

EDITORIAL

Hoping
this candy
tastes sour

The notion that anything could make the experience of eating a Twix candy bar anything but blissful might seem farfetched.

But here's to hoping this is so in one instance.

Whoever pilfered four boxes of candy — including the aforementioned scrumptious combination of chocolate and caramel with a cookie crunch — from the concession stand at Wade Williams baseball field in south Baker City doesn't deserve to enjoy the fruits of the larcenous labor.

The Baker Little League, which manages Wade Williams (owned by the Baker Elks Lodge), lost about \$300 in the incident that happened between Sunday evening, May 15, and the next afternoon.

Jason McClaughry, Little League president, said the thief or thieves used boltcutters to snap two padlocks and gain entry to the concession stand. Baker City Police investigated but there's little evidence to link someone to the thefts.

McClaughry said this isn't an isolated incident. There have been similar thefts at Wade Williams each year for the past three or four years, he said.

Stealing from an organization that helps kids play baseball is abhorrent in any case, of course. But targeting Wade Williams seems especially obnoxious given the amount of work volunteers, led by Kenny Keister, have put in over the past several months to restore the fields, parking lot and other parts of the facility.

Anyone with information about the thefts should call Baker City Police at 541-523-3644.

— Jayson Jacoby,
Baker City Herald editor

OTHER VIEWS

City hasn't justified fire dept. cuts

Greetings! I'm Casey the firefighter/paramedic and I am here to help you understand the conflict going on regarding the ambulance and Baker County.

The first thing that myself and the other firefighters would like you to understand is that there is no budget crisis. Baker City is not losing vast amounts of money on the ambulance nor is it in any other department that we are aware of.

There is no crisis except that which was created by city manager Jonathan Cannon's manipulation of our elected officials, and the trust of the citizens of this great community.

To help illustrate this point I am going to highlight some large-scale numbers for the city and the fire department, and then we will get into the nuance of the fire department budget and how he was able to craft the illusion that we are losing money.

The IAFF, International Association of Firefighters, conducted a routine assessment of the city of Baker City's budget and found that the city is in excellent financial health.

City Reserve Funds (essentially our savings account) are up 34%, or 2.44 times greater than our liabilities.

City revenue is 12% greater than our expenses, meaning that we're putting 12% of "extra" income to the general fund.

Next, we will look at fire department budget reports and previous years accounting to assess the overall financial health of the fire department. All of this information is available online to the general public. If there is anything that is not available, one simply has to submit a request to the city using their form and you can obtain the same financial information that we have.

Excluding this year, when financial reports have grossly overshot previous years due to manipulation by the city manager, we see a trend. Starting in 2015 and going until 2020 we note that every single year the fire department was under budget except for two years, 2018 and 2019. In the former, we were 3.5% over our allocated budget, and in the latter, a scant 1%. If the fire department has been under budget for five of the last seven years, I assume we are still doing fairly well. We are certainly not hemorrhaging money as I have heard some say.

Now we get to the nuanced assessment of the fire department budget. To understand how this complex assessment works, we need to think about our budget being broken down into two separate components, ambulance and fire. To be clear, there is no physical or other boundary between the fire department and the ambulance service. I am a fireman and a paramedic. Depending on your needs as a victim calling 911 I can either put on bunker gear and go put the fire out in your home or I can come to your house when you're having a heart attack and provide lifesaving interventions.

Now back to the accounting. It helps to think of our budget as being divided into two parts of unknown size. The fire department part is paid for by the taxpayers and there is no expectation from the city to reimburse the general fund for fire department expenses. The second component, the ambulance service, is essentially given a loan out of the general fund and then is expected to reimburse the city for that money using ambulance billing and other sources of income.

Now, if we play the game of "what would a nine-year-old say?" we would say that each part needs to pay for half of the fire department budget. 50-50 split. If our budget is \$1 million, we expect the fire department to cost approximately \$500,000 and the ambulance service would also then cost approximately \$500,000.

In that example, the city would give the fire department \$1 million at the beginning of the year and expect the ambulance to reimburse the



taxpayer (general fund) \$500,000 in ambulance revenue. This brings the effective cost of the fire department down to \$500,000 a year.

Unfortunately, that's not the game that Mr. Cannon and his cronies are playing. Taking the broadest brush imaginable, they stated that since roughly 85% of our calls are EMS (ambulance)-related, then 85% of the fire department's budget can be attributed to the ambulance. If 85% of our budget goes to supporting the ambulance alone, then the ambulance alone needs to reimburse the city for 85% of the fire department budget.

Using our \$1 million budget from the example above, the expectation is that the ambulance then needs to make \$850,000 to justify its existence (85% of \$1 million). The other assumption this makes is that running the fire department will only cost \$150,000.

If the ambulance only makes \$300,000 this year, Mr. Cannon frantically proclaims "the ambulance is costing us \$550,000 a year!" When we apply real budget numbers, we find that this 85% assumption is where the claims of the fire department losing \$700,000/year come from.

Do you see what he has done there? I call this bad math. You can call it what you would like.

If one wants to check the validity of the "85% rule" we only need to look at the new budget that was passed earlier this month for the fire department only. Even though this budget incorporates three months of ambulance service and associated costs, it also accounts for nine months of the year with no ambulance. This is a good approximation for what it would cost to run the fire department without the ambulance. I can tell you right now that it will not be 15% of our current combined service budget. The actual budget passed for the fire department alone was \$1.67 million. That's 72% of our current budget for fire only, the exact opposite of the 85% rule.

The reality of this unfortunate and highly political situation is that we don't know what it costs to run the ambulance alone. We don't know how much of the fire department budget actually goes to ambulance operations versus that which goes to fire operations. We have

never had a professional company come in to evaluate the structure and cost effectiveness of this department. City staff can't even tell us why we bill the amounts we do when we take you to the hospital.

If we can't answer these simple questions and find ourselves using ridiculous math that doesn't pass the "asking nine-year-old" test, does it really justify putting 16,000 citizens at risk and terminating half of our fire department?

I believe the answer is no. They have not brought enough proof to validate the risk they are exposing this community to.

Hundreds of you showed up on May 10 to tell city council that very thing. They listened and voted to put in a bid for the ASA. While that is a great start, I'm here to tell you that it will not be enough.

Under Mr. Cannon's leadership, council will likely put in a bid of \$1 million or more. In private conversations with this department, he has said as much.

I am not here to pass judgments on whose duty it is to pay for the fire department or the ambulance. My purpose today is to tell you that if you want to keep fire-based ambulances showing up to your emergencies, we need a reasonable bid to the county. A \$1 million dollar bid will shut down negotiations between commissioners and the city, and the fire department along with it. We will lose six firefighters and the safety our current structure has brought you for the past hundred years.

Furthermore, when the fire department has been gutted and you only get two firemen to show up to your emergency in the name of "saving money," you will not get a tax break. The city has no plans to reduce taxes when they reduce fire department services.

Reach out to your councilors and demand that they work with the county to make this problem go away. Reach out and tell them to handle Mr. Cannon so that the city goes the direction that the population wants it to go in, not the direction he wants to go in.

■ Casey Husk is a firefighter/paramedic with the Baker City Fire Department.

COLUMN

Don't diminish the guilt of mass murderers

One lunatics who murder a bunch of strangers don't deserve to have their culpability curbed.

Not even by a minuscule amount.

Yet the latest member of this most dubious of clubs already has what amounts to a publicity campaign that perversely diminishes his culpability.

Payton Gendron, 18, is accused of shooting 13 people at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, on May 14. Ten people died.

Eleven of the 13 victims, and all 10 of those who died, are Black. Gendron apparently has described himself in writing as a white supremacist and anti-Semite, railing about "replacers" who "invade our lands, live on our soil, live on government support and attack and replace our people."

So he's a deluded bigot as well as a mass murderer.

This is hardly shocking.

Yet in the wake of the Buffalo massacre, some pundits weren't content to try to place the tragedy into some broader societal context, a tactic with limited validity but one that needn't diminish the criminal's responsibility.

Instead, some commentators explicitly blamed people with particular political beliefs for, in effect, encouraging Gendron.

The editorial board of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, to cite an example I read this week, opined that "once again, the truism that hate speech fosters violence has been

tragically reconfirmed, this time in Buffalo, New York."

That accusation, in addition to stretching beyond a reasonable level the definition of truism, is a curious mixture of the specific and the general.

Which hate speech, exactly, is the editorial board referring to?

If the speech in question is Gendron's writings, then the claim is reasonable, albeit obvious — he's a bigot whose personal hatred, exemplified by his writings, prompted him to shoot people, most of whom are Black.

But the editorial board then makes it clear that it's not confining blame to the man who pulled the trigger.

The editorial goes on to contend that Gendron was "fueled by so-called replacement theory, the far-right fantasy that white Americans are being intentionally 'replaced' by invaders of color to steer politics leftward. As Fox News' Tucker Carlson and top Republicans continue to toot this anti-immigration dog whistle, the bloodshed in Buffalo shows how easily it can translate into attacks on anyone who isn't white."

The audacity of that claim is breathtaking.

Although the editorial writers apparently aren't quite confident enough to actually brand as conspirators Carlson and the other "top Republicans" — readers are left to decide for themselves which GOP members are the



Jayson Jacoby

"top" ones — the implication is as blatant as the logic is flaccid.

Which is that if Carlson and his soulless cronies would quit whining about federal immigration policies, people like Gendron would stop murdering people.

This sort of simple-minded insinuation is always inappropriate, but it's especially egregious when deployed in a matter as serious as mass murder.

The Post-Dispatch editorial board seeks to strengthen its case by comparing something Carlson said in 2018 — apparently his influence takes quite a while to percolate, at least when the person being influenced is 14, as Gendron would have been — to something Gendron himself wrote.

Carlson: "How, precisely, is diversity our strength?"

Gendron: "Why is diversity said to be our greatest strength?"

So by virtue of similarly worded questions about the value of diversity we are to conclude that Tucker Carlson inspired a mass murder in Buffalo.

Speaking of comparisons, The Seattle Times editorial board picked the same verb as the Post-Dispatch to further this specious cause-and-effect indictment. The Seattle Times

described the Buffalo murders as "yet another massacre fueled by a formerly fringe belief that has found a mainstream foothold thanks to irresponsible pundits and political opportunists on the right."

The Seattle paper's editorial board was slightly more specific in its accusation, with Ann Coulter and another Fox News' host, Laura Ingraham, joining Carlson among those implicated in the acts of a madman.

That trio, the editorial board wrote, has "helped legitimize this paranoid delusion, while some GOP leaders have made the bet that stoking racial animosity will keep them in power."

The difference between cynical politicians and talk show hosts trying to capitalize on immigration policy debates, and blaming at any level those same people for "fueling" a mass shooting, is to me a great chasm.

Yet these two editorial boards seem to believe that the connection is more comparable to a coach relaying signals to his players.

This offends me not because the flimsy association between killers and TV personalities and politicians — neither of the latter group having a history of shooting up supermarkets — is unfair, although of course it is.

I've listened to a fair amount of Tucker Carlson's thoughts on immigration, and I think he greatly exaggerates the threat that our porous southern border poses.

What bothers me is that pundits seem to believe killers such as Gendron are mindless pawns who only respond, to borrow the clumsy analogy from the Post-Dispatch, to a "dog whistle" blown by TV personalities.

Besides the absence of any compelling evidence that these killers are driven by anything other than their own malfunctioning minds, this rhetorical approach siphons some of the guilt from Gendron and sprinkles it where it does not belong.

The logical conclusion to this illogical conceit is that a talk show host such as Carlson, whose audience is measured in the millions, ought not criticize the federal government's immigration policy both because such criticism is inherently racist, and because there lurk among us people like Gendron who would allegedly draw inspiration from a legitimate political debate.

This of course is antithetical to America's commitment to free expression.

I don't know that we can trust that commitment, with anything like the confidence we once had, if people begin to censor themselves for fear their opinions, no matter how reasonably formed and calmly stated, might share a phrase or two with the scribbles of a demented killer.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.