

EDITORIAL

The fatal scourge of fentanyl

A recent study by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) about fentanyl is disturbing, and not only because agency officials say the powerful synthetic painkiller has become a leading cause of overdose deaths.

It's also troubling that fentanyl is so ubiquitous that OHA officials can only concede that people will continue to ingest the drug. As a result, one of the agency's chief goals — and a worthwhile one — is to strive to ensure that Oregonians have access to naloxone, a drug that saves lives by rapidly counteracting the effects of fentanyl and other opioids. The state has programs that supply naloxone for free, as well as strips that test drugs for fentanyl.

Fentanyl is frightening in large part because many people don't even realize they're ingesting it. The drug is frequently present in illicit drugs, including pills. The Oregon-Idaho High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area said in April 2022 that 40% of all counterfeit pills in circulation contain fatal amounts of fentanyl.

In the same press release listing data about fatal fentanyl overdoses, OHA recommends that "unless a pharmacist directly hands you a prescription pill, assume it is counterfeit and contains fentanyl."

Obviously it's preferable that people simply don't take illicit drugs.

But some people will do so, and although the effects of drug abuse are serious and occasionally deadly, the prevalence of fentanyl has dramatically raised the risk of deaths that wouldn't, in the absence of fentanyl, have happened.

OHA's study found that fentanyl overdose deaths listed as either unintentional or undetermined increased from 71 in 2019 to 519 in 2021. Fentanyl was implicated in 47.5% of unintentional or undetermined overdose deaths in the state in 2021, up from 32.1% in 2020 and 14.3% in 2019.

These terrible statistics highlight how vital it is for police, at the local, state and federal levels, to combat fentanyl trafficking.

Moreover, the overdose epidemic emphasizes the need for Oregon to make better use of marijuana tax revenue to bolster drug treatment programs. That was supposed to be a benefit of Measure 110, the law Oregon voters approved in 2020 that decriminalizes the possession of small amounts of drugs, including heroin and methamphetamine.

Naloxone saves lives. But it's far better to help people overcome their drug addictions so that they'll never need a "rescue drug" to save them from fentanyl.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald



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KIRK

YOUR VIEWS

With public safety, the community has to come first

Throughout my career in policing I told numerous subordinates, colleagues and superiors that if you want to work in public service, the public has to come first. The priorities that you set for your agency and for yourself, must reflect your commitment to the community you serve. That thought process, unfortunately, seems to have been lost within portions of the Baker City government. The recent discussions about 20-hour police coverage and/or one officer on a shift at a time, reflects a mindset that does not put the safety of the community first.

This dilemma about short staffing is nothing new for the Baker City Police Department, as alluded to by the city manager and chief of police. Even when fully staffed and trained, the Baker City Police Department operates at minimum patrol coverage, which has two patrol officers on shift 24 hours a day, with a sergeant on an overlap shift. However, with vacations, sick leave and open positions, the sergeants end up working regular patrol shifts the vast majority of the time. If you lose another officer from a team, you have to pay overtime to cover the shift. If you lose that officer for an extended time, you are faced with the same dilemma the department has now, which we have seen numerous times through the years.

What we did for the 12 years I was chief of police was to temporarily move a detective back to patrol and a few times we had to move both detectives back to patrol. You see, this is where prioritizing the community first comes into play. A municipal police department has no greater priority than to provide patrol officers who can respond to an emergency, immediately upon notification. That means 24 hours a day. It also means that you must have two officers on a shift so they can safely respond to high risk calls immediately and not have to wait for backup. I will grant you that the call volume drops dramatically at 3 a.m.; but I will also tell you that if there were only one spouse being beaten, or one convenience store clerk being robbed, or one home being burglarized, or one vulnera-

ble child missing during those hours in a year's time, all the labor hours would be worth it.

I realize that Chief DUBY came from a different policing background, having spent his entire career with the Oregon State Police. He never had to prioritize the safety of an entire community. I will argue that the vast majority of municipalities in the state prioritize patrol over investigations. It certainly worked in Baker City through the years, garnering the city the distinction of being named the safest city in Oregon at one point. I daresay that's not the case now.

The last thing I want to add about the 20-hour shift proposal is the fact that it does nothing to address the short staffing. It takes just as many bodies to run 10-hour shifts as it does to run the current 12-hour shifts. All you save by going to 10-hour shifts is some accrued comp time for the officers working those shifts. With the 2-2-3, 12-hour shifts the police currently operate under, each patrol officer works on average 42 hours each week. Thus, they accrue 8 hours of overtime each month, which goes into their comp account. If the city did drop to 10-hour shifts, I would guess the standby pay and overtime pay for call outs would not be a good financial trade off.

As mentioned previously, none of these current issues are new. And the solutions aren't so hard to figure out, when you start with the belief that the community has to come first.

Wyn Lohner
Baker City

Great to see the motorcycles return to Baker City

This past weekend of July 8-10 saw a return of the motorcycles to Baker City. What a great weekend it was. We all thought the Baker Biker Rally would not come to visit but due to the exhaustive efforts of Brandy and her crew at Shameless Tees and a massive community participation and support — the event went off as planned and was a rousing success.

With a limited window in time to bring all the moving parts together, everyone who added their support and encouragement can take a portion of the credit

for returning this event to the calendar. Those who have added other such events to our list of community attractions will respect the speed with which this grand event came together. There was no sense of confusion on the streets, just a general happy response from everyone we talked to. The weather was as close to perfect as could be and high spirits were obvious by the smiles and friendly greetings exchanged.

The list of names is too extensive for me to include here but one name was heard more than once. Greg was a dynamo of good cheer and many did mention him by name. I know he is a decent, humble guy but he too, deserves a hearty "thank you." So let us show our appreciation to all the workers, vendors and guests that made this weekend so much fun. All we need to do is be sure our locally organized and operated event remains on the calendar for years to come. We have proven we, as a community, can stage a winner!

Penny Rienks
Baker City

'Blessings of liberty' still haven't been fully realized

In her letter to the editor of the Baker City Herald dated July 9, 2022, the writer wrote, "Our Founding Fathers drew wisdom from the Word of God" in composing the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, thereby "securing the blessings of liberty that we have enjoyed for 264 years," referring to the years since the colonies declared their independence from England.

If the Founding Fathers drew wisdom from the Bible, then why did they completely leave out these significant groups: slaves, Indians, and women? In addition, only men who owned property qualified to run for government office.

It would be decades, including a civil war and passage of several amendments to the Constitution, before those neglected groups would see the "blessings of liberty" in the United States. And those blessings have yet to be fully fulfilled to this very day.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

COLUMN

Responsible gun owners support safety measures

BY DR. CANDICE JONES

I'm a pediatrician and I own a gun. That may surprise you. I own a handgun because I grew up with guns. My dad had a shotgun mounted in his truck and he hunted and provided food for his family. He emphasized gun safety, carefully supervised us children when we hunted with him and taught us how to shoot. My great-grandfather kept a gun in the house as a means of protection, and my husband and I uphold that safe-guard in our home today. I even have a license to carry a concealed gun in Florida.

I was taught how to properly handle guns and I understand their power. I also know all too well the risks of children finding firearms, so my pistol is kept in a secure place.

I also support sensible gun measures to keep guns out of the hands of those who absolutely should not have

them. I am not alone. A 2021 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 92% of Democrats and 70% of Republicans support background checks for private gun sales.

The gun legislation that recently was passed by Congress will expand background checks for would-be gun buyers under age 21, giving authorities up to 21 business days to study juvenile and mental health records. It also sets aside money for states to pay for intervention programs and to implement red flag laws that allow authorities to temporarily confiscate guns from someone a judge deems too dangerous to have them.

These are important steps, but we can do more. Law-abiding, responsible gun owners like me and others I know want federal firearm measures that keep people safe, including:

- Comprehensive background checks for anyone buying a gun

- Mandatory firearm safety training and licensing process

- Raising the age of gun ownership in all situations to 21, the same as the legal drinking age

- A ban on assault rifles and high-capacity magazines
- Funding for more research on gun violence to inform evidence-based reduction strategies and effective legislation

These measures can save many lives. They can't prevent every mass shooting, of course, but they could stop some would-be gunmen from taking lives.

The recent massacres at a school in Texas and at a grocery store in New York, for example, were committed by 18-year-old men whom authorities said legally bought military-style rifles. What might have happened if they'd been denied the ability to purchase these powerful weapons?

I am tired of living afraid. When I drop my children off at school in the morning, I feel a small knot of dread and wonder if someone with a gun will enter their school that day, making it the latest in a long line of shootings. As an African American woman, I also must worry about being shot at the grocery store or at church by someone with hate for others in his heart. And now I must wonder if holiday parades in my city are safe.

I serve families from underserved, marginalized communities, and gun violence is no stranger to my practice in Orlando. I've seen a teen following up after hospitalization for multiple gunshot wounds, suffering from post-traumatic stress and also trying to cope with the grief of losing a friend to gun violence.

Another teen, whose life was full of adversity and who suffered mental illness and substance use, shot and

killed his caregiver in a fit of rage. I have seen siblings experiencing domestic violence that led to the death of their mother, who was shot by their father.

These children and families will never be the same. Gun violence now is the leading cause of death in children in the U.S. We must remember that these deaths are preventable, and Congress should act now. I am a gun owner, but my right to bear arms should never supersede the rights of children and families to be safe from gun violence in schools, while shopping, or while attending a special occasion.

So, I ask, pray and plead: Please act now and pass gun laws that can save lives.

■ Dr. Candice Jones is a general pediatrician in private practice in Orlando, Florida, and a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

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