

## EDITORIAL

## Just get the shot

The potential situation that prompted Baker County Commissioners on Wednesday, Sept. 22 to declare a local emergency is indeed a troubling one.

Imagine a multi-car crash on Interstate 84 or Highway 7 or Highway 86, with no paramedics or ambulances available to respond to help the injured.

The problem, according to the commissioners' declaration, stems from Gov. Kate Brown's mandate that health care workers, including paramedics and first responders, be vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 18.

The declaration contends that this mandate could prompt enough health care workers to quit that there wouldn't be enough remaining in the county to "provide basic public health and safety services."

But this problem, as daunting as it seems as you read the passages of the county's disaster declaration, has a simple solution.

The affected workers should get vaccinated.

It's perplexing, and disappointing, that so many people who don't object to the battery of inoculations that they — and for those who are parents, their children — almost certainly have received, have declined to protect themselves and potentially others by taking a safe and largely effective vaccine against a virus that has wreaked havoc on society like no other in the past century.

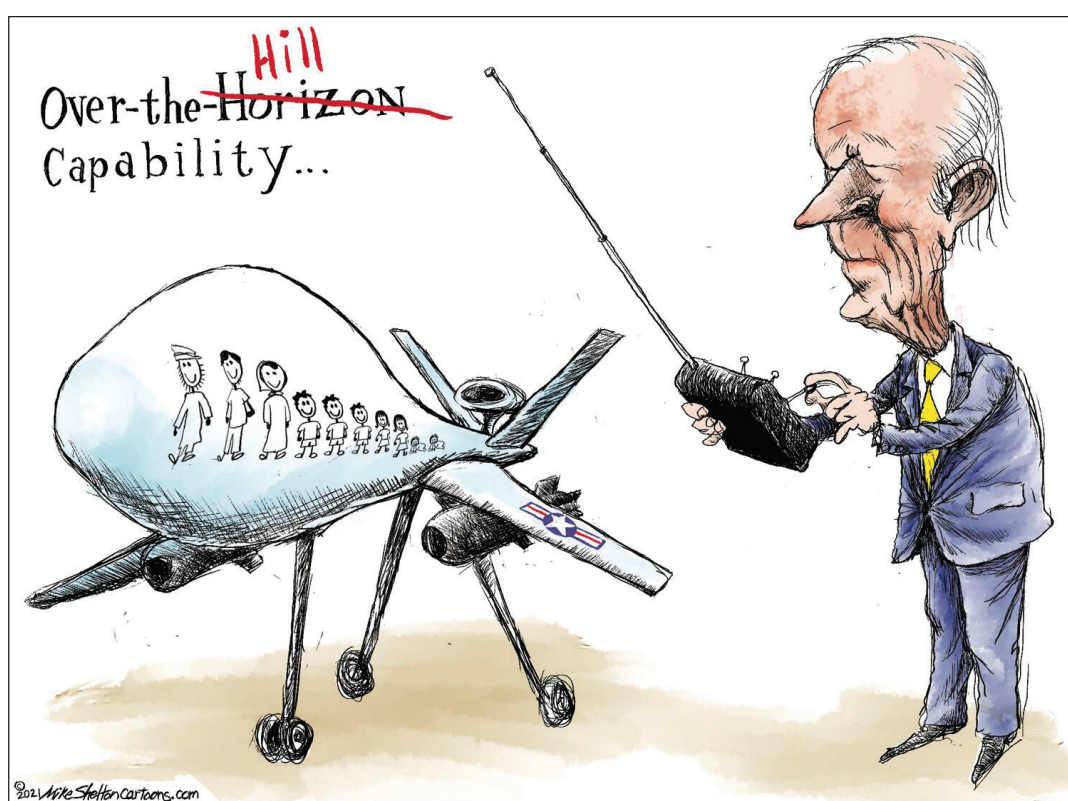
But here's the thing: Although the county's emergency declaration, and the wider societal debate, focus on the vaccine "mandate" as though it's an absolute edict, that's a misnomer. This crisis atmosphere is unnecessary because the affected workers do not face a stark choice between getting the shot or losing their job.

The "mandate" gives employees the option of filling out a form stating that they have a religious objection. Workers don't have to get a note from their pastor; they just complete the form and give it to their employer. State guidelines don't require the governor or any other state official to decide whether exceptions are valid. Unvaccinated employees who opt for the religious exception (or the medical one, which does require corroboration from a medical provider) might have to take additional precautions, such as wearing an N95 mask at work. But the vital point is that, even if they, for specious reasons, continue to eschew the vaccine, they can continue to provide the essential service that the public depends on, and for which we have great respect for those who provide it.

Although it's reasonable for commissioners to express their concern about the potential for a severe shortage in health workers, commissioners made a major error by claiming, in their declaration, that the vaccine mandate would also leave Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City understaffed. Hospital officials said that's not accurate, and they asked the county to delete that reference. Commissioners should have checked with the hospital before making a claim that might have scared people unnecessarily.

Commissioners should instead emphasize how important it is for everyone who's eligible to be vaccinated. They note, in the declaration, that the surge in COVID-19 cases is "filling our hospitals." To acknowledge that fact, but ignore that vaccination is the best way to ease the crisis, is irresponsible.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City  
Herald editor



## Your views

## Editorial about county road settlement left out rest of the story

After reading your editorial in Saturday's paper, Sept. 18, I am disappointed to see so much disinformation going out to the public as fact. Just because it comes from a media source such as a newspaper does not justify making false and uninformed statements such as, "Based on the limited evidence the county had that the road across Longgood's property was previously public." This statement is ridiculous. The newspaper did not have any of our information and they are not a court judge or jury to make any judgment call.

The County has an abundance of the history of the Lookout area that we have researched and studied for over 2½ years and the Commission would not have taken this course of action without the facts to defend the public right-of-way.

The County is required to protect all public access for the citizens. This is a part of our jobs. This Commission, as well as past Commissioners, have done a good job to do just that. Having a local paper give such a one-sided view of a story without all the facts is a disservice to the public and the local government servants, who are trying the best they can to protect the public's rights.

It would be better if the paper would do as Paul Harvey always said, "get the rest of the story."

William 'Bill' Harvey  
Baker County Commission  
Chairman

## Looking forward to a more enlightened future for U.S.

As summer fades into fall I see some things unchanged. No one has taken your guns, no one has forced you to wear a mask, you can choose to get vaccinated or not, history is history no matter who wishes it untrue, no voter fraud evidence, and pompous, rich white men still control our federal government.

I watch as our local leaders have tossed any thought of embracing and benefitting all of their constituents, instead, holding on to the hate and division infecting their disgruntled minority of likeminded. I watch our mayor jump on the alternative history bandwagon, attempting to put God into our Constitution. A sorry attempt to remove our most important safeguard, separation of church and state? As a candidate for governor I hear her say that climate change is "not even on her radar" as I breathe smoke, watch our local farmers struggle and our reservoirs evaporate. I watch an angry minority blame mandates for failed businesses when they are guilty (not just presently but

historically) with their denial of science, Facebook research and irresponsibility. Their maskless anti-vax freedoms have spread this virus so quickly and thickly that businesses, once able to survive through adaptation and adherence to mandates, have succumbed to the "freedom" spreaders. Hospitals now choose who lives and who dies because of their "freedoms"! Whose fault? "Who lives and who dies!"

I hear the screams "Medical freedom!" "My body my choice!" and then watch efforts to deny all women that right? I see adults? ... endangering their own children, other children, all of us, forcing their maskless freedom on the innocent as they label the responsible "sheeple."

To experience such things, that my sympathy for the sick and dying anti-vaxers is strained, leaves me heartbroken.

I saw good things. I watched a local, anti-everything, freedom rally fizzle into nothing. A rally in D.C calling to free the (Trump/Republican encouraged) insurrectionists saw police and press outnumber the idiots.

I watch the increasing legal troubles and horrific criminal revelations mount concerning our former president and dream of 2045, when the American white man becomes a minority.

Mike Meyer  
Baker City

## Putting the forest health problem in perspective

I never realized how big one acre is until I tried to get across one that was determined to stop me.

The stubbornness this patch of ground exhibited might have impressed me if it hadn't been so infuriating.

Even so, I couldn't suppress a certain grudging admiration.

I have felt something like this while watching a toddler in the throes of a tantrum, a sort of full body spasm that exudes energy, wasted though it is.

This particular acre, in the forest near Blue Canyon, about 10 miles southwest of Baker City, might be rather less or more than that standard unit of measurement.

One acre equates to precisely 43,560 square feet. But I don't as a rule bring along a tape measure when I'm hiking. And the woods are conspicuously lacking in rulers or other means of accurate surveying.

But it was a modest piece of ground, in any case. Yet small though it is, the place has become for me the scale by which I measure a problem that has gotten a lot of publicity this summer.

The problem is our forests.

They're ailing.

And they're burning, which is not coincidental.

"Our" in this case is appropriate because I'm referring specifically to publicly owned forests, which



JAYSON JACOBY

belong to all of us.

That public forests in Oregon and much of the West are sick, and often on fire, is hardly a revelation, of course.

But in an era of blazes such as the Bootleg fire, which was started by lightning July 6 in Klamath County and has burned more than 400,000 acres, people naturally wonder why such expanses are being charred.

There is no single answer.

But in very many cases one contributing cause is the condition of the forests. Their most common affliction — one that proves the aphorism that it's possible to have too much of a good thing — is that there are simply too many trees growing.

Even rich soil can support only so many trees before the competition for nutrients, water and sunlight is so great that all the trees grow more slowly than they would in less crowded circumstances. These dense forests are also vulnerable to insects, diseases and — almost always the most dramatic and acute threat — fire.

There is a considerable degree of agreement, even among groups with diverse interests, about the basic prescription for this predicament.

(There is, however, quite a lot of divergence, and no small amount of rancor, when it comes to debating the details of administering this remedy.)

Loggers and environmentalists concur that a combination of cutting trees, and reintroducing controlled fire to limit the amount of combustible stuff on the ground, is key to restoring forests.

Western forests will remain susceptible to fire regardless — particularly as climate change lengthens the period of highest fire danger — but this kind of work has proved to be effective.

Including, most recently, with the aforementioned Bootleg fire, the biggest blaze in the nation.

Officials from the Fremont-Winema National Forest, through which the fire burned, reported that areas where some trees had been cut, and prescribed fires had been lit — as recently as this spring — weren't burned as severely as adjacent but untreated forests.

Photographs demonstrate the distinct difference.

This is encouraging.

And yet, as I ponder the tangible benefits that the Bootleg fire

proved, I can't help but think of that aforementioned acre.

I'm no forester. But I've talked to many of them over the past 30 years or so, often about this very topic, and I believe the acre I blundered through fairly represents the affliction affecting our forests.

If anything, the condition of that acre understates the scale of the task ahead. The forest there isn't as dense as areas I've walked through at higher elevations elsewhere on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. But the young firs — either white or grand, or possibly the hybrid of the two — were numerous enough to impede my progress and leave my forearms striped with white scratches.

Those firs pose a two-sided threat to the ponderosa pines that also grow there and are, indeed, the traditional predominant species on the relatively low-elevation site. The thickets of firs compete with the pines for sunlight and for water and nutrients in the soil. They also can serve as "ladder fuels" — the combustible path that flames can climb from the ground to the crowns of the ponderosas.

I have enough experience running a chain saw to appreciate how much time, and effort, it would take, on that single acre, to thin the firs, a necessary step before prescribed fires can be ignited to further pare

the fuel load and better protect those pines.

And then I contemplate what that acre represents.

The three national forests of the Blue Mountains — Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur — comprise 5.5 million acres.

This is a lot of country. (And a lot of scratches on my arms, potentially.)

Not all of those acres either need, or are open to, the kinds of restoration projects that slowed the Bootleg fire.

There is among the three national forests more than 800,000 acres of wilderness, which is off limits to logging (prescribed burning is allowed but is difficult due to limited access).

Nor is sheer acreage the only way in which this job is monumental.

The work will cost tens of millions of dollars.

Some projects likely will be delayed by legal challenges.

It is in multiple respects a daunting challenge, the work of many decades of patience and persistence. A lot of acres will undoubtedly burn while we're at it.

Maybe even that one acre that's my nemesis.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.