

## EDITORIAL

## One spark can lead to mayhem

May is Wildfire Awareness month, and while the weather the past few weeks delivered wet and cold conditions it is wise for residents to remember the hot and dry days of summer are just around the corner.

Warnings about fire danger are now nearly routine because of the dangerous, overgrown state of our forests. The climate isn't helping much either. Add drought to the bigger picture and a recipe for potential disaster is mixed and ready.

Yet the climate can't take all the blame for dangerous wild and forest fires. Blazes accidentally — or otherwise — ignited by humans continues to be a growing problem.

That means those of us who want to take advantage of the great vistas and mountains that are near to our communities need to be aware about the danger from fire.

Fires start with a spark, and that means campers, hikers and anyone else trudging throughout the great expanse of wilderness around us should take heed to minimize the potential for an inadvertent miscue with fire.

Sparks from equipment — especially motorized equipment — such as cars, trucks and all-terrain vehicles can seem easy to dismiss, but just one can create mayhem in terms of fire.

Sparks also are generated by such things as electricity, chainsaws or even target shooting.

Last year, more than 1,000 fires scorched huge swaths of land in Oregon, and while many were sparked by Mother Nature — such as from lightning strikes — the source of other fires could be traced back to human error.

Now, with rainy, cold weather, the threat of wildfire seems like a distant concern. Yet, the weather will shift — as it always does — and the local climate will be warm and dry. Once we enter into the summer months the threat of wildfire is a real one, and all of us should be mindful a major blaze can erupt quickly.

We should all expect to enjoy our great outdoor recreation spots this summer. But with our privilege to tromp around the area's forest comes the responsibility to be careful and to always use caution.

*Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.*

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## COLUMN

## America's Army: 'equitable' but not ready for combat

BY THOMAS SPOEHR

Americans are used to picturing Army combat soldiers as incredibly tough individuals, able to run faster and do more pushups than most people. In today's Army, though, that notion is officially passé. At a recent Senate hearing, we learned that Army physical fitness has been sacrificed on the altar of gender equity, a move that former infantryman Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., noted, will "get soldiers killed."

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth admitted to Cotton that the service had abandoned efforts to ensure that soldiers' fitness in physically demanding Army career fields — such as artillery — was being continuously assessed to ensure they met the standards. A subsequent exchange revealed that the Army's minimum fitness standards have been dramatically compromised.

This wasn't what we were sold when President Barack Obama's Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, opened all combat positions to women seven years ago. He directed that "leaders assign tasks and career fields throughout the force based on ability, not gender."

Obviously, not all Army career fields require the same levels of physical fitness. A cyber sergeant doesn't need to run a seven-minute mile. But an artillery crewmember must be able to lift and carry a 90-pound artillery shell. Most Americans can't meet that standard. So, to ensure readiness of the force, the Army needed a way to make these continuing objective assessments to meet Carter's guidance that soldiers have abilities necessary for their career fields.

Enter the Army's new Combat Fitness Test or ACFT. Designed over 10 years, it consists of six events, all chosen as a proxy for the types of strength soldiers need on the modern battlefield. The standards were gender-neutral to objectively assess who could serve in which Army positions.

The Army spent years studying the standards necessary to succeed in its 190 different career fields.

Unlike previous fitness tests, the ACFT had no categories for male and female. Color-coded scoring bands were established for each of the six ACFT events. For artillery crewmembers, the level of performance required were the highest, coded "black."

To achieve the "black" standard for a two-mile run time, for example, a soldier needed to finish in 18 minutes and deadlift 200 pounds. Similarly high scores were required in the other four events.

It was a tough but science-based system that ensured soldiers who held these physically demanding positions were able to continue to contribute effectively and succeed. It was scheduled for implementation for October 2021. Then Congress and advocacy groups intervened.

Alarmed that women were scoring lower than men were on trial tests of the ACFT, Congress passed a law delaying the test and requiring an independent assessment.

Months later, Rand, who performed the study, returned with shocking news: Males and females score differently on fitness tests. Thus, greater numbers of women than men would not be eligible to serve and remain in the Army's most physically demanding career fields.

Under heavy pressure, the Army surrendered. They threw out the gender-neutral ACFT, effectively abandoning any effort to link continued physical fitness to career fields and simultaneously watering down the baseline fitness standards.

Asked "why" by Sen. Cotton, Secretary Wormuth replied: "We wanted to make sure that we didn't unfairly have standards for a particular subgroup that people, you know, couldn't perform. We didn't want to disadvantage any subgroups."

So now the entire Army is disadvantaged, its

readiness degraded in the name of "fairness." The desire to put "equitable" outcomes first is reducing elite combat units to the lowest common denominator. It is a recipe for defeat.

Worse, not only did the Army remove any link between continuing physical fitness and career fields, it also significantly lowered the minimum scores necessary to pass.

The new ACFT passing standard for a female age 17-21 for the two-mile run is over four minutes slower than the old standards. A female soldier can take a leisurely 23 minutes, a male 22 minutes, and still pass. The number of required pushups went down by nine, to a total of 10. Cotton, unable to hide his disgust during the hearing, called the lowered standards "absolutely pathetic."

This is not to say no women can meet the physical standards to serve in combat units. More than 100 women have graduated from the Army's grueling Ranger School, its most physically demanding course.

One of the first graduates, Cpt. Kristen Griest, recently expressed strong views on the subject: "While the equity question must be addressed, the answer is not to implement gender-based scoring or reduce the minimum standards for combat arms. Doing so would have both immediate and insidious impacts on combat effectiveness, as well as on women's credibility and potential."

Some may think this doesn't matter — that modern combat is all about "pushing buttons." Think again. In Ukraine today, soldiers are lugging 90-pound shells and 50-pound javelins all across the country to defeat Vladimir Putin's brutal invaders.

Cotton concluded his questioning by warning, "I'm not going to let it stand."

For the sake of America's Army, let's hope he doesn't.

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## OTHER VIEWS

## Focus on reducing unwanted pregnancies

## Editorial from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

As contentious as the issue of abortion rights is at the moment, it would be easy to assume there's no overlap between those who believe women have a right to biological self-determination and those who believe that terminating a pregnancy at any stage is murder — an argument that some lawmakers in red-state America are already attempting to press into law.

But there's actually one area where the two sides of this fraught debate should be able to agree: The ideal solution to the abortion conundrum is fewer unwanted pregnancies to begin with. If abortion-rights activists are serious about helping the women who are most vulnerable in this debate, and if anti-abortion activists are serious about reducing the number of abortions taking place, both should work together — maybe just this once — to make oral contraceptives available over the counter.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Academy of Family Physicians have said for years that

standard birth control pills could be safely sold over the counter without prescriptions. Daily birth control pills work with hormones to prevent fertilization from occurring. The pills also can thin the walls of the uterus to make it less likely a fertilized egg will attach. No embryo, no pregnancy.

Some anti-choice activists argue that preventing a fertilized egg from implanting in the womb is a form of abortion. That's a medically specious argument that, if anything, confirms that pregnancy is a complex process that doesn't fit neatly into black-and-white moral structures. Using that logic, leaving a fertilized egg in a test tube also would be a form of abortion.

Two birth control manufacturers, HRA Pharma and Cadence Health, have been working toward Food and Drug Administration approval of over-the-counter birth control for several years now, but the apparent approaching overturn of Roe v. Wade gives the issue new urgency.

There have been hints from the anti-abortion side, however, of potential resistance — including opposition to intrauterine devices and so-called "morning after pills." Those are distinct from the debate over abortion medication, which actually ends pregnancies that are already in progress. It is perfectly legitimate to defend the right to abortion pills, as this newspaper does, while recognizing it is a fundamentally different process in need of different arguments than birth control.

The argument regarding birth control is fairly simple. While abortion should remain an option for women, prevention is a preferable approach to unwanted pregnancies — and should be an uncontroversial one. If anti-choice voices now expand their argument to limiting contraceptive access, it will only confirm what in truth has long been obvious: The movement that claims to be based on protecting life is more accurately described as one dedicated to diminishing women's control over their own bodies.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the

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- Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

- The writer must include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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