

## EDITORIAL

# Baker needs 24/7 police patrols

Baker City residents deserve to have police patrolling their neighborhoods 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Needing to call in an off-duty officer in an emergency, which inevitably leads to delays that can put people in danger, is not acceptable.

That has to be the starting point for the discussion the Baker City Council and other officials began during the council's meeting Tuesday, June 28.

Councilors decided to schedule a work session on the topic in September.

The matter came to the public's attention sooner than city officials planned. Last weekend social media posts claimed that the police department, starting Aug. 23, would cease patrols between 3 a.m. and 7 a.m. daily.

Police Chief Ty DUBY and City Manager Jonathan Cannon met Monday morning, June 27. DUBY acknowledged that ending 24-hour patrols is a possibility, and that department data show the 3 a.m. to 7 a.m. period has relatively few calls that warrant an immediate police response.

DUBY said he had asked a department employee to put together a draft schedule based on 10-hour patrol shifts rather than the current 12-hour shifts, a change that would curtail patrols from 3 a.m. to 7 a.m. DUBY said that proposed schedule was mistakenly released as an actual pending schedule.

DUBY told councilors Tuesday that he and Cannon always intended to discuss the situation with the city council before changing the patrol schedule.

The social media posts thrust the issue to the top of the council's agenda Tuesday — and rightfully so.

Reducing police patrols by any amount is a significant change in public safety, and one that demands a robust public discussion in which residents have ample opportunities to express their opinions.

This is even more vital given that the city council just recently agreed to Cannon's plan that drops ambulance service from the city fire department's duties (Baker County has hired a private ambulance company to replace the city) and reduces the fire department's workforce from 16 full-time equivalents to 10.5.

DUBY told councilors Tuesday that maintaining 24-hour patrols is a challenge even when the police department is fully staffed with eight patrol officers. The city has six now, with one officer in training and the city looking to hire another soon. The department also has three sergeants, two detectives and the chief.

The problems DUBY described in a Monday, June 27 interview aren't easy to dismiss.

To maintain 24-hour patrols, officers often have to work overtime. Sometimes they're not able to take compensatory time off when they ask for it.

"They're overworked," DUBY told councilors.

He said the work schedule has contributed to officers resigning, saying the city has lost one or two officers on average for more than a decade.

That's hardly ideal. Although the city needs to have 24-hour patrols, achieving that goal by pushing officers to the point that they leave town is no bargain. We need to consider the well-being of the officers who protect us.

The solution might well require the city to boost the police budget to hire more patrol officers. DUBY said as much Tuesday, telling councilors "it all comes down to money."

Regardless, city residents, having recently seen the city council oversee major cuts in the fire department, are likely to object, vociferously, to further reductions in public safety.

As they should.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.

• The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters.

• 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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## COLUMN

# How old is too old to govern?

BY NICHOLAS GOLDBERG

In last week's issue of *New York* magazine, two photos of Sen. Dianne Feinstein are laid out side by side.

In the first, from 1971, she is smiling broadly, hair bobbed, wearing pearls — the first female president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. She's about 38 years old.

On the facing page is Feinstein today, half a century later, in almost the same pose and pearls, but now her face is deeply lined, her shoulders hunched, her expression substantially less joyous. She looks irritated. The caption: "The oldest sitting U.S. senator."

It should go without saying, of course, that there's no shame in getting old. Each of us, if all goes well, will someday get wrinkles and our hair will thin and, over time, our strength and vitality will decline.

But Feinstein, who turned 89 last week, has kicked off a heated national debate by refusing to step down from her job even as people begin to clamor about her age and competence.

And she is hardly alone among her peers in clinging to power as she ages. Famously, Ruth Bader Ginsburg sat unbudgingly on the Supreme Court until she died at age 87. (Remember how she fell asleep during the State of the Union address in 2015?)

There's House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is 82 and apparently going strong. Sen. Mitch McConnell is 80, and he's waiting to become Senate majority leader again if Republicans win control in November.

Incumbency turns out to be a very pleasant place, and power an aphrodisiac that is difficult to give up — to the point that the word "gerontocracy" has suddenly become common.

Is this a problem? I think it is. In Feinstein's case, it is especially so because of the parade of reports on her cognitive diminishment, including a *San Francisco Chronicle* article in which sources described her memory as "rapidly deteriorating" and a *New York Times* story that de-

scribed her increasing "befuddlement."

But even beyond the issue of cognition, isn't there a point at which we all become slower, less relevant and less attuned to the changing world around us?

I realize that people live longer these days and that some people are more competent than others as they age (and that voters theoretically take that into account at the polls). But I still think it's troubling to be led by so many people who came of age in a distant, nearly unrecognizable era. At some point, government becomes sclerotic, stagnant and backward-looking and requires new blood.

The two most prominent exemplars of the trend are Donald Trump and Joe Biden. In 2017, Trump was the oldest person ever to become president. He was 70. Four years later, that record was smashed by his successor, Biden, who was 78 when he was sworn in.

And now — and this is the mind-boggling part — both Trump and Biden are thinking of running again.

Call me ageist, but I'm not the only one worrying about this. A recent article said that Democratic leaders all over the country are concerned about Biden's age, vigor and political viability and that many don't want him to seek another term. If he were to win, he would be 86 at the end of it. Trump would be 82.

A recent YouGov poll found that 58% of Americans support an age limit for elected officials.

And it's not just the presidency. Eleven sitting U.S. senators were born while Franklin D. Roosevelt was president. Thirty-three senators are 70 or older. Only one is under 40. (The median age in the U.S. is 38.1 years.)

Studies suggest that between 15% and 25% of people over 65 suffer from mild cognitive impairment. But physical problems also need to be considered. Many remember when an ailing 92-year-old Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) was rolled onto the Senate floor in his wheelchair to vote for Obamacare. (He missed 40% of the votes that year.)

One way to address these problems would be to enact an upper age limit for public officials. The Constitution already sets lower limits. You have to be at least 25 to become a member of the House of Representatives, 30 to be a senator and 35 to be president.

Congress in 1986 made mandatory retirement ages for most professions illegal in an effort to fight age discrimination. But certain sensitive jobs — including in some cases, judges — are exempt. Presumably elected officials could be exempted too.

Or maybe that's going too far. Maybe we don't want to force out people who are still performing at a high level. In that case, we could simply require candidates or sitting government officials to undergo a thorough nonpartisan medical review to assess their physical and mental health after, say, 70.

Or we could enact term limit laws. Senators, for instance, might be held to two six-year terms. That wouldn't be an age restriction, but it would clearly reduce the number of older senators.

Otherwise, there aren't too many ways to nudge people out. (Political scientist Larry Sabato told the *Washington Post* about Sen. Ted Green of Rhode Island, who finally retired in 1961 at age 93 when his staff "forgot" to file his reelection paperwork.)

In 2019, former President Jimmy Carter — who is still legally entitled to one more term if he chooses to run again — pointed out that presidents need to be intellectually flexible and attuned to new ideas and acknowledged that he couldn't have handled the job even at age 80.

"I hope there's an age limit," said Carter, who is now 97.

But there isn't. Which is why, for the moment, we have to rely on the good sense of our leaders to know when they've served long enough, and to get out of the way when the time is right.

■ Nicholas Goldberg is an associate editor and Op-Ed columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Supreme Court's abortion ruling disrespects women, families

With its poorly reasoned ruling in *Dobbs*, the radical majority of the Supreme Court stripped away the constitutional rights and choices of at least half of US citizens to manage their own health care.

The decision overturning *Roe vs Wade* shows a shocking disrespect for women, families, and legal precedent. It allows state government to make women's health care choices, not the woman in consultation with her doctor, family, and, if desired, her spiritual advisor. It harms women and families in 26 states who have banned or extremely limited choice, even in cases of rape and incest in some states. It has a disproportionate impact on poor women who can't afford to travel.

Alito's "originalist" reasoning was made up to achieve his ideological ends, based on norms in 1789. In 1789 women were essentially the "property" of men, had no right to vote, and states could approve of humans being enslaved.

How can we channel our grief and anger in a positive way?

Right now: Boycott businesses in states that have denied or severely limited women's rights to choose an abortion and related procedures. I will no longer vacation or shop in Idaho, Texas, Florida, and states who deny women constitutional rights.

History shows boycotts work. Boy-

cotting companies and events was key to overcoming apartheid in South Africa in the 1990s.

Elect federal and state representatives to codify *Roe* to restore women's privacy rights to manage their own bodies and healthcare.

Support an impeachment inquiry into the three illegitimate justices who lied under oath in their Senate confirmation hearings. They said that *Roe vs Wade* was settled precedent and law. They joined the radical majority to kill this "settled precedent" and violated their promise under oath.

Vote for and contribute to candidates and organizations that expressly support a woman's and families' right to choose.

Mary Tomlinson  
Baker City

### In America, religion and politics are not supposed to mix

A response to a letter written by Mr. Fox on June 25.

You're a Christian nationalist. You probably don't see yourself that way but you are. You want what the Islamic Taliban wants. Yes you do. You want the rest of us to live under a religion you like. Where that religion becomes the law of the land.

You're trying to tie the decline of this country to the restrictions placed on your religion of choice. Once again, this is sim-

ply not true. There are a lot of different world-wide events that have shaped us in recent decades. If Christianity was so perfect in the earlier days, why did people like me have to grow up with whites only signs everywhere?

No, what we have here is a swelling of evangelical Christian power in this country attempting yet another coup. There is no irony lost on the fact that you're the same people that supported and voted for a fascist like Donald Trump. This is not about God. It's about religion and politics mixing together. Something we were warned NOT to do.

It is the responsibility of citizens like myself to remind you where those limits are. You have the freedom to practice your religion of choice. But, you may not place yourself in a position of dominance simply because most people here are Christian. Keep your religion in your pants. It's a private matter between you and what made you. It has no place in the halls of power.

And the Ten Commandments? They were lifted from ancient Egyptian texts that predate the Bible. Because religions are composed of the various religions that came before them. Judaism and Christianity are no different. I'm a researcher by nature. When I researched Jesus, there was nothing in the historical record. Nothing. And if Jesus wasn't real, what are we to make of a religion that comes in his name and wants to assume power?...

Dan Collins  
Baker City