

EDITORIAL

Let voters decide on governor's authority

Rep. Mark Owens, the Crane Republican whose district includes Baker County, thinks state law has given Gov. Kate Brown too much power to impose restrictions, under unilateral executive orders, during the pandemic. Owens believes no governor, regardless of party, should have that much authority.

But he doesn't want either the executive or the legislative branch to decide whether to make changes. Owens, quite reasonably, thinks the matter should be up to voters.

Unfortunately not enough of his colleagues in the Democrat-controlled Legislature agree. Owens' bill, House Joint Resolution 206, has stalled in the House Rules Committee. Owens said it won't even get a hearing in Salem before the Legislature adjourns next month.

That's a pity. Owens' bill would ask voters to amend the state constitution to limit governors' emergency declarations to 30 days and allow county officials to extend such declarations, or to get rid of aspects of such declarations.

It's not likely that such an amendment would pass in Oregon, where a majority of voters are registered Democrats, the party that has offered little if any objection to Brown's executive orders.

But voters should at least have a chance to decide whether to shift the balance of power away from fulcrum of Salem to the state's 36 counties.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at 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 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.

BACK THE BLUE



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OTHER VIEWS

Ranchers suffer as meat prices soar

Editorial from The St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

Farmers and ranchers in rural Missouri and Illinois, it's safe to say, are a pretty conservative group, firm in their longtime dedication to the deregulation and free market principles of the Republican Party. But now might be a good time for them to take a good look at their bank accounts and contrast their increasingly meager earnings to the astounding profits being enjoyed by the corporate conglomerates that control America's meat, poultry and pork markets. Someone is taking it on the chin, and it ain't the conglomerates.

The last entity farmers and ranchers should turn to for help is the Republican Party, which has a demonstrated record of siding with corporate interests whenever it involves a matchup against the little guy. At some point, rural voters in Missouri and Illinois will perform a frank economic assessment of their sagging financial prospects and start questioning why their party isn't stepping up to help.

What's happening right now across America is bizarre and defies all standard

economic models. Demand is high for meat, poultry and pork in American supermarkets. Supplies are dwindling and prices are through the roof — rising 20% just in the past year. Under normal circumstances, that situation would deliver a sizable financial windfall for those who control the source product — that is, the ranchers and farmers whose farm animals supply those markets. But both consumers and source suppliers find themselves increasingly squeezed.

Right there in the middle, however, are corporate conglomerates, like Tyson, Cargill and Sysco, that have seen their profitability skyrocket since the pandemic began. The Biden administration says four large conglomerates control 85% of the market. Their domination allows them to dictate purchase prices at the producer level and sales prices at the consumer level. If ranchers dare to challenge them, they can find themselves with no slaughterhouses willing to accept their animals because no one wants to get squashed by Bigfoot.

"We are contemplating getting out," Montana rancher Steve Charter told The New York Times in December as he choked back tears. "We are not getting our share of the consumer dollars."

The tactics employed by the conglomerates invoke the same images of the robber barons from the dawn of America's westward expansion. Republicans, transfixed with the idea that unbridled free enterprise can do no wrong, don't dare question the unfair practices that are taking place. Ranchers like Charter have long been loath to challenge that conservative orthodoxy, yet they cannot deny the real-life effects corporate market domination is having on their ability to survive.

What's happening here is not free enterprise. It bears all the hallmarks of abuse bordering on antitrust. If farmers and ranchers want to see this unfair corporate domination change so they can survive, they'll either have to change party loyalties or force their own party to come to grips with the monster Republicans helped create.

YOUR VIEWS

Baker County United welcomes people to learn about the group

With the widespread knowledge expanding every day that cloth masks don't work, that vaccination injuries far outweigh a 99.9% coronavirus survivability, and the pain exacted on our families and economy from the manufactured lockdowns, it's obvious that our individual liberties should have never been compromised for a "security" narrative.

Baker County United (BCU) started late last year as a gathering for our county residents to work together in preserving our Bill of Rights while using our Constitution as the measuring stick with which to grade our locally elected public servants. While other counties have passed resolutions representing their citizens against big government's overreach, the Constitutional resolution that BCU proposed to our county commissioners has been largely shunned. The resolution was proposed in the preservation of our right to medical choice; for citizens to decide regarding forced vaccinations, and whether or not

our children got to be free all day from mask-induced bacteria, oxygen deprivation, and skin disorders. The proposed resolution also covered our natural resources within Baker County and accented our right to due process.

Gary Dielman and other far left extremists have repeatedly misrepresented BCU for several weeks now in this publication. They have made some absurdly false statements regarding BCU. I understand those few liberals will continue their sideshow of ambient noise, but this merely platforms a community discussion on how we can retain our Republic and leave the kind of America to our kids that previous generations sacrificed for. While I disagree with nearly everything they've written, I do agree with them in inviting you to come see what all the fuss is about surrounding BCU. All are welcome that embrace liberty, truth, and non-violence.

I further plead with our local elected officials to remain true to their oaths of office and remember that they represent and work for us ... not Salem. Our Baker County school boards need to do the same. In addition to their regularly tax-

funded budgets, our four school districts have accepted millions of dollars from the federal government for forcing our children to suffer with masks. Our children's health should not be for sale in exchange for bribe money.

I think our commissioners and mayors are simply scared and want extra money. Our county budget is over \$40 million but the county only raises about \$6 million from us in property taxes. To what extent are we for sale? Courage and unity for our basic inherent rights must be the standard. 2022 is an election year. Consenting to the government of our choosing is infused into the very fabric of America's bedrock. Consent is our heritage, and Jefferson championed it in the greatest resolution ever passed, our Declaration of Independence.

I encourage all of you who have not attended a BCU gathering to come and investigate what is actually being done to preserve our culture and economy. Come find us on Facebook and visit us on our website at www.bakercountyunited.com.

Jake Brown
Halfway

COLUMN

Banning books weakens our democracy

BY SUZANNE NOSSEL

In the ever-worsening culture wars, schools have emerged as a battlefield, with fierce arguments raging about the contents of curricula and propriety of particular books. Debating what literature and ideas to teach students is a mark of a healthy democratic society. But coming amid assaults on voting rights, protest rights and respect for dissent, these efforts to repress disfavored ideas and books must be recognized as part of a larger attack on democracy itself.

Since January 2021 more than 150 bills have been introduced in 39 states that would restrict the teaching of certain curricula, mostly on issues of race and gender. Of these bills, more than 103 were introduced since the start of 2022. Twelve have already become law. Roughly two-thirds of the bills target K-12 schools, with the rest focused on higher education, libraries and state agencies. Sixty-two include mandatory punishments for those who violate the bans.

Initially, most of these measures used the misnomer of "critical race theory" in an effort to push back against teachings thought to over-emphasize the role of race as the driving force in American history and culture. But more recently intro-

duced restrictions reach beyond any single concept.

South Carolina's House Bill 4605 seeks to protect students from any material that might cause "discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress" on account of their "race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, heritage, culture, religion, or political belief." Such language, common to many of these bills, is dangerous. It is impossibly broad, opening the door to eliminating an endless range of works and topics. It also undermines one of the very aims of education, which is to help students move beyond their existing assumptions about the world.

Most book bans target works by and about people of color as well as LGBTQ subjects and storylines. Florida's Polk County "quarantined" 16 books, including Toni Morrison's "Beloved" and "The Bluest Eye," based on complaints from a group called County Citizens Defending Freedom. And as the calls for book banning increase, so does the vitriol that accompanies them: Last fall two Spotsylvania, Virginia, school board members called for books banned in the county to be burned.

International examples offer an ominous clue as to where this could lead. In the 20th century the South

African apartheid state banned 12,000 books, at one point commanding a steel factory furnace in order to burn reviled texts. And in the 1930s the Nazi Party railed against "un-German books," staging book burnings of Jewish, Marxist, pacifist and sexually explicit literature.

More recently, in 2018 Iran banned the study of English in primary school to ward off "cultural invasion." Legislation adopted in Hungary last year banned all curriculum referencing homosexuality from schools in the name of "protection of children." In 2014 Russia passed a new law adding Nazi propaganda to the subjects it bans and restricts — LGBTQ content, offenses to traditional values and criticisms of the state are among others. Booksellers were so fearful of running afoul of the broad law that they removed Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel "Maus" from stores because of the swastika on the book's cover, despite its potent anti-fascist message. Last month a Tennessee school board banned "Maus" from its curriculum.

Book bans and curriculum debates in the United States have flared up episodically over time, as rattled communities have sought to pump the brakes on social change in areas including evolutionary science,

sexuality and the embrace of ethnic differences. Although some of the arguments being made today — about protecting innocent students from corrupting ideas — echo traditional motives for book banning, the current crusade has a more sinister cast.

The spiking numbers — what the American Library Association has called an "unprecedented volume" of book challenges including more than 155 unique "censorship incidents" between June and November, 2021 — indicate that something organized is afoot. In many cases the new bans are not simply spontaneous initiatives by local citizens. Conservative donors, think tanks and organizers have been drafting and shopping model laws, lobbying legislators, recruiting parent and community activists, and providing playbooks on what to get banned and how.

Some of the same institutions and funders fueling book and curriculum bans are mounting parallel, partisan efforts to curb assembly rights, make it more difficult for members of minority groups to vote, command election administration and sow doubts about election integrity. It is all part of the work of a revanchist political movement bent on trampling civil liberties in order to gain and hold power. Organizers have hit

upon bans as a potent tool to fire up suburban parents with an issue that affects their own kids' bookbags.

The techniques being used to enforce these prohibitions feed into an already menacing atmosphere of political schism. School board members in Redding, Connecticut, and Eureka, Missouri, stepped down last year after receiving death threats in the course of curricular battles. In an incident reminiscent of Cold War-era purges, a school principal in Colleyville, Texas, was put under investigation for his teachings on issues of race, finally resigning under pressure after being accused of "encouraging the disruption and destruction of our district." School officials across the country have been similarly targeted.

The blitz on books and curricula is one flank in a wider onslaught on institutions and norms, aligned with part of our country's resistance to the political and social implications that come with demographic and ideological shifts. Holding fast to democracy means holding fast to books, defending the judgment of teachers and librarians, and vigorously upholding the rights to read and learn.

Suzanne Nossel is chief executive of PEN America and author of "Dare to Speak: Defending Free Speech for All."