

EDITORIAL

City's camping rules reasonable

The proposed Baker City ordinance regulating overnight camping in parks and some other public places is reasonable and sensible.

On Tuesday, April 26, the City Council approved the first two readings of the ordinance that Police Chief Ty Duby brought to councilors April 12. The City Council could pass the final reading at its next meeting.

Duby told councilors that the ordinance, which is modeled after existing regulations in other Oregon cities, including Coos Bay, is designed to address problems with homeless people camping on public property.

The ordinance states, in part: "It shall be unlawful for any person to set up tents or any other temporary shelter or to use house trailers, campers or automobiles for the purpose of overnight camping in any city park, nor shall any person remain in any city park after closing hours; provided, however, organized youth groups under competent adult supervision may be permitted overnight camping privileges."

The ordinance defines parks as including the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway. The ordinance also prohibits camping in several other specific public properties, including within 150 feet of any school, preschool or childcare center, or at the Baker Heritage Museum at 2480 Grove St., the Baker County Courthouse, Sam-O Swim Center, the YMCA gym on Church Street and the YMCA Fitness Center on Pocahontas Road.

The ordinance also states that if someone is living in a vehicle, it must be moved at least every 24 hours and for at least the distance of a city block.

The ordinance also bans camping on public property in residential zones, while it would be allowed, with time restrictions, on public property in the general-commercial, general industrial and light industrial zones. The ordinance prohibits camping during the period 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The ordinance applies only to public property. People are not allowed to camp on someone's property, at any time, regardless of the zone.

Duby was prompted to propose the ordinance after the Oregon Legislature passed a bill in 2021 which states that cities and counties with ordinances regulating camping on public property must ensure those ordinances are "objectively reasonable as to time, place and manner with regards to persons experiencing homelessness."

The state law also allows homeless people to challenge in court such city or county ordinances.

In other words, Baker City's new ordinance, along with those in effect in other cities, are on somewhat shaky legal ground.

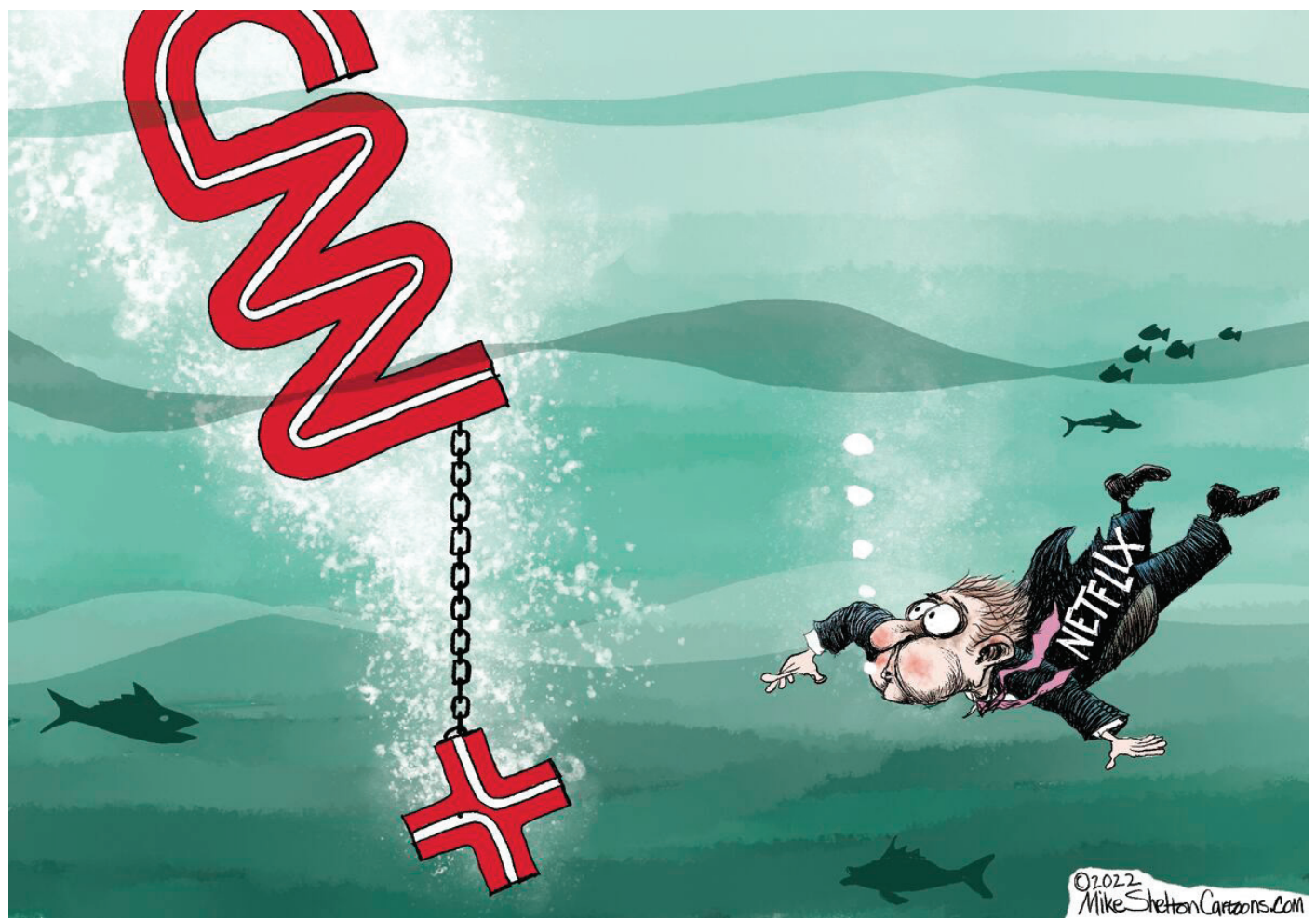
But while we wait for the situation to play out in the courts, it's wise for Baker City to have an ordinance in place that gives police officers the authority to deal with people camping in parks and the other public property listed in the ordinance.

Without that ordinance, the city wouldn't be able to prevent people from camping on some public property if the person wasn't violating another ordinance, such as the one prohibiting people from blocking a sidewalk or other public right-of-way.

Duby got to the heart of the matter when he told councilors on April 12 that the 2021 state law, "while offering compassion and support to those experiencing homelessness, can fail sometimes to protect both the citizens of our community and the very homelessness the law is designed to protect."

The city's ordinance strikes an appropriate balance. It doesn't outlaw homelessness — something that could hardly be enforced — but it also rightly recognizes that having city parks become camps is not acceptable.

—Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



YOUR VIEWS

City, county officials have misplaced priorities

For two years I have watched our city and county government descend into a confusing madness. Are they competing for the most ridiculous local government in the State of Oregon? It would be laughable if it wasn't so sad and embarrassing. Instead of focusing on the health, protection and welfare of their constituents, including our precious businesses, they've chosen anger, bitterness and divisiveness, spawned from their inability to accept the "fact" they were members of a losing minority in the last elections. Time to move on one would think. ... but no.

As fringe partisan special interest groups, masquerading as Baker City councilors and commissioners, your local representatives ignore critical problems, relevant business and their jobs, deciding instead to focus on senseless and meaningless resolutions? The time and energy Harvey and Bennett wasted on BCU, and their crybaby snowflake grievances, is beyond comprehensible. To what

end? Thank you Commissioner Nichols for ignoring that disgraceful display of futility.

Then there's the very definition of dysfunction ... our city council. Here we have a mayor and three councilors rejecting a free, all expenses paid, safety upgrade to every railroad crossing in the city! The downside? Less noise. They've chosen instead to subject our most vulnerable (grade school children, the elderly, the infirmed. ...) to a fractured education, health complications and ear damage, all in the name of...what? They claim the people need to vote on this? Hmmm. Just like the people voted on that unnecessary, special interest paving project by the golf course and a myriad of other monetary expenditures added to their tax liability? Using this skewed logic there should be no problem with every council decision being put to a vote of the people. Oops! Guess we wouldn't need a council then huh?

We all know what this is about. A last ditch attempt by an impudent special interest group to maintain a semblance of power and control. Angry bitter pride, pure and

simple! Thank you, Councilors Guyer, Spriet and Alderson for ignoring this obvious vindictiveness.

Feeling nostalgic? "Siri/Alexa play me a blaring train horn. ... or maybe an "ambulance" siren??"

Michael Meyer
Baker City

What does the term 'pyrrhic victory' actually mean?

In an April 23 letter to the editor Gary Dielman states that a synonym for pyrrhic victory is "meaningless." A pyrrhic victory actually, is a victory at too great a cost. The origin of the term comes from King Pyrrhus of Epirus whose army defeated the Romans in 279 BCE but lost too many of his troops.

Maybe passing county resolution: "Reaffirming the constitutional rights of Baker County Citizens" is meaningless but it is no pyrrhic victory.

Neal Jacobson
Baker City

COLUMN

Reining in Big Tech's power over publishing

BY DOUGLAS SCHOEN

Thousands of local papers have shuttered their doors in recent years, and those surviving are facing unprecedented challenges in remaining both economically viable and as the lifeblood of their communities.

All the while, Big Tech monopolies like Alphabet and Meta — through sites like Google News and Facebook News — have come to dominate the news and publishing industries by expropriating the work of smaller and local operators via their news aggregator sites.

The Founding Fathers enshrined protections for a press free from government regulation in the First Amendment to the Constitution because a free and diverse press is the backbone of a healthy and vibrant republic. But the Founders could not have envisioned a future in which nearly all news and information would be controlled by just a handful of private entities.

This is not only blatantly unfair — it is a threat to the free press and, thus, to democracy itself.

The American people not only understand the severity of this threat, but moreover, are united on the need to curb Big Tech's undue power and unjust profiteering in the news and publishing industries.

New polling by Schoen-Cooperman Research — which was conducted among a representative sample of U.S. adults, and commissioned by News Media Alliance — reveals widespread public concern over Big Tech's outsize influence with respect to news and publishing, as well as broad-based support for Congress taking action to rein in these monopolies.

Indeed, roughly 4 in 5 Americans are concerned that Big Tech companies have too much power over the news and publishing industries (79%), manipulate these industries for their own gain (78%), and are driving small and local news outlets out of business (76%).

Further, approximately three-quarters

agree that "Big Tech's monopoly over the news and publishing industries is a threat to the free press and unfair to publishers, especially to small and local outlets" (76%).

In addition to being broadly concerned about this problem, Americans want change and are looking to their elected leaders in Washington to deliver.

Roughly 4 in 5 Americans agree with statements to this effect, including "I support Congress taking steps to give small and local publishers more power in negotiations with Big Tech companies" (81%), as well as "Congress needs to rein in Big Tech by passing reforms that would make the publishing industry fairer for smaller media entities and local operators" (77%).

In terms of specific reforms, our survey measured public support for a bill that was introduced this year known as the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, or JCPA. This is a bipartisan proposal that would allow news publishers to negotiate, under the authority of a federal intermediary, fair terms for use of their content by Big Tech companies.

Remarkably, after reading a brief description of the JCPA, strong majorities support Congress passing the JCPA (70%) and believe it is important for Congress to pass the JCPA (64%).

Respondents also indicated that a political candidate's support for the JCPA — or lack thereof — would affect their vote in an election. By a 4-to-1 margin, U.S. adults would be more likely, rather than less likely, to back a candidate for Congress who supported the JCPA.

Additionally, 7 in 10 agree that "elected officials who oppose the JCPA are allowing Big Tech companies to continue manipulating the news and publishing industries for their own gain, leaving small and local publishers powerless" (69%).

In addition to being supportive of the JCPA, the public broadly favors general reforms to this effect. Strong majorities

support Congress passing laws that would allow news publishers to band together to collectively negotiate fairer terms for use of content by Big Tech (71%) and increase regulations on Big Tech to curb their power over the news and publishing industries (57%).

And by roughly a 3-to-1 margin, Americans would be more likely, rather than less likely, to back political candidates who support both reforms.

Over the last two decades, though the world of news and information has changed dramatically with the expansion of Big Tech, the United States' antitrust and anti-monopoly laws have not changed with it.

Congress now has a mandate from the American public to rein in Big Tech and pursue long-overdue reforms that will safeguard local journalism's survival — and ultimately will make the news industry fairer, freer and more democratic.

On a personal note, in my experience as a professional pollster who has worked in the industry for more than 40 years, it is rare for an issue or piece of legislation to garner this level of broad-based and enthusiastic public support.

Elected officials from both parties have a unique opportunity to deliver on reforms that are both substantively important and politically viable — by advancing the JCPA or a similar version of the bill — which our data indicates would have a demonstrably positive electoral impact for these members.

If America is to have a news industry that is truly free and fair, we must stop allowing Big Tech companies to expropriate the work of smaller and local publishers without consequence. Congress can start by passing legislation like the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act into law.

■ Douglas Schoen is a Democratic campaign consultant and author of several books including "The Power of the Vote: Electing Presidents."

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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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