

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Partial solution to homeless challenge

Baker City Police Chief Ty Duby's plan to bring to the City Council a proposed ordinance limiting where and when people can camp on public property is a good one.

It's also a topic that the City Council has previously discussed and is interested in pursuing.

The city has no such ordinance now.

And without one, the city has little if any authority to restrict homeless camps of the sort that have become common sights in metropolitan areas such as Portland and Seattle.

Baker City, as was the case last week in a situation on Fifth Street where a woman had accumulated shopping carts, a mattress and other items, can enforce existing state laws that prohibit people from blocking sidewalks or streets with their possessions.

But based on a 2018 federal court ruling in a Boise case, and on a law that the Oregon Legislature approved and Gov. Kate Brown signed earlier this year, the city's ability, without an ordinance, to restrict camping on public property is severely limited.

Even with an ordinance, the city's authority is not absolute.

The new state law reads, in part: "A person experiencing homelessness may bring suit for injunctive or declaratory relief to challenge the objective reasonableness of a city or county law."

The law goes on to state that "reasonableness shall be determined based on the totality of the circumstances, including, but not limited to, the impact of the law on persons experiencing homelessness."

That language notwithstanding, it's certainly reasonable for the city — for any city — to set parameters to ensure that, for instance, parks, which are built and maintained by tax dollars, remain inviting places for people to gather.

Duby said he plans to model the ordinance on one that the Coos Bay City Council approved in August.

The Coos Bay ordinance allows camping on some public property, but only between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. The ordinance bans camping in city parks and on public property in high-density, medium-density and small-lot residential areas.

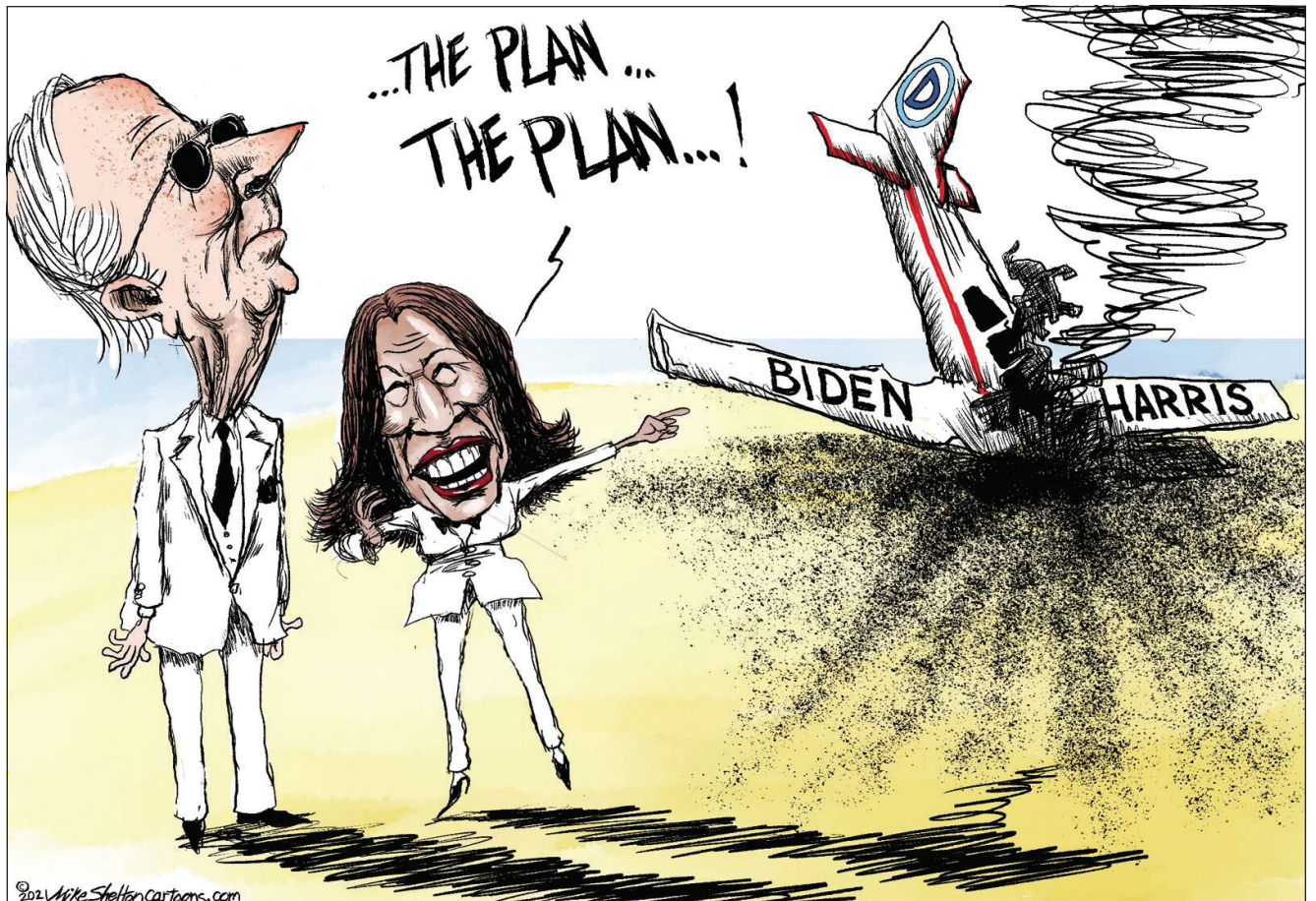
Although a well-conceived ordinance could help prevent major problems with homeless camps in Baker City, no ordinance can deal with the underlying issues, such as mental health and addiction, that often contribute to a person being without permanent shelter.

There's no doubt that the government — mainly at the state and federal level, given the limited local resources — can and should do more to provide such services as counseling and temporary housing.

But no amount of money can compel adults who aren't breaking the law to change their lifestyle if they choose, at least at times, to live outside.

Enacting limits on where, and when, they can legally camp, however, is both reasonable, to borrow an adjective from the state law, and necessary to preserve the quality of life in Baker City.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

I'll keep expressing opinions about what people do, say

It is so cute that one of our citizens saw my recent letter to the editor about my heavenly vacation to Hawaii and the absence therein of political ridiculousness as a personal attack. My opinion on the overall state of the nation seems to have hit a nerve.

This citizen, for some reason, thought I was talking directly to him? Then, in a clever veiled sort of way, invited me to move if I wasn't going to accept his politics or culture. He mistakenly believes his personal ideals are magically extended outward into the community?

No, I am sorry, it isn't all about you or where you live ... there is not a significant amount of ultraconservative people in this tiny town to ever make me move. I happily live in a perennial blue state with a little faction of disgruntled (you may now add that to your list of soul searching attributes) and would never think of moving from beautiful Baker City, having no problem fitting right in. I choose to not accept anything about a culture and politics I disagree with, I choose to live where I want, I choose to voice my opinion and strive for change. Please don't misinterpret your grandmother's sage advice "live and let live" with "keep your opinions to yourself" cause

that ain't never gonna happen. I will, as always, continue to judge my fellow man by their actions and words, just as you have judged me.

The fact that you are embarrassed and humiliated for thinking Donald Trump had the best interest of our country at heart shows that even your culture and politics is always in flux. Don't despair as more and more left thinkers infiltrate your little island of red. Don't move to Hawaii just yet. Idaho will soon envelop and save you.

Mike Meyer
Baker City

Christians need to come together, not break apart

I wrote a devotions column a few years ago titled "What's wrong with Christianity today?" I still have this running through my mind when I see as Christians that we have let this God-founded country become infested with demonic anti-Christ spirits that their only aim is to see this country and its foundation destroyed. I also remember what was said by a minister from Africa in our church in California. The first words out of his mouth were: "What are YOU doing with YOUR Christian life?" This is a very strong question.

It's asking, do you or I really believe that the words of the Bible are true, absolutely true, and do you also act on

them? The column I wrote made some pastors unhappy with me at the time and it should have, if the shoe fit. It wasn't written to upset anyone but to remind some that God changes not, and Jesus is still the same yesterday, today and forever. The gifts of divine healing, deliverance from demon power, and oh yes, speaking in tongues, is as much for today as it was in the early church. These are power gifts. An unlearned language, also a prayer language.

It's talked about in Mark 16; I Corinthians 12-14. These were given to the Church, not taken away as some teach. Sorry! But there's not even ONE Scripture in the whole Bible that does away with any of the gifts given to the church (the body of Christ). These were given to help people, and defeat the enemy.

The difference is today, we fight among ourselves instead of the Word being the only judge that can bring us together to defeat the enemy instead of being defeated. It's time to raise up against the anti-Christ spirit in this country and stop listening to those who say, "it's going to happen anyway, so why bother?" This is the worse cop out and plays right into Satan's hands. Satan is the one who wants you, me, to believe we can't change the world!

The Rev. Richard Fox
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Pharmacy closures causing troubling ripple effect

Rural Oregonians have long counted on local pharmacies deeply rooted in their communities for quality service.

But those community mainstays now face a growing threat from an unfair practice by big insurance companies and pharmaceutical benefit managers (PBMs) that's threatening the pharmacies' ability to stay open.

And that threat, in turn, undermines rural Oregonians' access to prescription drugs, patient education, management of chronic disease, preventive care and lifesaving vaccines.

In recent weeks, the fallout from the announcement by Bi-Mart that it's begun closing 37 pharmacies in our state — in part because of that unfair practice — has cast troubling ripples throughout Eastern and Central Oregon.

News reports have detailed how Umatilla County Public Health has raised concerns about diminished capacity to offer COVID-19 vaccination clinics with fewer local pharmacies; Baker County health officials referred to a local "pharmacy health crisis" with longer wait times to get prescriptions filled at remaining pharmacies and a lack of critical infrastructure for people seeking flu shots and COVID-19 boosters; and there are longer wait times as well in Central Oregon with Bi-Mart closing its pharmacy services in Sisters. And I heard similar problems firsthand last week from pharmacies in Ashland and Corvallis.



RON WYDEN

This is not a minor inconvenience in rural Oregon when families and seniors must drive longer distances for prescriptions and other pharmacy services, especially over snow- and ice-covered roads in the upcoming winter months.

Here's what's going on, and what I'm doing as chair of the Senate Finance Committee to get relief for rural Oregonians who deserve reliable and accessible pharmacies in their communities.

Goliaths like Big Insurance and the PBMs put the squeeze on small pharmacies by charging them something called a DIR fee. That stands for direct and indirect remuneration fees, and PBMs demand that pharmacies pay up, or they'll take their business elsewhere.

To be sure, DIR fees are not likely to come up in conversation around too many dinner tables this Thanksgiving. But they're a big deal because they skyrocketed 91,500% from 2010 to 2019, and doubled from 2018 to 2020. They contributed to the permanent closure of 2,200 pharmacies nationwide between December 2017 and December 2020.

Why do PBMs charge these fees? In short, because they can. This disturbing development should sound loud alarm bells, because PBMs can use mechanisms like DIR fees deliberately,

to starve independent pharmacies of revenue. When these stores close, large chain pharmacies owned by the same plans and PBMs that forced them to pay up, reap the benefits. These fees are unfair and they're anti-free enterprise.

I've asked the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to use its existing legal authority to propose and finalize rules that make it impossible for PBMs to use DIR fees to force community pharmacies to close their doors.

In my recent letter to CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-Lasure, I noted that Bi-Mart's announcement of the 37 pharmacy closures in Oregon and 19 others in the Northwest cited "increasing costs and ongoing reimbursement pressure."

I wrote, "These fees do nothing to lower the amount Medicare beneficiaries must pay for their drugs each time they fill a prescription and seemingly serve only to pad plan and PBM profits."

Bottom line: The use of DIR fees is unfair and unjustly enriches big insurers and PBMs.

For the benefit of Oregonians in small communities throughout our state, I'm all in to preserve their lifelines to local Oregon pharmacies and knock these "Goliaths" down a peg or two so that local rural pharmacies can continue to stay open.

Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is one of Oregon's two U.S. senators.

Letters to the editor

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