

EDITORIAL

Exposing secrecy

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is casting a welcome, and bright, light on the Central Intelligence Agency's methods for secretly gathering information about, and from, Americans. Wyden and another senator, Martin Heinrich, D-New Mexico, commented last week about the recent declassification of a letter they wrote to CIA Director William Burns in April 2021.

The senators, both members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, noted in the letter that the CIA has undertaken a "bulk surveillance" program authorized under an executive order signed in 1981 by President Ronald Reagan but outside oversight by Congress or the judicial branch. This program is also separate from the better-known FISA law — Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act — which was passed by Congress and occasionally results in public releases of documents.

Wyden and Heinrich are calling on CIA to explain to the public the kinds of records it has collected under auspices of the executive order, and the legal justification for doing so.

Those are important questions, and Americans deserve to receive thorough answers.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

OTHER VIEWS

Politics driving decisions on masks

BY NOLAN FINLEY

The Detroit News

It was never about the science.

When the first COVID-19 mandates were issued in hopes of turning back a mysterious pandemic, there wasn't enough science or data available to know for certain what would work.

It was all best guesses and speculation, and a desperate instinct to do something in the face of a lethal public health threat unseen in our lifetimes.

COVID had its way with us no matter what protective orders were put in place. But few policymakers were willing to risk abandoning their edicts, even when the virus defied them.

Suddenly, though, keeping mask mandates and other restrictive measures in place has become riskier to the politicians who ordered them than the potential for another COVID surge.

Indoor masking requirements are coming off even in states run by Democrats. California, New York, New Jersey and Delaware are among the Blue states that are shedding masks this week.

What changed?

COVID hasn't gone away. Nationwide, roughly 250,000 new cases are reported every day, and 2,400 deaths. While daily cases have dropped over the past 30 days, daily deaths increased.

Yet the masks are going even in states where they've been akin to a cloak of righteousness. Why?

Because it's an election year, and masks mandates are not polling well, particularly among parents of schoolchildren. Governors notice what happened in Michigan, where Gov. Gretchen Whitmer backed off the active management of the pandemic last fall and has watched her approval numbers climb.

Omicron has tipped the balance. The highly contagious variant has blown past masks, as well as vaccines, to infect even those who are most vigilant in following the protective protocols.

Last month, the CDC said the cloth and paper masks most of us have strapped across our faces are not very effective in screening omicron particles. If it's not an N-95 mask or the equivalent, its protection is uncertain.

And yet wearing the flimsier versions allows us to go to school, fly on airplanes and fully participate in society. It makes no sense.

We have also surrendered to the reality we can't hide from COVID. Lockdowns and school closures didn't stop the spread and were largely abandoned. Now the masks we've been wearing for two years are going on the trash heaps.

Even vaccines have proven not to be the answer we had hoped. Eighty percent of the nation, age 5 and up, has had at least one dose of the vaccine, and yet the hospitals are filled with COVID patients.

Forcing compliance with ineffective measures does, however, give us someone to blame for the persistence of the pandemic — the virus is spreading because certain groups of people aren't wearing masks, or they aren't social distancing, or they aren't getting the shots, etc.

Omicron has demonstrated that no matter what we do, the virus will persist until it tires of tormenting us.

For two years we've put up with limits on our freedom in hopes of beating COVID. But it's in our national DNA to resist arbitrary dictates that don't produce results.

People are plain fed up. And when politicians realize the consequences of that, political science is the only science that matters.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.

• The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters.

• Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

• The writer must include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

• Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald,

P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

Email: news@bakercityherald.com



YOUR VIEWS

My emailing experience with Baker County United

Recent letters to the editor written in support of Baker County United (BCU), make me wonder if its supporters really know what their organization is all about. The following information is based on my considerable personal interaction with person(s), who purport to speak for BCU.

BCU first came to my attention on the morning of Oct. 4, 2021, when I received an email from a friend saying, "This was on our doorknob this morning." Attached to the email was a very colorful flyer titled "Community Call to Action." A sub-headline pleaded, "Operation Boston Tea Party, Withhold Your Property Taxes!" I ran right out and sure enough, the same flyer was hanging in a plastic sack from my doorknob.

The flyer informed readers, "Letters with over 300 signatures have been sent to Baker City Council, Attn. Mayor McQuisten, Sheriff Travis Ash, and the Baker County Commissioners." Near the bottom of the flyer was another sub-headline, "Stand United For Medical Freedom!"

Ah, hah! I thought, this is all about opposition to Governor Brown's vaccine mandate. That mandate requires that all persons working in health-related professions be vaccinated for COVID-19.

With my interest piqued, I set about trying to find out who the leaders of BCU are. The 8½ x 11 flyer had not one word about who composed the flyer and/or who paid for printing and distribution of the flyer. But the flyer says "the movement" has a website: BakerCountyUnited.org; and an email address: BakerCountyUnited@protonmail.com.

With that much information I thought surely I'll be able to find out who the leaders are. But, nope. Checking out the website, I arrived at the home page, where there's a paragraph declaring, "WHO WE ARE: Baker County United is a fast growing group of citizens making a concerted effort to ensure that our elected representatives are held to the expectations of their constituents." The declaration continued, "It is the responsibility of all of us to reject and replace those who are neither willing nor able to do that." Elsewhere on the website is this statement: "Desperate times call for what some may consider desperate measures."

I wanted to find someone to talk to about those demands and especially what "desperate measures" the organization has in mind. But nowhere on the website is there the name of anyone who might answer my questions.

At least the website gave itself a name, "Operation Boston Tea Party," defined as "a movement started by Baker County United wherein citizens of Baker County withhold their property taxes due in the fall of 2021, and set them aside." The theory behind the movement appears to be that if enough citizens withhold paying property taxes, local officials will be forced to accede to the demands of the movement. (We all know now what a bust that campaign ignominiously suffered.)

Inquiring at the Courthouse, I obtained a copy of a letter from "We the People of Baker County" dated Sept. 17, 2021, addressed to all three Baker County Commissioners: Bill Harvey, Mark Bennett, and Bruce Nichols. The letter is not signed. Instead, attached are two pages of signatures and addresses of Baker County citizens totaling 56, all signed on 9-17-2021, presumably meaning that not one of all those signatories wanted to take responsibility for the content of what I refer to as a demand letter. (That's like the Declaration of Independence being signed by "Anonymous." But Thomas Jefferson and several other courageous patriots proudly made their authorship known.)

The BCU declaration continued, "We insist on your commitment to standing by our emergency responders affected by the mandate to receive the covid injections. We require of you ... to retain the employment and services of these employees regardless of their decision to comply or not comply with Governor Brown's injection demands."

I find the movement's intentions reminiscent of Baker City Council's Resolution last year declaring Baker City a Sanctuary City, whereby City Council encouraged businesses not to abide by the state mask mandate (but with a footnote City Council would not pay their fines).

Having not yet found a person to query about Operation Boston Tea Party's leadership, I sent an email. Thus began a series of correspondence with a person who — surprise, surprise — would not identify himself/herself. After several email exchanges with this anonymous person, I started addressing my emails to "KKK," since he was hiding his identity under his pointy white hat, like Ku Klux Klan members did early in the 20th century. I told KKK that I consider anonymous correspondence as irresponsible and cowardly. But considering the content of his emails to me, one can readily understand why he did not want his or her identity known. Following is just one sample email from KKK to me.

"You apparently hate yourself because the KKK were democrats as well as Hitler. Those are your people, Gary,

so if you hate them so much why act like them? This is typical radical communist behavior. You project onto others the very thing you are doing. Small minded little men troll others because they have too much time on their hands. Please get a few more boosters for us too. Natural selection works great on godless people.

"The jab has already affected your little brain. You are too insignificant to even think that your behavior has any affect on us. You and sleepy, commie, Joe can go back to your basement. You having your double N95 masks, gloves, and hoodie proves our point. If people don't have your small communist mind then you and your Klan Democrats that hate liberty, god and country, have little snowflake meltdowns and go to the democrat Herald to air your little tamper tantrums when you don't get your way. That mentality lost the civil war and WWII, so keep that in mind, comrade. God Bless, Signed 80 million Trump voting patriots who win elections while your Third Reich cheat, steal, and spit on everything that made America Great Again, party will always be losers. P.S. If you come on Private Property the owner can have you removed if you keep behaving like an ass. Your intentions have been made clear so everyone is watching you."

I certainly hope that members of Baker County United would not want emails like that representing their movement. Especially concerning is KKK's comment that the mentality of Democrats "lost the civil war and WWII." Makes me wonder if we'll soon see members of BCU parading down Main Street waving Confederate flags.

So, who wrote that email? I think he left a clue. Right after I sent an email addressed to KKK, thanking the organization for inviting the public to attend the upcoming rally to be held at 6 p.m. on Nov. 4, 2021, I expressed my intent to attend the event.

Shortly after hitting send, I got a phone call from Jake Brown, owner of the large building at 3325 K Street, the rally's venue located across K Street from the Baker County Sheriff's Office. Jake Brown told me I was not invited and was not to set foot on his property. So much for the organization's invitation to the public to participate. Why does Jake Brown consider this 82-year-old Democrat so intimidating?

I encourage everyone to send an email to BakerCountyUnited@protonmail.com to see if you can find out who its leaders are. If anyone with the answer wishes to contact, my email address is tubingen@eoni.com and phone number is 541-523-6760.

Gary Dielman
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.

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: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97500; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. bentz.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. Councilors Jason Spriet,

Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells, 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.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durrflinger, 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.; Chris Hawkins, Andrew Bryan, Travis Cook, Jessica Dougherty, Julie Huntington.