

## EDITORIAL

Keeping kids  
in class, and  
on the court

The current school year has been pretty normal for Baker School District students.

They've studied in their classrooms.

They've played sports and engaged in other extracurricular activities that are such an integral part of school.

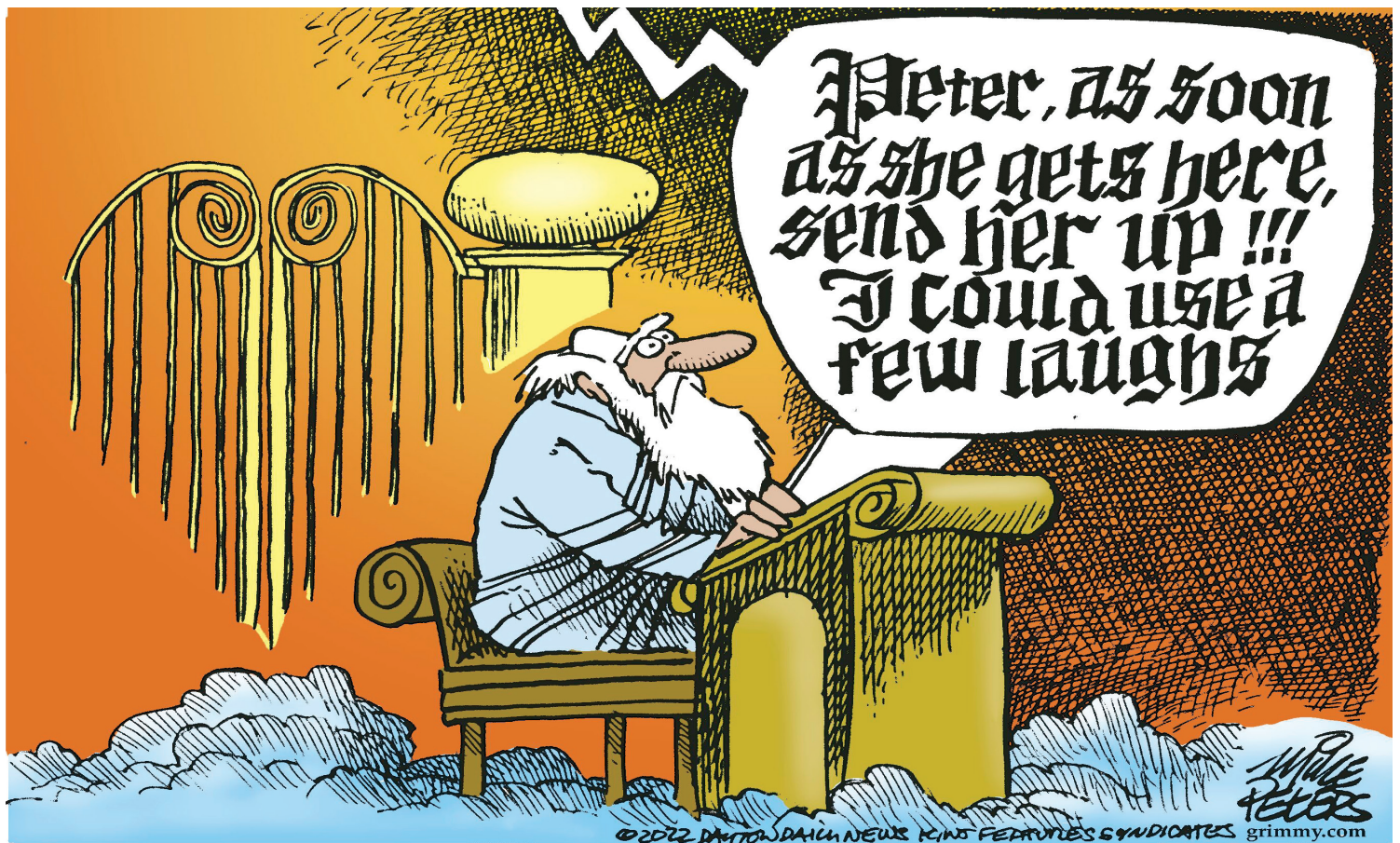
And although the highly contagious omicron variant of the coronavirus poses a potential threat to the continuation of this refreshingly typical school year, interruptions are hardly inevitable.

Mark Witty, Baker Schools superintendent, had an appropriate take on the situation. In an interview with the Herald this week, Witty said that despite a call from state officials for schools to consider curtailing extracurricular activities, Baker schools will continue to operate as they have been so long as that's feasible.

Omicron is boosting the number of cases. But evidence is mounting that it's much less virulent than the delta and earlier variants. And, as has been true throughout the pandemic, the virus poses a minuscule risk to healthy children.

Witty acknowledged that rising infections among school staff could challenge the district's ability to keep up a normal schedule. His advice for reducing the chance of that happening is wise for all of us — wear masks in crowded indoor settings, maintain distance if possible, and most important, if you feel ill, stay home. Vaccines also reduce the likelihood of severe illness.

— Jayson Jacoby,  
Baker City Herald editor



## BETTY WHITE 1922-2021

## OTHER VIEWS

With COVID and hospitalizations,  
it's important to get numbers right

## Editorial from The New York Daily News:

From the very beginning of the pandemic, when we called it coronavirus, political leaders tasked with making moment to moment decisions to protect public health have relied on a steady stream of data: new infections, breakthrough cases, variant dominance and tragically, deaths. But COVID hospitalizations have the most critical measure in determining the progress of the disease and if our health care system would collapse or not.

Hospitalizations were reported directly by medical centers and

assumed to imply a certain severity, making them a proper gauge of the virus' fluctuating intensity. However, these numbers came with a built-in problem that has only gotten worse in light of omicron's staggering transmissibility and what so far seem like generally milder infections, particularly among the vaccinated: hospitals test everyone who enters their doors for COVID as a matter of course, so many people who went to the hospital for something else — like a broken bone or a bacterial infection — were tallied with the COVID cases if they tested positive after their arrival.

This confusion over what the numbers really mean is hampering our ability to respond. Parents are disconcerted over increasing COVID hospitalizations of children, but a recent CDC survey of six hospitals in several states found that, even during the much deadlier delta wave, almost a fifth of children "had incidental positive SARS-CoV-2 test results" that were "unrelated to the reason for hospitalization." This proportion could be much higher with omicron.

This week, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that New York would become the first state to

collect better data by having hospitals report specific numbers for people admitted due to COVID complications and for those who test positive incidentally.

These statistics drive public policy, and so they should be carefully collected and shared: each hospital must follow the exact same rubric, and the state should endeavor to make them public as soon as possible. For crucial decisions around mandates and restrictions, this primary hospitalization number will be the clearest metric we have. It should be weighted accordingly.

## 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).

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**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us).

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**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. Councilors Lynette Perry, Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

**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.

## Clean energy discussion should include nuclear

Oregon touts itself as a leader in the campaign to combat climate change, but I find it difficult to take the state seriously in what is, to be sure, a matter of considerable importance.

I happen to live at an elevation of 3,400 feet, so sea level rise poses little risk of swamping my modest patch of ground.

Hundreds of millions of people, however, have much less dry land to sacrifice before they must sink or swim.

But even those of us who reside at a comfortable altitude above the sea are hardly immune from the potential effects of a warming Earth. Drought, for instance, which besides the obvious dilemma of water shortages can also contribute to the prevalence of massive wildfires that destroy valuable timber and foul our air (and lungs) with pollutants.

When I read climate change comments from politicians and agency officials and the deadly earnest members of environmental groups, whose self-righteousness carries a whiff of whatever chemical is added to natural gas, I am struck by their blithe use of numbers. They generate a blizzard of percentages and timelines for revamping energy production that seems to me the product of the endless meetings that bureaucrats revel in rather than a sober recognition of physical and economic realities.

The announcements are so enticing in their smug certainty about what the companies that actually light and heat our homes and businesses can — indeed, must — do.

Last summer, for instance, the Oregon Legislature voted to require the state's major electric providers,

Portland General Electric and Pacific Powder, to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 80% below baseline levels by 2030, by 90% by 2035 and by 100% by 2040.

Gov. Kate Brown signed the bill into law in July.

Conspicuously absent in many public pronouncements about this sort of legislation is a word that ought to be at least as prominent as favorites such as solar and wind.

Nuclear.

Like those other sources of "green" electricity, nuclear power plants do not release greenhouse gases.

Quite unlike the others, nuclear plants produce immense quantities of power reliably and constantly, their output not subject to the vagaries of weather.

Yet Oregon acts as though fission doesn't exist.

Far better, apparently, to deploy solar panels across thousands of acres, and erect tens of thousands of skyscraper height wind turbines, rather than harness the energy produced by interactions at the atomic level, collisions so tiny we can never hope to see them.

Our state's disdain for this plentiful, safe and climate-friendly source of power is as archaic as a horse owner railing about newfangled automobiles causing stampedes and buggy pile-ups across the nation.

In 1980 Oregon voters enacted a moratorium on the construction of new nuclear plants. There was only one such plant in the state then — Portland General Electric's Trojan plant, which opened in 1975 near Rainier. It closed in 1993, despite producing as much electricity as a pair of coal-fired plants similar to the



Jayson Jacoby

one at Boardman, which itself shut down for good in 2020.

Oregon's moratorium bans financing and construction of a new nuclear plant until the nation has a permanent repository for spent fuel and voters approve such a plant.

This onerous restriction is not so much outdated as it is an irrational overreaction, almost as much today as it was 42 years ago.

The moratorium was, like so much else about America's attitude toward nuclear power, influenced by the 1979 partial meltdown of a reactor at the Three Mile Island plant in Pennsylvania.

Yet that accident — universally acknowledged as the worst for the U.S. nuclear power industry — is far more compelling evidence for those who advocate for nuclear power than for those who object to it.

The death toll from this "worst" accident?

Zero.

To suggest that nuclear power is without risk is, of course, silly.

A nuclear reaction is an incredibly powerful event — hence its great utility in producing electricity — and its radioactive byproducts are inimical to human life.

But humans aren't well-equipped to hurtle through the air at 600 mph, 40,000 feet above the ground, either. And millions of us do so every day, with a brief bout of jet lag the only physical malady resulting from the experience.

The reason is technology.

The analogy is imperfect, certainly, but it's indisputable that, just as commercial air travel is notably safer today than it was in 1979, the year of Three Mile Island, a modern nuclear reactor is better, which is to say safer, than those of earlier generations, including the one at Three Mile Island.

Although it's difficult for a technology to be much safer when its greatest disaster killed no one.

The irrational fear of nuclear power is hardly limited to Oregon.

Just last month an editorial in the Los Angeles Times supporting the planned closure of California's only operating nuclear plant, while acknowledging the environmental benefits of nuclear power, also employed illogical comparisons to the 1986 Chernobyl and 2011 Fukushima nuclear disasters to explain why, to quote the newspaper's editorial board, "there are good reasons to eschew nuclear power as a solution."

Although those two accidents, unlike Three Mile Island, actually killed people and released large quantities of radioactive material, the Times editorial indulges in noxious exaggerations such as claiming that both Chernobyl and Fukushima "rendered huge zones uninhabitable and spread radioactive isotopes across the globe."

The areas affected by those accidents hardly qualify as "huge" even in the countries where they happened, much less the world in general.

And the reference to radioactive isotopes spreading globally is even more misleading. The implication, which is wholly wrong, is that people in, say, Oregon are at a higher risk for cancer due solely to those two incidents.

Any reference to Chernobyl, in

particular, in a discussion about nuclear power in the U.S. is pure propaganda. The crucial differences between Chernobyl and any nuclear plant that has ever operated in this country, or ever would be allowed to operate, are so numerous and so blatant that they ought not have escaped the attention of, or been ignored by, the editorialists at such a fine newspaper as the Los Angeles Times. But chief among them is that the Soviet-designed reactor that exploded at Chernobyl, unlike all U.S. plants, didn't have a concrete containment structure. This is roughly akin to building a car without functioning brakes.

Although the hysterical anti-nuclear attitude that culminated with Oregon's 1980 moratorium continues, it has not gone completely unchallenged.

During the past five years, legislators have introduced bills to either exempt from the moratorium certain types of small reactors, or to do away with the moratorium altogether.

None of these efforts has made it through the Democrat-controlled Legislature.

Instead, lawmakers should take the matter back to voters.

I'm loath to predict what Oregonians might do with a subject so easily infected by claims based on emotion rather than on science — the Times editorial being only a recent example.

But such a ballot measure would at least force voters to confront their own commitment to fighting climate change.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.