

EDITORIAL

VA should reconsider plans for Walla Walla

A potential move by the Department of Veterans Affairs to scale back services at its medical center in Walla Walla is a bad idea and should be reconsidered carefully.

Last month, the VA released a report from the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission that recommended the Walla Walla VA reduce services to primary care and mental health.

That move would downgrade the facility's services and potentially create problems for thousands of veterans who live across the Pacific Northwest's inland empire of Eastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon.

The best, recent news came from Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, who vowed he would reach out to the VA to get an explanation for the recommendation.

The commission's suggestions about reducing services at the Walla Walla center appear to be misguided and crafted through a certain degree of ignorance regarding the plight of veterans in rural areas of the Pacific Northwest.

All too often the government seeks to slash funding for programs that provide key services with apparently little forethought.

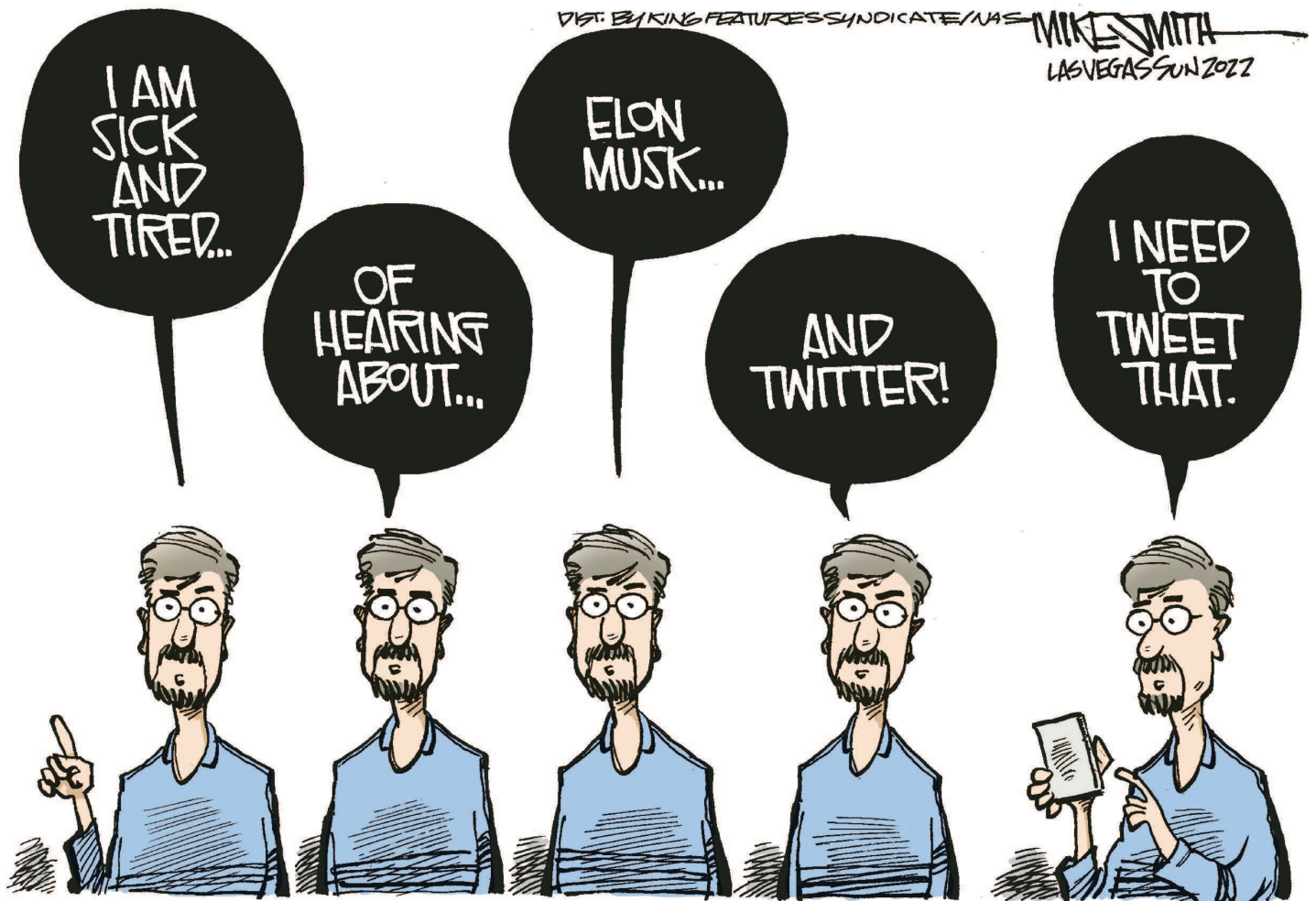
Modifying a funding outlay for an expensive, nonessential government program makes good sense and is a service to taxpayers, but VA facilities and programs should be off limits.

That's not because VA programs and facilities are not expensive. They are. However, the VA and its programs are part of a sacred covenant established between those who give service to our great nation and the rest of us who vow to take care of them.

As a nation we tend to get geared up for a major conflict but forget each war, each confrontation where our men and women are deployed, has long-term consequences. Those consequences are the health and care of our veterans, and we cannot ignore our pledge.

When a man or woman dons the uniform of one of our nation's service branches they do so as volunteers and as part of an unspoken bargain, they know America will watch out for them after their service ends. We owe our veterans more than we can ever repay, but we can ensure that as they age they have the best medical care our nation can provide.

Shifting resources to save money and potentially leaving our veterans out on a limb runs contrary to our nation's values.



YOUR VIEWS

Voters should be aware of how Precinct Committee Person races actually work

I want to alert the community to some mailers and fake social media ads I'm seeing regarding various Republican Precinct Committee Person (PCP) races. A lot of this would apply to just about any other race as well.

These materials encourage people to NOT vote for the candidates who actually live in their own precincts and are on the ballot, and instead write in candidates who live on the opposite end of the county. Why?! Your precinct is your neighborhood. Your PCP is supposed to be familiar with it and represent YOU. Your PCP should of course know what a PCP actually is, what a PCP actually does, how county parties work, how the state party works, and how the national party works. PCPs go through hours of training, learn Roberts Rules of Order, study the party platform and state statutes, and spend countless hours volunteering to get Republicans elected.

Some of this marketing is being made to appear as if it comes from The Baker County Republicans or Baker County GOP. It does not. This is illegal.

"Paid for by Candidates" violates campaign finance law. (Authentic candidates and campaigns will know this.) If a group is advertising on behalf of a candidate for any elected position and has spent even a few hundred dollars total doing political activities, they have to form a political action committee (PAC) with the Secretary of State so that the public can transparently see who is paying for what. If this hasn't happened, financial backers are being hidden. This is also illegal and with good reason. Ask

for PAC names if you're in doubt, so you can go to the Secretary of State's website and access Orestar, where all campaign finances are out in the open for everyone to see. The civil fines are high, and criminal prosecution is possible for campaign finance violations.

Oregon statute states organizations which operate as a political PAC but are not registered, such as Baker County United, are breaking the law. They are not being transparent with their donations, operations and expenditures, go cautious with their recommendations this election cycle.

Suzan Ellis Jones

Baker County Republican Chair

Baker County Republican Committee sets record straight

After months of false information being written in letters to the Baker City Herald and too numerous to count social media platforms, members of the Baker County Republican Committee will set the record straight.

Jake Brown and Ken Hackett's accusations of theft are coming from people who were not at the meeting, who don't attend meetings. If there was a person at that meeting who disagreed with the proposal and motions made for approval, they didn't express themselves, because the vote was unanimous. Brown and Hackett just make stuff up out of thin air.

In September of 2021 a proposal was discussed for the committee to set aside an article bylaw which is allowed by Roberts Rules of Order and to endorse Kerry McQuisten. This proposal was based on what other counties have done in a variety of races over the years, includ-

ing Dennis Richardson who was also a statewide candidate.

This proposal was shared with the committee by Tom Hughes. It was tabled until the November meeting. At the November meeting, Tom Van Diepen made the motion to set aside the specific bylaw article and endorse Kerry. Motion was seconded, and passed unanimously.

After that item of business was completed, Tom Van Diepen made a second motion to donate \$2,500 to Kerry's campaign. This motion was seconded, followed by a brief discussion and passed unanimously. Unanimously. All accepted parliamentary procedures were followed to the letter, of course people who were NOT at the meeting wouldn't know that.

The people who were in the room can attest to the fact that it was not the County Chair Suzan Ellis Jones, the Vice Chair Julie McKinney, nor Committee Treasurer Joanna Dixon who made the proposal. The accusations that money was stolen from the committee is false, the accusation that the County Chair was behind endorsing and making the donation are false. Brown and Hackett have been on a very toxic hate trip this past year, doing everything they can to discredit those in the committee that actually work for the benefit of the committee. They actually act like Democrat operatives.

Baker County Republican Committee is honored and feel it a privilege to donate money and publicly support one of our own for governor of Oregon.

Vote Kerry McQuisten for governor. We are.

Justin Langan

Tom Hughes

Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Angry parents ruining youth sports

BY BEN SHERWOOD

As millions of kids in the U.S. return to fields and courts for spring sports, black eyes and bloody noses are returning too. This time the injuries aren't just among the athletes. These are dangerous times for referees and umpires who call penalties and outs.

In Laurel, Mississippi, earlier this month, an umpire of a 12-year-olds' softball game was ambushed by a parent in the parking lot and hit in the face after the game. The accused assailant — wearing a "Mother of the Year" T-shirt — was arrested and charged with simple assault, a misdemeanor, and fined \$422.25.

In Livonia, Georgia, at a church basketball game this month, a referee was attacked after the final whistle by parents and eighth grade players. Some 30 stitches later, the ref is recovering.

Attacks have happened at a Texas baseball game, a Northern California soccer game and a Colorado hockey game, where one parent sprayed a referee in the face with an industrial-sized can of Lysol. Chemical warfare comes to youth sports. What next?

No wonder youth sports today face double trouble. Some 70% of young athletes drop out by age 11, primarily because sports aren't fun anymore. And 80% of referees quit within two years.

Some have called referee abuse "a national crisis." More broadly, others have labeled youth sports "a cauldron of yelling and hysteria."

Although plenty of games go off without a hitch, too many referees are demeaned and rules disregarded, abuse and violence are rampant, and winning appears to be the only thing that matters.

The sideline mayhem has become pervasive

enough that nearly two dozen states have laws against harming sports officials. And the Legislature in Minnesota is considering a \$1,000 fine for unruly sports parents.

But laws, says Brian Barlow, a referee activist in Oklahoma, aren't the answer. He has refereed youth soccer for 14 years and started the Facebook page Offside. It began as satire — publicly shaming abusive sideline behavior with video — but has grown into an advocacy group for refs.

The problem is worse than ever, says Barlow, who also runs a referee academy. Leagues are losing referees at record rates, and they're recruiting at historically low rates. "I've never seen a time when so many games are being canceled," he says.

The result? Kids simply don't get to play — because their parents can't behave.

Out-of-control youth sports parents are nothing new. In a 2017 survey by the National Association of Sports Officials, some 87% of participants said they had suffered verbal abuse, 13% had been assaulted and 47% had felt unsafe because of administrator, player, coach or spectator behavior. And when it's all caught on cellphone video, it's increasingly hard to brush aside these incidents as isolated events.

There's some reason to believe that this most recent wave of violent behavior — also seen on planes, at grocery stores, at the Oscars — has been fueled by the pandemic. Keith Humphreys, a psychiatry professor at Stanford University, told The Atlantic that the pandemic has created "high-stress, low-reward" situations that can result in shocking outbursts. Other theories? Rudeness is contagious, substance abuse is up and the isolation of the pandemic has been crushing.

Some experts believe that as the world returns to "normal" our societal norms will return too. Eventually. But in the meantime, youth sports parents have to do better.

One solution? When parents are abusive, take away their privilege of watching their kids play youth sports. Barlow believes that banishment would be more effective than a fine.

To make this work, everyone — from the major leagues down through state associations and local clubs and government — needs to adopt a standard of zero tolerance. And then they have to enforce the rules and laws. (The assailant from the softball game in Mississippi will reportedly be banned from all recreational facilities in her city.)

Referees themselves can also take a stand. At the end of the day, if there's no ref, there's no game. It's hard to accept that it has come to this: Friday night flag football, Saturday morning soccer, canceled because no referee is willing to put up with the abuse.

As I watch parents go nuts on the sidelines — and sometimes feel a little rage myself as a parent coach — I can't help thinking we've gotten everything entirely backward. With time, no one really remembers the score of a youth game. But everyone remembers the parent who went berserk or the ref who was socked in the face.

While you can't blame anyone for quitting, the answer isn't to leave the field. It's to step up and remake youth sports into a communal and civil activity.

■ Ben Sherwood, founder and CEO of MOJO, a youth sports app, is a soccer referee and has coached his sons for the last 13 years in four sports. He has served as president of ABC News, president of the Disney ABC Television Group and co-chair of the Disney Media Networks.

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

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