

EDITORIAL

A thin exception

The Oregon Health Authority has created a COVID-19 Religious Exception Request Form. It's for people who are — you guessed it — requesting a religious exception to the vaccination requirement for religious reasons.

There's not much to it. Name. Phone number. Date of birth. Employer name. Job title. There's a box to tick if: "Receiving the COVID-19 vaccination conflicts with my religious observances, practices or beliefs as described below."

There's a small space for people to explain. Might be room for two sentences. And then there's a place to sign it and date it. It almost fits on one page.

If people have religious beliefs that prevent them from being vaccinated from COVID-19, well, that is their belief. But this religious exception is similar to the ones Oregon already has in place for school vaccinations. And by that we mean, you could drive busloads of people through it who don't have any real religious belief about vaccinations and could use it as an excuse to not be vaccinated.

Employers can take steps to protect their employees if they know an employee is unvaccinated.

Employers are actually not required to if "doing so would pose a direct threat to the excepted individual or others in the workplace or would create an undue hardship," according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The burden will likely fall in large part on employees. So if you are around other employees at work, please don't let your guard slip, as awkward and unfortunate as it may be. Vaccination is the best weapon we have against COVID-19. Distancing and masking help.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.

YOUR VIEWS

Stand up for Baker and get vaccinated

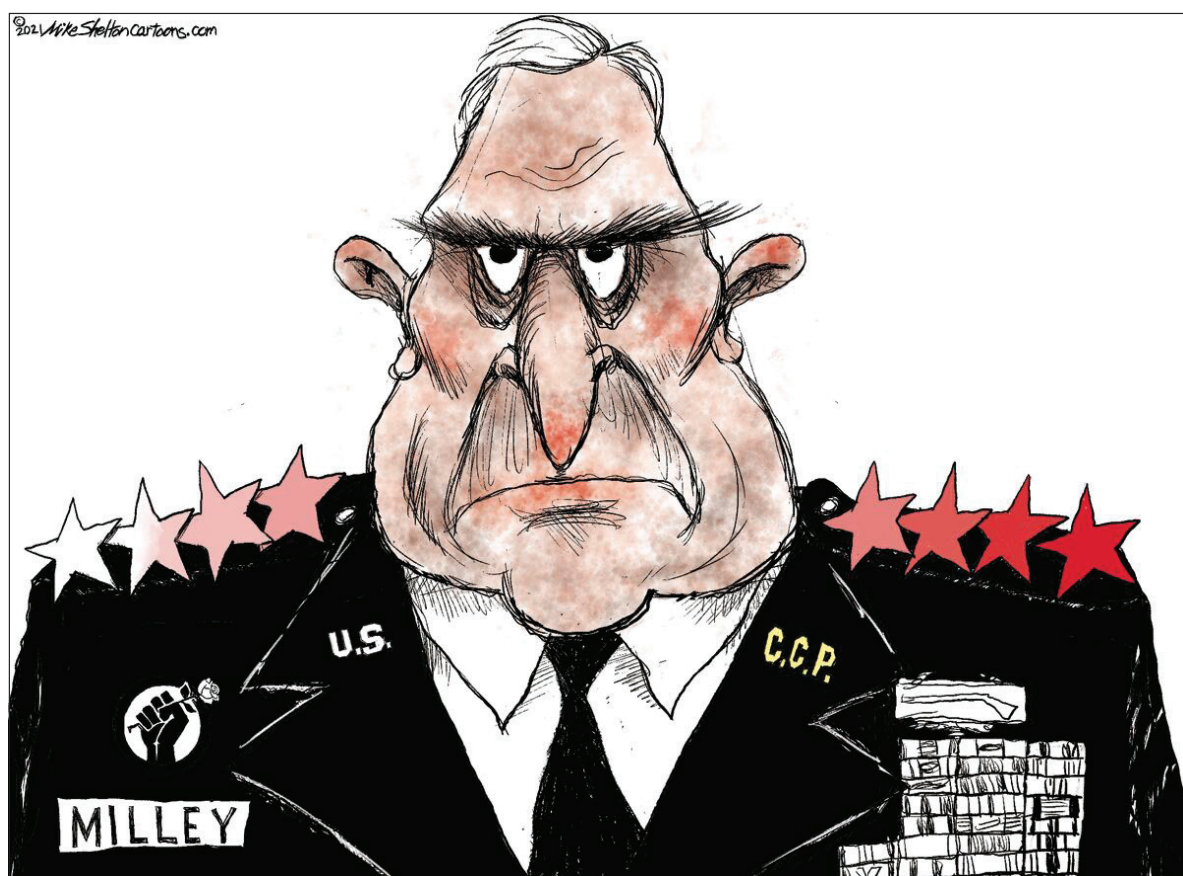
I've lived in Baker County 56 years, including 45 years in the communities of Richland and Halfway. One of the things that always made me feel so proud was how these communities rallied around any crisis that befell their neighbors. Whether it was clothing, housing, monetary support or any other thing that would alleviate the suffering, it was always there. North Powder, Huntington, Unity, Oxbow and any other collection of people in small locations of Baker County always made headlines in local papers of the support they showed their neighbors in times of need. If you've lived here any amount of time you have seen and heard these stories.

Baker County is in a crisis right now and leading the state in COVID case rates. We can't continue to deny the statistics, vaccinations help! I don't need to repeat the news you read or see on TV. Hospitals are full of COVID cases and there is now not room for patients who may need urgent medical attention for other causes. These people are our neighbors. Where is the community outreach? Do we continue to let people die or get deathly ill when we can help prevent the catastrophe going on? Have we given up on the values that made Baker County special? It is not a case of individual freedom when it affects all of us.

9/11 reminded me that 3,000 people were killed before we could do anything. 600,000, and rising, have already died in the U.S. — 200 times as many as 9/11! We have the ability to stop this killing. We all just need to do the right thing for all our neighbors. Our community depends on it. Get vaccinated now.

Chuck Peterson
Baker City

Bob White-Stetten/Caricatures.com



Milley's arguably treasonous acts set dangerous precedent

By **ANDREW BACEVICH**

A new book by journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa contains a singularly startling allegation. In the waning weeks of the Trump administration, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, twice called his counterpart, Gen. Li Zuoqiang, of the People's Liberation Army, offering assurances that the United States was not about to launch an attack against China.

"If we're going to attack," Milley told Li, according to Woodward and Costa, "I'm going to call you ahead of time. It's not going to be a surprise."

The surprise turns out to be the revelation of Milley's actions. Some in the Defense Department may have known about the calls, but one thing seems clear: President Donald Trump, the U.S. commander in chief, did not. Milley acted of his own volition, without prior presidential approval. On that point, Christopher Miller, then serving as acting Defense secretary, is emphatic, describing Milley's actions to Fox News as a "disgraceful and unprecedented act of insubordination."

Providing adversaries with advance notice of U.S. military actions does not number among the prescribed duties of the chairman of the joint chiefs. Arguably, the Woodward-Costa allegations, if accurately reported, qualify as treasonous. At the very least, they raise serious doubts about Milley's respect for the bedrock principle of civilian control of the military. To state the matter bluntly, when adherence to that principle raised the possibility of an outcome not to Milley's liking, he seemingly granted himself an exemption.

Of course, all of this happened in a specific context: Woodward and Costa's chilling account is only the latest to depict the unraveling Trump presidency following the November election. Unwilling to accept defeat, the incumbent all but ceased to govern and instead devoted himself to overturning the election's results by any means necessary, violating the rule of law and waiving the Constitution.

Milley's response, however, shouldn't have been to do likewise.

By statute, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff advises the commander in chief. Choosing to accept, amend or disregard that advice, the president then decides, with military leaders obliged to implement those decisions. Through his communications with the Chinese general, Milley signaled his intention to forestall or undermine a presidential decision not to his liking. Opposing a possible war with China, Milley exerted himself to prevent Trump from starting one, communicating his intentions to Chinese authorities while the American people were kept in the dark.

Was Trump contemplating an attack on China? We don't know; Trump himself denies it. Would any such attack have produced disastrous results, as Milley seems to have feared? Almost certainly. Yet while allowing that Milley's intentions may have been honorable, his actions were categorically wrong and set a dangerous precedent.

But let's be clear about where the problem lies: It's with the existing U.S. system for controlling the use of nuclear weapons. That system placed Milley in a difficult predicament. Since the dawn of the nuclear era, Americans have entrusted presidents with the authority to initiate Armageddon on their own. Even though held in abeyance since Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, that authority may well stand as the ultimate symbol of the power invested in the U.S. presidency.

The practice is also bizarre and dangerous in the extreme, as the meltdown that concluded the Trump presidency should remind us. And to suggest that Trump's departure from office eliminates that danger overlooks the very real possibility that another Trump-like figure — or Trump himself — may win the White House again. Americans are not immune from conferring the presidency on figures who may not be models of stability and good sense.

If the United States is intent on maintaining at the ready a large nuclear strike force, as is appar-

ently the case, the nation needs comprehensive safeguards to prevent reckless and ill-considered decisions regarding their use. We should not have to rely on American generals exerting themselves to check presidents who appear to have gone off the rails.

The essential fix is clear: Congress should act to curb the president's authority to employ nuclear weapons, requiring decisions on the use of nuclear weapons to be made collectively rather than by a single individual, with senior military officers still obliged to stay in their lane.

A useful first step would be for the Senate and House to pass the Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act of 2021, sponsored by Sen. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) and Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Torrence). The bill would not prevent actions to defend the United States, but it would prohibit any president from launching a nuclear first strike without a prior congressional declaration of war. Sadly, there are few indications that our legislators with their pronounced aversion to collective responsibility will take up this issue anytime soon.

Milley's questionable regard for the principle of civilian control was wrong and should be condemned. Yet given what we are learning now about Trump's state of mind during the last weeks of his presidency, Milley's actions also qualified as prudent. "It is breathtaking to think of the lengths that Milley and others went to avert the disasters Trump was creating at the end of his presidency," Sen. Richard J. Durbin, D-Ill., told reporters.

Perhaps so. But Milley's audacity is hardly less breathtaking. It could well be that the nation owes the general a considerable debt of gratitude. Although President Joe Biden has expressed his continuing confidence in Milley, his clear duty is to fire the general forthwith.

Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army colonel, is president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. His most recent book is "After the Apocalypse: America's Role in a World Transformed." he is a contributing writer to Opinion.

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400. fax. 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Mayor

Kerry McQuisten, Councilors Jason Spriet, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty DUBY, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durflinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

Baker School District: 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Andrew Bryan, Jessica Dougherty, Chris Hawkins, Travis Cook and Julie Huntington.