

## EDITORIAL

## Council exaggerates challenge with county ambulance request

If you attended or watched a recording of the Baker City Council's work session on Wednesday night, May 11, you might reasonably have concluded that Baker County is solely responsible for putting in jeopardy the city's ambulance service and forcing the city to propose to lay off six firefighter/paramedics.

It was if councilors didn't, on their own, notify the county on March 22 that the city intended to stop ambulance service on Sept. 30, 2022.

But they did do that.

And by doing so the City Council forced the county, which is responsible under Oregon law for ensuring ambulance coverage, to prepare for the possibility — if not the likelihood, considering the city's budget for the fiscal year starting July 1 doesn't include ambulance service — that it would need to replace the city fire department as the ambulance provider.

Having received that ultimatum from the City Council, and with just six months to act, it's hardly surprising that county commissioners have sent out a request for proposals for operating ambulances in a service area that includes Baker City and about two-thirds of the rest of the county — what's known as the Baker Ambulance Service Area. To not make such preparations would be negligent, considering the obvious necessity of ambulances.

That request for proposals (RFP) was the focus of the City Council's two-hour work session Wednesday. City Manager Jonathan Cannon and councilors spent much of the time talking about how onerous they believe some of the RFP requirements are. Cannon told councilors the city can't comply with some of the county's standards, or that it would have to hire several new firefighter/paramedics and buy or lease at least a couple new ambulances to do so. That would cost the city hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The implication seemed to be that the county had written an RFP intended to make things as difficult, or expensive, as possible for the city.

Yet County Commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols, neither of who attended the work session, both said on Thursday, May 12, that they're mystified by councilors' and Cannon's assessment of the county's intention with the RFP. Bennett and Nichols both said they don't believe the city needs to meet every standard in the RFP — indeed, the commissioners contend that these aren't true "requirements," in the sense that the city's proposal, if it doesn't comply with everything listed in the RFP, would either be disqualified or would rate very poorly. Bennett said the RFP is designed to address all types of providers that might respond, including private firms that operate ambulances only, as well as dual-purpose public agencies such as the Baker City Fire Department.

Both Bennett and Nichols said they

would welcome a proposal from the city that offers to continue the same ambulance service the city has today. Although that wouldn't meet every item listed in the RFP, Nichols said there's no reason commissioners, if they choose the city's proposal, couldn't draft a contract with the city that reflects not every detail in the RFP, but the level of service the city is capable of meeting. And that's a high level — much higher than the city would be able to supply if it drops ambulance service and has to lay off firefighters.

The city probably could have avoided this situation altogether. The City Council didn't need to send the county the Sept. 30 ultimatum. Nor have councilors expressed much skepticism about Cannon's implication that the city can't keep its current dual-role fire department intact, for even one more fiscal year, without wrecking the city's budget. This despite the city's own financial records suggesting that the situation, over the next fiscal year, is not nearly so dire as that.

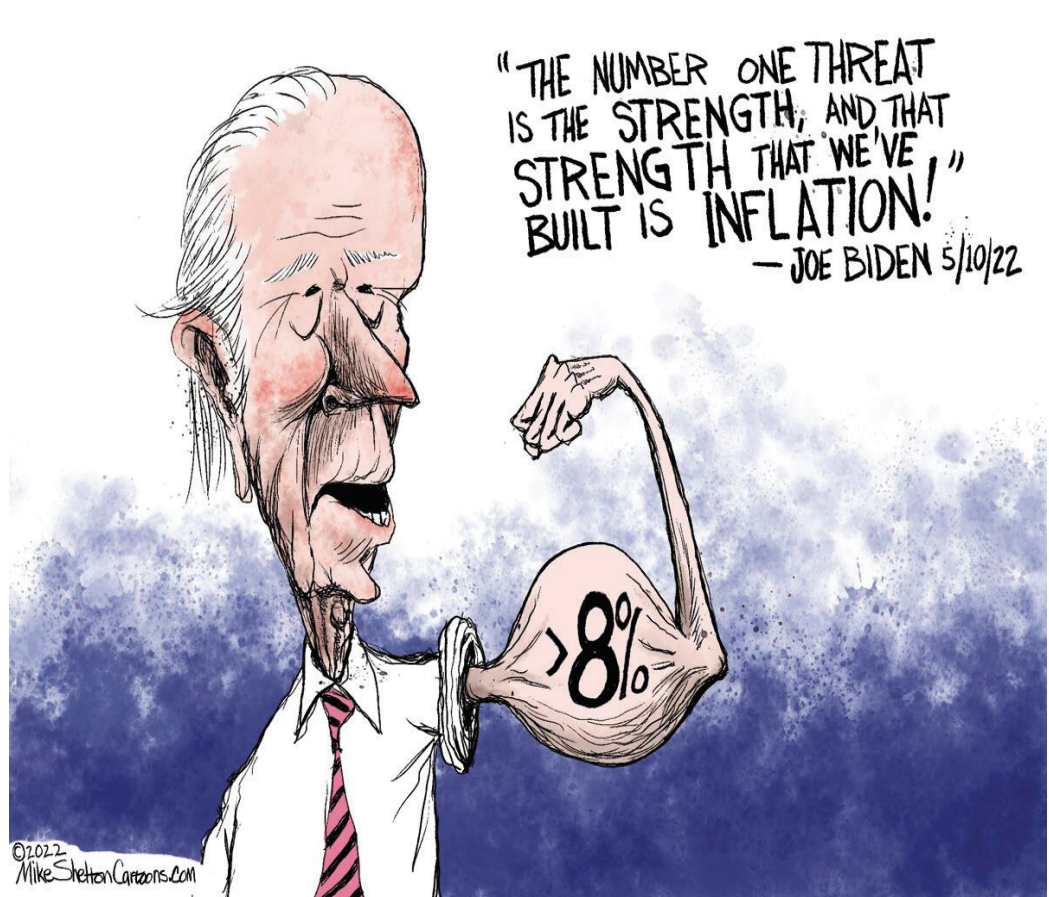
The city and county could have negotiated a contract that maintains the city fire department as the provider for the Baker Ambulance Service Area. The county would not then have needed to put out the RFP, leading to Wednesday's unnecessarily negative work session. Even a one-year contract would give the county time to set up a proposed ambulance service district to take to voters, probably in May 2023. Both city and county officials seem to generally agree that a district, which would require voters to agree to raise their property taxes, both inside the city and in the rest of the ambulance service area, is the best long-term solution to the challenge of paying for a professional ambulance service. Cannon and city councilors have made the reasonable contention that city taxpayers should not have to continue to shoulder the burden of paying for a service that benefits most of the county.

Fortunately the City Council, despite the litany of complaints it leveled during Wednesday's work session, intends to respond to the county's RFP before the June 3 deadline. Based on Bennett's and Nichols' comments, it seems likely that a proposal for the city to retain what's basically a status quo ambulance service would be the solid basis for negotiating a contract. Councilors also discussed including with their proposal an estimate of how much it would cost to meet every standard in the RFP, but that doesn't seem to be necessary.

The people who packed into City Hall on Tuesday, May 10, for the City Council meeting made it abundantly clear that they want the city fire department to remain what it has been for decades — a dual-purpose department that responds with fire trucks and ambulances.

The City Council can still accomplish that vital task.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## YOUR VIEWS

## No one has right to kill an innocent human being

Scientifically speaking, each new human life begins at the moment of fertilization. Things such as local, age, gender, race, cognitive ability, or physical ability do not determine the humanity of that new human being. He or she is human — biologically — and therefore, is worthy of the right to life and protection from harm.

Abortion is, plain and simple, the homicide of an undelivered human being. And globally, what has happened is that stronger human beings have decided that legalizing the homicide of abortion against another weaker class of human beings is acceptable. But no one has an actual right to kill an in-

nocent human being. The idea that one person's bodily autonomy overrules another person's right to life and to a natural death (instead of being killed by homicide) is an incorrect, dangerous, and inhumane notion.

The abortion pill starves a developing child, a first-trimester D&C uses powerful suction to tear a child to pieces, and a second-trimester D&C literally dismembers babies who are capable of feeling pain and some of whom are old enough to survive outside the womb. A third-trimester induction abortion uses a lethal injection of feticide to cause the child to go into cardiac arrest. And a D&X, commonly called a "partial-birth" abortion, includes partially delivering the child before stabbing the base of his

or her neck and suctioning out his or her brain.

If born persons were subjected to any of these deaths, this would be rightly viewed as a human rights crisis. Yet undelivered persons, who are no less human than born persons, are subjected to these deaths daily in the United States.

We need to love both the mother and child to help her make "choices" that preserve the sanctity of life. 2,363 lives that have meaning and purposes created in the image of our Heavenly Father.

Psalm 139:14: "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."

Pixie McKnight  
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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**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, Kenyon Damschen, 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.

## COLUMN

## The potential dark side of compulsory voting

Living as I do in a state that scarcely punishes people for carrying a couple hits of heroin or snorts of cocaine, I bristle at the notion that Oregonians, or anyone else, could ever be fined, even a token sum, for failing to vote.

I don't begrudge a certain share of my tax dollars going to keep drugs, and the people who use, make and sell them, out of circulation.

I endorse actions that make it less likely that one of my children or grandchildren will happen upon somebody with a needle in his arm.

It seems to me passing strange, though, that we might also employ the force of government, even in a rather modest way, to cajole people to fill in their ballots.

It strikes me as not at all implausible that with compulsory voting we might end up electing more people with loony ideas such as not punishing people who use heroin or cocaine.

Although to be fair to politicians, it was Oregon's voters, not their elected representatives, who passed Measure 110 in November 2020, making the possession of small amounts of many dangerous drugs a minor misdeed roughly equivalent to topping the speed limit by 5 mph.

And that was an election when 21.5% of the state's electorate didn't fill in all the little bubbles — or, probably, any of them.

I shudder to imagine what sorts of hijinks my fellow Oregonians might get up to if all of them were forced to send their completed ballots back.

The concept of mandatory voting is probably pretty farfetched, I'll concede. There is no current proposal for such a requirement.

Americans don't cotton to being bossed around, an aversion to authority we have demonstrated in a variety of ways over the centuries.

From rebels tossing Tory tea into the sea, to tattooed ruffians riding motorcycles without donning helmets, we have flexed our independence through the decades.

But I recently came across an editorial in another newspaper that kicked around the idea of requiring eligible Americans to vote.

The impetus was a new book: "100% Democracy: The Case for Universal Voting," by E.J. Dionne, a longtime columnist for The Washington Post, and Miles Rapaport, a senior fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School and former secretary of state in Connecticut.

Among their arguments is that with limited voter participation, electoral results don't fully represent the population.

This is true enough. But I'm not convinced this is a bad thing.

The implication, it seems to me, is that if the population were fully represented in elections — by way of requiring people to vote and issuing a fine of, say, \$20 or less to those who don't — that we'd end up picking better people. Or at any rate people who feel bound to try to represent their constituents more evenly so as to get reelected. Which is one trait we can surely count on when it comes to politicians.

I'm by no means sure that would be the case.

Frankly I'd rather that voters be compelled not by their government but by their conscience.



Jayson Jacoby

I'd even prefer voters whose motivations are based on some predilection that I might find perplexing — choosing Republican candidates based on who vows most vociferously to protect our children from pedophile illegal immigrants peddling critical race theory, for instance, or picking Democrats who vow to protect our children from an even worse threat.

Donald Trump, for instance. People who vote only to avoid a \$20 fine, by contrast, are more likely, I think, to treat the ballot like a multiple choice test on a subject about which they know nothing.

They'll just guess. Or choose the candidate whose name is shared with a favorite uncle or who levels the most piquant insults against her opponent.

Or some equally inane reason which has nothing to do with creating a more informed and engaged electorate, which I have no doubt is Dionne's and Rapaport's goal.

Although no state mandates voting, Oregon's motor voter law is at least tangentially related to this topic. The law, which took effect on Jan. 1, 2016, aims to add to the voting rolls eligible people who visit the DMV. The law achieves this in a rather clever way, but one which also illustrates the absurdity of the concept.

People who show up to renew their driver's license or conduct some other transaction will, if they're not already registered to vote, receive a notice by mail later. To avoid being registered as

a voter, the person has to reply to the letter. Those who don't automatically are registered.

This reminds me of nothing so much as the online marketers who offer you a great deal on some sort of subscription and let you sign up with one click of the mouse, but then make it about as difficult to get out of the deal as it is to hack into the Pentagon's mainframes.

But the motor voter law has proved to be an effective way to add digits to the state's voter rolls.

Which is hardly surprising. People who haven't already taken the simple steps needed to register to vote have already demonstrated the lackadaisical attitude so sought after by the crafters of Oregon's "motor voter" law.

We ought not be surprised that most of these people simply accept their newly minted voter status — presuming, of course, that they even read the notice, a presumption I'm not comfortable making.

To return to the concept of mandatory voting, I'm mystified as to why anyone would think it wise to ensure that such people, who obviously have no interest in electoral matters and likely little knowledge about it, cast their ballots.

During the first nine months the motor voter law was in effect, Baker County added 1,286 voters, and 972 of those were registered through the law.

Moreover — and this is hardly shocking — the vast majority of those 972 — 880 — accepted being enrolled as nonaffiliated voters, which all "motor voters" are unless they choose a different affiliation.

Which requires action, something that group has demonstrated a distinct lack of aptitude for.

Perhaps the more telling statistic, though, is statewide voter turnout in presidential elections, when turnout almost always peaks.

In 2016, when the motor voter law was new, Oregon voter turnout was 80.3%.

Four years later, with Trump again on the ballot and Oregon having added almost 400,000 new voters, primarily through motor voter, turnout dropped to 78.5%.

Compelling Oregonians to become registered voters obviously doesn't entice most of them to actually use their franchise.

This suggests to me that taking the much more dramatic step of forcing people to cast their ballot will not redound to our country's benefit. It might well have unintended and unpleasant consequences.

Universal access to suffrage is not merely desirable but is, I think, a precondition to being the equitable society that America strives to be.

But universal voting is quite another matter.

If you grew up or have lived in a house with lots of children, imagine if everyone had an equal say in deciding the dinner menu.

Now I have no particular objection to Twinkies as an appetizer, chocolate bars as the main course and Pepsi as an aperitif.

But I also think America has enough cases of type 2 diabetes and obesity as it is.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.