

**EDITORIAL**

## COVID death toll doesn't quite add up

When you read the details of Josh Barnett's story about trying to right the record on his mother's apparent COVID-19-related death (Feb. 12 issue of the Baker City Herald), something doesn't add up.

But not from him — from the Oregon Health Authority.

As far as we (and he) can tell, his mother, Theresa Malec, who died in mid-December 2021, is the woman listed by the OHA as the 14th COVID-19-related death in Wallowa County.

His family is the first that we are aware of in the county to refute COVID-19 having a role in a loved one's death. The death certificate, and Barnett, both state the cause of Malec's death was liver cancer.

Barnett offered to share the certificate with the Wallowa County Chieftain. Following an interview, he gave the newspaper permission to publish the cause of death information and that portion of the document.

And after looking at what was provided by Barnett and speaking to him, and then looking at what OHA has given, Barnett's case is much more compelling than the state's.

For one, Malec's death occurred more than four months after her positive COVID test in August 2021. By Barnett's account, she had fully recovered from her bout with the virus. Even OHA's own documents say for a death to be counted as COVID-related, the time duration from an individual's first known positive test or symptom onset to their passing must be no more than 60 days.

OHA also counts a COVID-19-related death if the death certificate lists specific COVID-related codes. Yet the death certificate for Barnett's mother has no such code listed, and the only mention of her COVID history on the document states there were two negative tests.

(Interestingly, while it doesn't seem to apply here, the other criteria for a COVID-19-related death is "Death from any cause in a hospitalized person during their hospital stay or in the 60 days following discharge and a COVID-19-positive laboratory diagnostic test at any time since 14 days prior to hospitalization." Does that not strike anyone as odd?)

To be fair, we cannot be 100% certain that the woman in the OHA report is Malec, as OHA has not — and said it cannot — provide identifying information. The agency also could not confirm if Barnett's mother, when given her name, was the individual. And yes, Barnett said it was OK for us to ask the OHA that question, as well.

But when you look at the timeline for Malec's death and consider her age is the same as listed in the OHA report, in a county as small as Wallowa County it's pretty easy to put two and two together.

More details are needed to get to the bottom of this particular case, but at the moment, Malec's passing — and Barnett's account and document — raises some serious questions about the validity of OHA's data in this case, and could weaken its overall credibility.

This is not to discredit the losses felt by people who have been severely impacted by COVID. The virus has killed more than 900,000 people in the U.S. and more than 6,000 in Oregon.

But as you look a little deeper into OHA's data, it's clear something does not add up.

*Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.*


**OTHER VIEWS**

## Congress needs to unite behind China competitiveness bill

**Editorial from The Seattle Times:**

Under the shadow of growing tensions with Beijing, the U.S. House of Representatives has approved a bill that would help the United States remain economically competitive with China. It will now need to be reconciled with similar legislation that passed the Senate last year.

Congress must not allow partisan squabbles to scuttle this vital proposal.

Republicans, who supported the U.S. Senate's United States Innovation and Competition Act, have so far turned their back on the House version, known as the America COMPETES Act, saying the bill includes unacceptable provisions related to labor, foreign policy and climate change.

While differences exist — and their merits are worth debating — both bills promise to fund the critical need to address supply-chain vulnerabilities and increase computer chip production in the U.S. They also include a major investment in ensuring America's place as the leader in scientific research and innovation.

These similarities should be the focus, said U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., who heads the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. Both bills call for a \$52 billion investment in the semiconductor industry, about \$160 billion for research and development agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy, as well as funding to reduce STEM workforce gaps.

"This would be the largest five-year commitment to public R&D in our nation's history," Cantwell said. "We need it for the job growth. We need it to stay competitive."

The legislation would also create some manufacturing jobs in the U.S., but the benefit to American workers may be strongest in improved protection from global market volatility, said Jeffrey Kucik, an associate professor at the University of Arizona.

"It's about insulating the domestic market from unpredictable global forces," he said. "Whether that's the pandemic, or the Great Recession, or shocks associated with

the escalation of the U.S.-China trade war."

For their part, Chinese officials have repeatedly labeled these legislative efforts as the product of a "Cold War mentality."

It was ironic, then, to see President Xi Jinping of China and Russian President Vladimir Putin warmly meet on the sidelines of the Winter Olympics in Beijing. Even more so was their joint statement, which sent a message of cooperation between the two countries not seen since Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong.

Their statement, which includes support for each other's foreign policies, underlines the precarious situation surrounding existential threats to Ukraine and Taiwan. It also underlines the need for Congress to act.

These bills are not about viewing the U.S. relationship with China as a Cold War zero-sum game. They are smart efforts to ensure America remains competitive. However, in working together, Republicans and Democrats can send their own message of unity in the face of global challenges.

**YOUR VIEWS**
**Nichols' request for security was an overreaction**

Feb. 2, 2022, I made the usual effort to attend a Baker County Commission meeting. Ordinarily the meetings are mundane, but I always manage to absorb some new information when I attend. I was left stunned by actions from Commissioner Nichols at this meeting.

On the 2nd, during "citizen participation," Mr. Curtis Martin brought some of his concerns to the commission. The discussion at times was very enthusiastic from both sides of the table, this is to be expected when people engage and disagree. I found it very invigorating and hope others in attendance would agree. OK, at some point Commissioner Nichols, fearful of an insurrection, called for security. The need for security to protect the commissioners from Mr. Martin? There was no apparent reason to request security other than to possibly intimidate Mr. Martin, or anyone else wishing to voice discontent.

All should feel offended by Commissioner Nichols' reaction. Actions such as this, against the electorate, discourages needed dialog; conversation alerts local representatives on issues important to constituents. The entire exchange between Mr. Martin and commissioners Harvey and Bennett, was instigated one way or another, from COVID. Freedom of choice, regardless of political affiliation, should bind this community and country. Commissioner Nichols needs to consider an apology not only to Mr. Martin, but also include those at the meeting, for his overreaction.

Wanda Ballard  
Baker City

**Speaker at commission meeting doesn't deserve apology**

Dear Commissioner Nichols: This Curtis Martin character deserves no apology from you or anyone. If anything he needs to apol-

ogize to all that attended the meeting and were subjected to his screaming tirade about things he just doesn't like. I respect your decision to request law enforcement as you had no idea as to how far he was willing to push his personal political agenda.

I also believe he should apologize to you and every Baker citizen for taking up our valuable time and newspaper space with such ridiculous unfounded nonsense. He obviously is using this incident as a very lame excuse to draw attention to his extreme views and show his personal dissatisfaction with you not kowtowing to his agenda. Me thinks BCU might be helping direct his "flabbergasted scurrilous appalling outrageous shock!?"

That he was never "treated so shamefully" and you "besmirched his character" is beyond laughable. Thank you for your vigilance and watching out for the safety of all. Give this man nothing.

Mike Meyer  
Baker City

**County GOP should ask for refund from McQuisten campaign**

According to ORESTAR, on November 29, 2021, the Baker County Republican Party (BCRP) donated \$2,500 to the gubernatorial campaign of Kerry McQuisten. This appears to be a violation of Oregon State Republican Party (ORP) Bylaws which codify the equal treatment of all Republican candidates in a primary. In order to rectify this illegal transaction and avoid serious financial liability (paying all Republican gubernatorial candidates \$2500), BCRP must ask for a refund from the gubernatorial campaign of Kerry McQuisten.

Susan Bland  
Baker City

**Solution to mass shootings isn't more restrictive laws**

I'm using this letter because of lack of in-

terest of church leaders to use the devotion page. I've been reading and watching TV on what to do about all these mass shootings that no one seems to have any real answer to. More background checks, more mental health checks, more and more laws that bad people pay no heed to. The big one, more restrictive gun laws. Ever heard of the open car trunk? Really, none of this has ever stopped anyone with this kind of a devilish desire in their thinking. As a Bible student and believer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I would suggest a Biblical answer to what is happening.

Jesus said things like now would happen when people forsake God in their lives and turn from their faith and go chasing after strange ways (abortion). Read II Cor. 4:4. We are in the last days and this is happening. Hate, jealousy, sex, the decline in morality. All can be an open door to demonic spirits that will direct you to do things you would not do normally. Has the Church forgotten that Satan is still leading people into hell. It's not guns. Guns do nothing on their own. It's people who let demons into their lives by their lifestyle and lack of understanding of the Word. The Bible calls it demon possession.

I suggest three good studies on this before you think me crazy. Dr. Lester Sumrall's book, "Unprovoked Murder, Insanity or Demon Possession." Also, "101 Questions and Answers on Demon Power." And Joyce Meyer tape teaching, "Closing the Door to Satanic Attack." Most mental doctors won't find any of these or they don't believe or know what to look for. I've had a few experiences in this area myself. Some fault lays at the door of many churches who teach God's love (rightly so) but forget to teach the believer their authority over devils (evil spirits). God can and will put a stop to satanic attack if we will go back to believing his Word. Read II Tim. 3: 1-4, I Tim. 4:1-2, Gal. 5:19-21.

Richard Fox  
Baker City

**CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS**

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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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