

## EDITORIAL

## A strange way to protest

A group has been distributing fliers in Baker City urging residents to oppose Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health care workers by refusing to pay their property taxes for October and November.

This flier, sponsored by a group called Baker County United, includes the lines: "Operation Boston Tea Party" and "Withhold Your Property Taxes."

The flier rightly points out that the governor's mandate has the potential to result in workforce shortages for critical services such as emergency responders.

But defying the mandate is hardly a sensible solution, or a useful one.

The best outcome is for the affected employees to be vaccinated, which not only gives them and those they treat a high level of protection against the virus, but also of course keeps them doing their vital work.

Employees who don't want to be vaccinated can also ask for either a medical exception, which requires corroboration from a medical provider, or a religious exception, which just involves filling out a form.

Moreover, city or county officials, not state officials, will review and verify both types of exceptions, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Put simply, the "mandate" that prompted the flier with its specious references to the Boston Tea Party isn't really a mandate at all — affected employees have options besides being vaccinated or losing their jobs.

Having local elected officials pass a "public declaration of county wide mandate defiance and implementation of a self governance measure," is not necessary to give health care employees an alternative to vaccination. Yet that's what is requested in a letter that supporters of the flier sent to Baker City, Baker County and Sheriff Travis Ash.

Citing the Boston Tea Party is of course a common tactic for people who are aggrieved by what they perceive as government overreach. But the comparison hardly fits the current situation.

The Boston Tea Party was a 1773 protest against onerous taxation by an oppressive monarchy a couple thousand miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Participants destroyed 342 chests of tea imported by the British East India Company — a tangible expression of their opposition to the taxation.

But this call to withhold local property taxes would have no effect on the ostensible oppressor in this case, which is the state, and specifically the governor.

It would, however, punish local governments that provide important services that local residents depend on — and pay for.

That's where our property taxes go — to the city, the county, schools, the library and other programs, such as mosquito and noxious weed control.

Indeed, depriving Baker City of some of its property taxes could potentially harm the very agency that sponsors of the flier purport to support — the city fire department, which also operates ambulances.

Property taxes account for almost 38% of Baker City's \$7.8 million general fund for the current fiscal year. And the general fund includes the fire department.

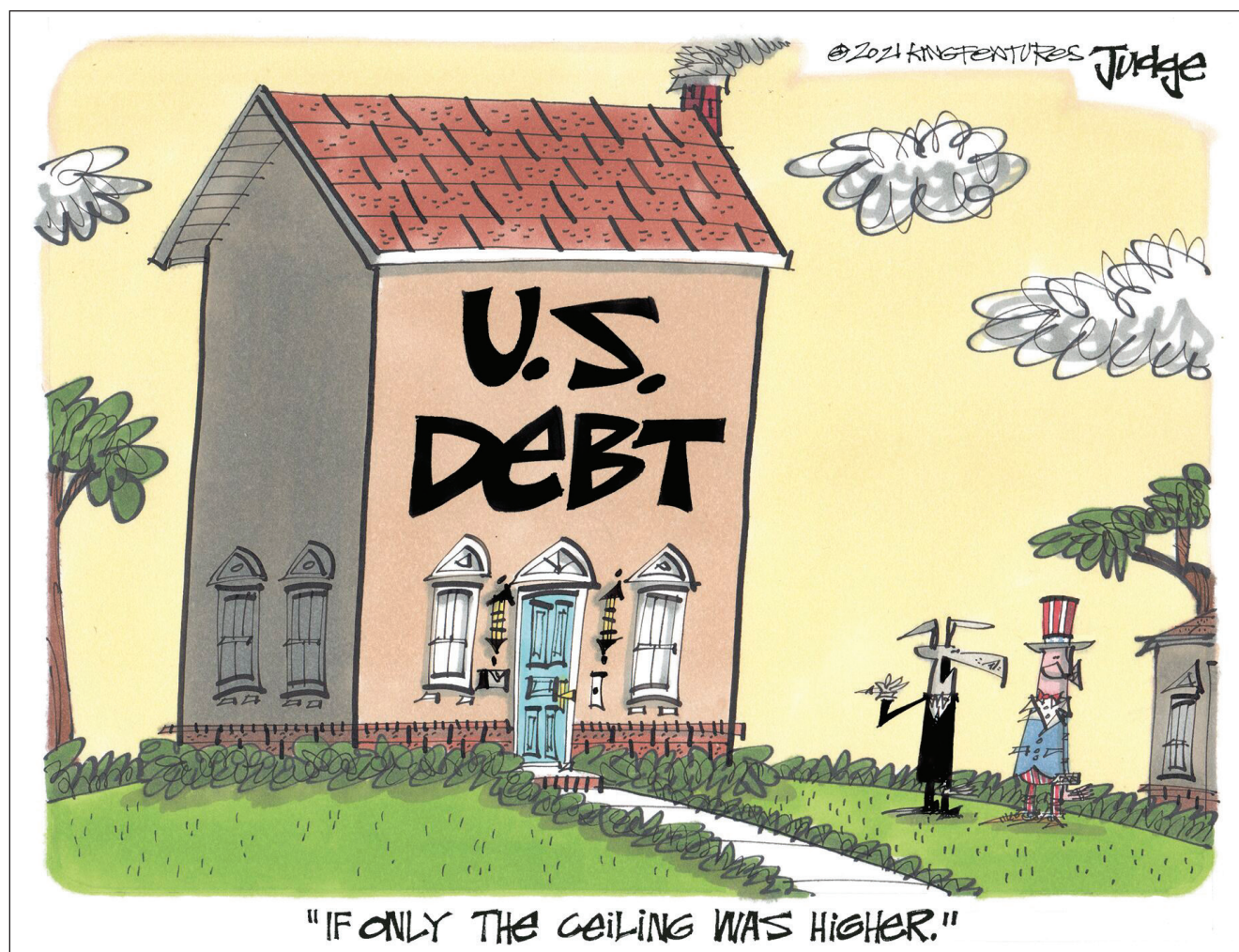
Yet the flier calls on residents to not pay their property taxes for the "October/November 2021 period" until "our elected officials do their duty and make our community a priority!"

(The county actually sends one annual property tax bill per year — they'll arrive later this month.)

Defying the governor's mandate could also jeopardize the city's and county's liability insurance coverage.

People who are angry about the governor's vaccine mandate would make a more direct statement by refusing to pay their state income taxes.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## Skin color shouldn't decide who gets federal farm loans

By JAMES DUNLAP

My family's cattle ranching heritage dates back to California's Gold Rush. Today, my wife, Katie, and I are still going strong, and one day we hope to have a ranch of our own that our daughter can inherit.

We also want our daughter to inherit a country where government treats people equally. COVID-19-related federal farm loan forgiveness does just the opposite, treating people as members of their racial group.

Right now, we live and tend cattle on my parents' ranch in Baker City. At the same time, we're buying equipment and building our herd, so we're ready to start our own farm when we can afford to buy property.

We've taken out federal loans to pay for equipment and cattle and which we're repaying with income from other full-time jobs — Katie works in sales, and I have a job as a railroad engineer. Between our second jobs and the ranch, we easily put in 100-hour workweeks.

As demanding as that had been, it was nothing compared to the pandemic. Meat packing houses shut down last year, affecting our supply chain. Now we have rising fuel prices, no seasonal workers willing to help with our cattle, and the worst drought in Eastern Oregon's history.

On top of all that, we have a new baby and more than \$200,000 in outstanding loans. It sounds ludicrous, but the reality is the government considers us good enough for federal farm loans, not loan forgiveness, because we have the wrong skin color.



JAMES DUNLAP

Katie and I heard about the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, and we were excited because the COVID-19 relief funding included \$4 billion in loan forgiveness up to 120% of USDA loan amounts.

That would have been life-changing for us.

Then one day, while I was on the tractor — where I listen to news and podcasts — I heard that the loan forgiveness was only for "socially disadvantaged farmers," which, in the government's eyes, are racial minority farmers and ranchers.

My first thought was, "Socially disadvantaged farmers? Isn't that anyone like us who has an FSA loan?"

Farm Service Agency, or FSA, operating loans are designed for people who have already been turned down by other lending institutions and cannot get traditional financing anywhere else. We are in our mid-30s, we didn't have a lot of cash, and we were still building up equity, so the FSA was our only choice.

If Congress decides to forgive these loans, I'll cheer them on. But there's no logic behind the use of race to make that decision.

I may be a rancher, but I also have a history degree and a passion for the bedrock principles of our nation's founding: fairness, justice, liberty. This loan forgiveness is everything but.

It's discriminatory and violates

the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection before the law.

To be sure, racial discrimination for any reason is unacceptable. In this case, the government insists it's making up for the USDA's past discrimination against Black farmers and ranchers. But the government has already paid billions of dollars to do just that. In any case, past discrimination cannot be remedied with more discrimination.

I credit my wife for what happened next. She and my daughter were shutting me around to do routine chores, and I told her how farmers in other states are suing to end the USDA's discrimination. I wanted to do the same in Oregon but suing the federal government seemed too daunting, time-consuming, and expensive.

"I can't," I said.

"Yes, you can!" she shot back. "Because right now, you still have a voice in this country and the opportunity and the right to speak your voice."

The next day, I contacted Pacific Legal Foundation, and soon afterward, Katie and I filed a federal lawsuit.

To be perfectly clear, our lawsuit is not about money, or loan forgiveness, or the hard-working people who would have received it. It's about equal treatment for all farmers and ranchers and fighting back when the government does the opposite. For us, it's also about setting an example for our daughter so that she might someday exercise her right as an American to stand up and speak out for her beliefs.

James Dunlap is a farmer residing near Baker City.

## Your views

## Why we're opposed to the state's vaccine mandate

This is why we are against vaccine mandates. This came to us from a very special friend, with a medical background, who is in the military. This is the letter that was sent to us. We will let it speak for itself.

"I broke today. I watched people cry as they were vaccinated against their will. I watched mothers break down

as they begged for mercy to have more time while they are still breastfeeding their babies. I watched others cry out that they have had miscarriages, stillbirths, and infertility and they just want more time in case this will harm them. They were told line up and take your shot. We are working to get them exemptions but every angle we take, those who are pro vax plot to change the rules at every turn. Once people started being

forced I refused to participate. I'm ready to be fired for this. It's kind of dramatic but I have nothing to lose. I can't watch this anymore. Thank You for praying."

We don't recognize our country any more. Are we living in Nazi Germany or communist China? We love our country and will continue to pray for those that are in authority.

Terry and Julie Miller  
Baker City

## 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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:walden.house.gov).

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

**Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read:** [oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov)

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