

## EDITORIAL

## Psilocybin use worth considering

Voters in Baker City and Baker County might have a chance in the Nov. 8 general election to ban the production and use, in a state-licensed business, of psilocybin, the hallucinogenic substance in “magic mushrooms.”

The Baker City Council has directed city staff to draft an ordinance that would take the matter to voters. Baker County commissioners have scheduled a pair of public hearings, one on July 20 and one on Aug. 3, to collect comments on a similar ordinance.

County voters have already expressed their feelings about this particular drug. In the November 2020 election Measure 109, which legalizes supervised use of psilocybin for people 21 and older, passed statewide with about 57% of the votes. But almost 64% of the voters who cast ballots in Baker County opposed the measure.

But voters, rather than reflexively rejecting anything involving drug use, ought to consider the potential benefits of allowing licensed psilocybin production or “service centers” if, as seems likely, they’ll see the topic on their ballot again this fall.

The state’s psilocybin system, which is under the direction of the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), is quite different from Oregon’s recreational marijuana industry.

Buying marijuana is much like buying liquor — you go to a state-licensed store, buy the product and then take it elsewhere to use it. Marijuana dispensaries are banned in Baker City, however.

With psilocybin, people, when the state starts issuing licenses in 2023, will be able to ingest the drug only at a licensed business.

Well, sort of.

During the 2020 election Oregon voters also approved Measure 110. It decriminalizes the possession of relatively small amounts of many drugs, including psilocybin, making the punishment for possession effectively the same as a minor traffic ticket. Put simply, local residents who want to take psilocybin now have little disincentive — and they don’t need to make an appointment at a “service center,” to borrow the OHA’s rather silly euphemism.

But euphemism notwithstanding, psilocybin use under the state system would be much more controlled than it is now. People who take the drug would be in a safe place during the several hours the hallucinogenic effects can persist, and monitored by a “facilitator” — the OHA surely does love its generic terms — who will have to complete 160 hours of training.

Based on predictions about how psilocybin centers will operate, and in particular the cost, the question facing Baker City and Baker County residents might well be moot. It could cost around \$1,000 for one “session” — or “trip,” if you prefer ’60s vernacular. There’s not likely a big clientele for psilocybin hereabouts.

Nonetheless, psilocybin has the potential, based on legitimate medical research, to help deal with significant societal problems that affect Baker County, without creating new ones. Researchers have found that psilocybin can be effective in treating depression, anxiety and addiction to other drugs (psilocybin itself is not addictive, experts say).

To be sure, the aforementioned price for patronizing a psilocybin “center” could be prohibitive for people who might benefit most from its effects.

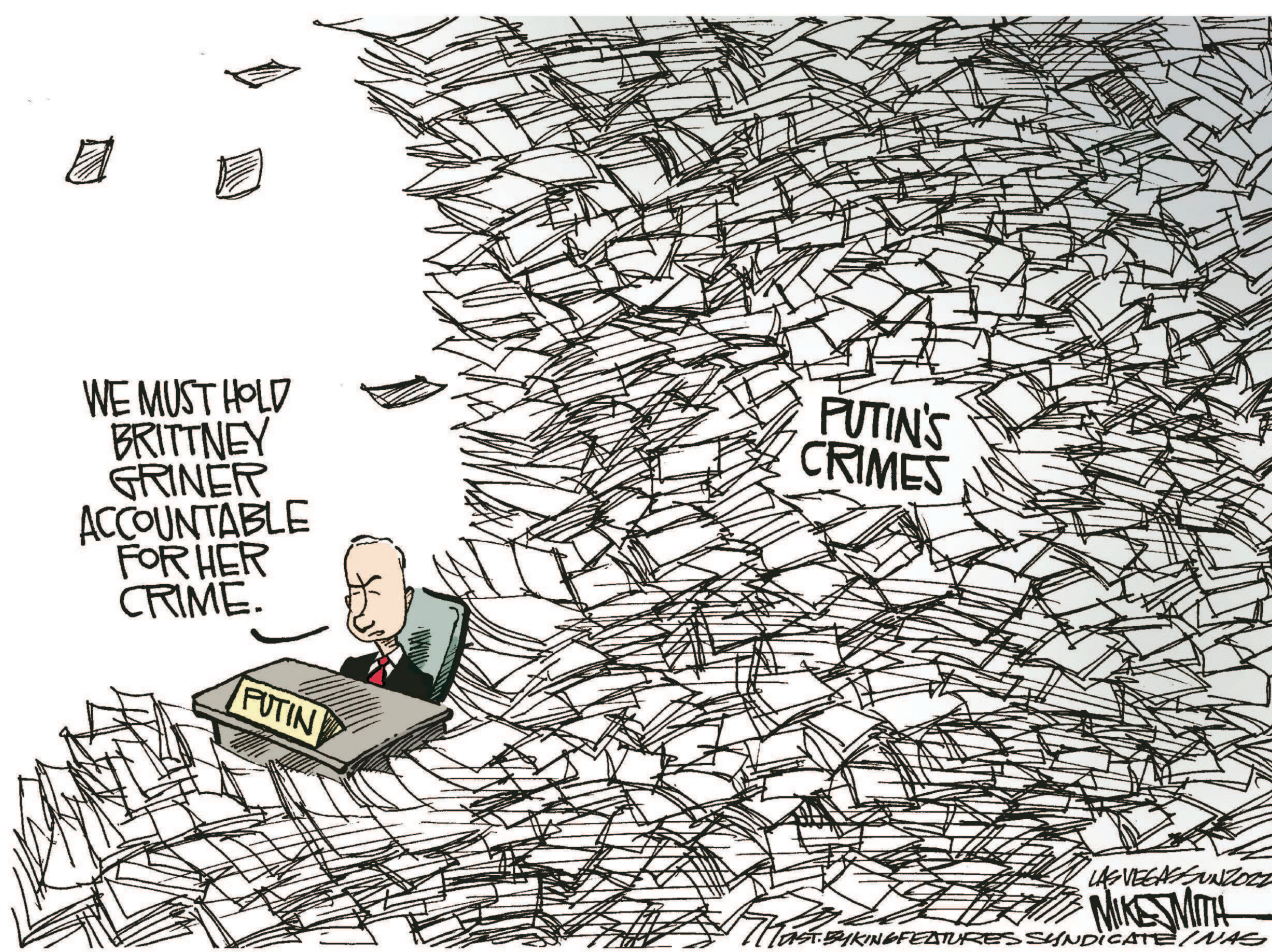
And to be clear, Oregon doesn’t require a prescription or recommendation from a physician to use psilocybin at a licensed business — people can go simply to experience the hallucinogenic results.

Some local voters will undoubtedly oppose anything they perceive to be a government endorsement of drug use.

But Oregon’s psilocybin system, due to its restrictions, is different. There are legitimate questions, of course — how well will the centers be monitored to ensure they don’t let clients drive home while they’re still in the altered state that psilocybin induces.

Yet voters shouldn’t blithely reject something that could help people overcome debilitating depression or other mental issues, or conquer an addiction to much more dangerous drugs. That’s a particularly vital issue to consider in an era when fentanyl, the powerful synthetic opioid, is ubiquitous and causing many unintentional overdose deaths in people who didn’t even realize the drug they took was tainted with fentanyl.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## YOUR VIEWS

### Stop by the Baker Food Co-op and see all it has to offer

I have been a member of the Baker Food Co-op since returning to my hometown in 1988. I enjoy being part of a community of people who value quality natural food and shopping in an environment that focuses on that. I believe that the co-op is a unique asset to the community and for that reason I accepted the invitation to join the board of directors when asked to do so last fall.

As explained in a recent Baker City Herald article (7-7-22), the co-op has reached a point where it is necessary to ask those who want to see the co-op continue operations into the future to step up and pledge their support. Shoppers are being asked to pledge to spend at least \$75 monthly. An error in the article stated that there is an annual administrative fee of \$25. That fee is actually just \$10. The \$25 fee is for a lifetime membership that also gives you

10% off all purchases for the first 30 days of your membership. I encourage you to seriously consider making this pledge and working on changing your shopping habits just a little to make it work for you.

If you haven’t been to the co-op for a while, stop in and see what’s there. The hours are convenient, there’s no parking lot to navigate and you will find a friendly atmosphere with an abundance of great food to help feed yourself and your family.

The opportunity to purchase many items in bulk, while re-using your own container, is a great way to economize on groceries and cut down on throw-away plastic in your life. Bulk grains and flours are available in organic as well as non-organic options. You can even purchase liquid soaps of all sorts and personal care products in bulk. Membership is not required to shop, but there is a 5% discount to members for items on the shelf. Items special ordered earn a

greater discount. Give it a try and support this local community asset!

**Carolyn Kulog**  
Baker City  
Board member, Baker Food Co-op

### Grateful to all who helped in a serious medical crisis

On June 8 I called 911 and would like to thank all those that responded in our crisis. The medical people, law enforcement, ambulance driver, ER at Saint Al’s, everyone responded so quickly, professionally and kindly, helping us through a major accident. You are stellar in performing your duties. With much appreciation.

P.S. We are now home again, and thankful for all those that prayed also. God is great and greatly to be praised! May He bless you in abundance as you continue to do your jobs.

**Ann Schneider**  
Baker City

## COLUMN

## Wandering bear unites neighbors

The words “bear” and “golf course” clang in the ears when crammed into the same sentence.

The combination is not quite so jarring, certainly, as, say, “cougar” and “bath tub.” Or “king cobra” and “bedroom closet.” Still and all, bears are not commonly associated with golf.

Birdies, sure.  
Even the occasional eagle.  
But you needn’t be a duffer like me to get a hitch in your backswing if a furry figure barrels across the fairway in that uniquely ursine gait, simultaneously clumsy and efficient.

I was lining up a convoluted sentence rather than a tricky par putt when I heard the word “bear” on the police scanner.

I was in my office on Sunday morning, July 3, a little before 8 o’clock, working on a few matters I didn’t want to have to start afresh on the coming holiday.

(Newspapers, alas, as a rule eschew the governmental approach to days off.)

From what I could gather, based on the scanner chatter and a Facebook post (the nearly inevitable modern version of the conversations that used to be lobbed back and forth over a backyard fence), a bear, fresh off its tour of Quail Ridge Golf Course, had ambled down the hill to Foothill Drive.

This sounded considerably more interesting than what I was engaged in.

(What that was I don’t recall, which suggests that even something less intriguing than a bear on a city street likely would have lured me from my desk.)

I was just starting to twist the key to lock the door when I remembered to grab the telephoto lens for the camera.

I didn’t expect to have a chance to get especially close to a bear.

Nor did I want one.

When I turned off Indiana Avenue onto the north end of Foothill and rounded the corner I saw the flashing lights from several police cars. I parked a couple blocks away and walked south.

The bear, a yearling male, had already sought refuge in the place that bears often do — up a tree.

A birch tree, specifically, one of a pair growing between two apartment buildings on the east side of Foothill.

I stood directly across the street and started chatting with Julie Bouchard, who lives on the west side of Foothill, and her daughter-in-law, Megan Cloyd, who grew up in Baker City and was visiting for the



**Jayson Jacoby**

holiday weekend.

Bouchard told me how she had just let out of the house her dog and Cloyd’s two black Labs when she heard someone up on the golf course yelling about a bear.

Not long after, she saw the bruin gambling through a field next to her home.

I took a bunch of photos of the bear.

And since the animal seemed uninterested in coming down — the one time it moved in that direction a flurry of yells from the police officers on the ground quickly convinced the bear that its elevated perch was safer by comparison — I talked with Baker City Police officer Lance Woodward, who was directing traffic.

For the next two hours or so, while everyone waited for Brian Ratliff, a local wildlife biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, to arrive with his tranquilizer dart gun and bear cage, I felt rather like I had been invited to a neighborhood block party.

There was, at any rate, a certain festive atmosphere there along Foothill on a mild and mainly sunny morning.

Also the sort of camaraderie that can ferment so rapidly in circumstances when a group of people are brought together by an event none of them could have conceivably expected, but which is generally benign.

Benign for the people, at any rate.

Several of the spectators I talked with, however, were concerned about whether the bear would survive.

Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash announced that the plan was to tranquilize, not kill, the bear — information that those gathered in the street and in adjacent yards endorsed with enthusiasm, even among some spectators who talked about hunting bears in years past.

(Bears which, obviously, did not roam city streets.)

The operation didn’t proceed perfectly, to be sure.

After Ratliff darted the bear, the animal, rather than tumbling to the ground, climbed several feet higher in the tree before nodding off.

When it became clear that gravity wasn’t sufficient to bring the bear down, Jeff Smith, who owns J2K Excavating and lives on Foothill, volunteered to drive his

bucket lift down the street and make it available for the rescue.

Ratliff and Ash, along with Noodle Perkins, Baker County roadmaster, stepped onto the lift. Perkins maneuvered the platform to a point where Ratliff could get hold of the bear. A few minutes later the bruin, still snoozing in its chemically-induced stupor, was inside the cage and en route to the Eagle Creek area.

Ratliff said the bear was fully alert by noon, less than two hours after being tranquilized. The animal bounded out of the cage and, I expect, is at this moment acquainting itself with its new surroundings.

I had fun that morning.

I don’t always have the chance to watch a news event happen. It is the most granular sort of reporting, and also sort of old-fashioned, standing in a yard and chatting with neighbors.

Technology, as it almost always does, intruded. Between scribbling in my notebook and taking photos I was also tapping a Facebook post on my phone, something that as recently as 20 years ago would have seemed preposterous.

It was in the end a good story — not least because it had the happy ending that most people appreciate.

I enjoyed watching police and a biologist and an equipment operator demonstrate their skills in an unusual situation. Also a very public one, an arena especially rare for Ratliff, who typically works not before a suburban audience but in the remote places where bears and other wildlife spend most of their time.

The round of applause that swept through the audience as Ratliff guided the bear into the cage seemed to me utterly uncontrived, and wholly appropriate.

I walked back to my car feeling that peculiar compulsion to quickly tell the story I had just witnessed, while the details were fresh and easy to recall.

Words, like dairy products, are perishable and can, if left too long, become unpalatable.

I had as well a renewed appreciation for living in a place where such tales are there to be told — tales of bears and birch trees and biologists, of people who might shoot a bear in the woods if they survive a tag, but who want only to see a bruin surge when it goes astray and ends up in a place where bears ought not to be.

■ Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• 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 in-

clude this information cannot be published.

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

**Mail:** To the Editor, Baker City Herald,  
P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

**Email:** news@bakercityherald.com