

EDITORIAL

Grateful for
volunteer
firefighters

What a hectic week it was for wildland firefighters.

And what a dramatic illustration of how vital the efforts of the volunteers and other local residents who rush toward, rather than away from, the dangerous flames.

Lightning started two blazes in northern Baker County. The first, on Sunday, July 31, burned about 416 acres between Thief Valley Reservoir and the Medical Springs Highway. The second, started in the early evening of Wednesday, Aug. 3, was about nine miles to the east, near Keating. It burned about 200 acres.

In both cases, volunteers from rural fire protection districts played key roles in quickly stopping the fires and protecting nearby homes. Local ranchers also were among the first to arrive at the Keating fire.

Although no residents had to evacuate, the Baker County Sheriff's Office did issue Level 2 notifications — meaning residents should be ready to leave at any time — during both blazes.

Working with crews from public agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Department of Forestry and U.S. Forest Service, volunteers from local protection districts — there are more than half a dozen in Baker County — are a vital cog in the firefighting machine. And because the volunteers are local residents, they're often the first to arrive at a fire.

Unfortunately many of these districts have struggled over the past decade or so to recruit replacements for volunteers who, often due to age, can no longer do the dangerous and physically demanding work of combatting wildfires.

Buzz Harper, longtime chief of the Keating Rural Fire Protection District, took the lead on Wednesday's blaze, arriving just five minutes or so after he and a local rancher, Curt Jacobs, both saw smoke following a lightning storm. Harper said he's pleased that there's a group of young volunteers, in some districts, who are enthusiastic about helping protect their neighbors' properties.

As this past week has shown, with its frightening scenes of wind-driven flames racing through desiccated grass and sage, those volunteers are a bulwark against potential tragedy. Everyone, even those whose homes and livelihoods weren't close to the flames, should be grateful for their selfless dedication.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



YOUR VIEWS

Allowing extremists to
ignore rules leads to
chaos

I am so sad after reading the article in Saturday, July 30 paper about the Republican meeting. I attended the meeting on July 28 as an elected

PCP. The article in your paper did not capture what happened. It was shocking to me how a small group of people can totally disregard the by-laws and manipulate a process. It was a clear example of "might makes right" or as one of the ring leaders said — "we don't care about the bylaws!"

Most of the people in Baker County, whether Republicans or not, understand that a society cannot long exist without rules and laws. That's just common sense. When you blatantly disregard the rules designed to keep order, chaos is the result. Just look at Portland and the chaos re-

sulting from allowing radicals to govern the city. Well, don't be fooled: When we allow extremists to toss aside the rules so they can illegally grab power then Portland's chaos is coming here to Baker County.

Nora Bass
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

US, world face economic turmoil

Editorial from the Minneapolis Star Tribune:

Whether America is in a recession or not has yet to be officially determined. But unofficially, U.S. consumers may already believe that a downturn has begun and may be accelerating after a week of consequential economic news and months of rising prices.

The July 28 announcement from the Commerce Department that the U.S. economy contracted 0.9% in the second quarter of 2022 — following a 1.6% decline in the first quarter — meets a standard definition of a recession: two consecutive quarters of negative growth.

A National Bureau of Economic Research panel will eventually decide. Although that official declaration will be meaningful, what matters most is how consumers feel and behave in the face of higher prices on many goods and services.

The rate at which inflation is increasing is at a four-decade high following years of stable prices. Most paychecks have not kept up with the increased cost of living, leaving many

consumers — especially those with low incomes — feeling worse off.

On July 27, as was expected, the Federal Reserve again raised a key interest rate — this time at three-quarters of a point — to curb inflation.

The painfully necessary increase is meant to decrease economic demand and thus prices. "We need growth to slow," Fed Chair Jerome Powell said. "We don't want this to be bigger than it needs to be, but ultimately, if you think about the medium- to longer-term, price stability is what makes the whole economy work."

So do jobs, and in this aspect the U.S. and Minnesota, in particular, are in a better position than in previous downturns. The overall U.S. unemployment rate is a relatively low 3.6%, and Minnesota just announced its lowest unemployment rate ever, at 1.8%. Yet if the economy cools further, so could job growth.

The Fed's previous positions of years of relatively low interest rates may have contributed to the need to raise them so quickly. But it's important

to remember that the central bank, like federal, state and local governments, was trying to respond to an anemic pandemic economy.

It's also critical to note that the policy responses have an international context. The economy is interconnected and in fact genuinely global, and the unrelenting COVID-19 crisis and war in Ukraine, which both exacerbated the worldwide supply-chain problem, have had a hand in rising prices, too. Higher rates of inflation, slowing growth and rising interest rates are being seen in other developed economies in Europe and elsewhere, and the developing world faces a potentially more acute, even existential, food crisis due to the disruption from Russia's invasion.

The globalization of economic headwinds led the International Monetary Fund to warn on July 26 of a global recession. In a blog post timed with the release of the IMF's report, titled "Gloomy and More Uncertain," the IMF's chief economist wrote, "The world may soon be teetering

on the edge of a global recession, only two years after the last one."

Whatever one calls it — and predictably, the Biden administration doesn't want to use the term "recession," while Republicans do — economic conditions have worsened. Whether the Fed can produce a "soft landing" of lower inflation without more serious damage to the economy remains to be seen. But overall, the U.S. is in a better position than most major economies, Timothy Kehoe, a University of Minnesota professor of economics and adviser to the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, told an editorial writer.

"The world is in a time of unprecedented amounts of economic uncertainty with the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, not as brutally here as in some other countries, and the war in Ukraine," Kehoe said. "The United States is doing the best of any major country in the world right now."

That's a credit to U.S. citizens and policymakers, but no one can say with certainty if that relative strength will continue.

COLUMN

DNA testing: The perils of peering into your genes

I know where I came from, biologically speaking, but what if my DNA disagreed?

What if everything I had come to believe over nearly 52 years — the source of the shapes of my eyes and the astigmatism that has plagued them since I was in elementary school, my propensity for headaches and for kidney stones — was rejected by my very genes?

As recently as 15 years ago, this question would have been largely hypothetical.

But since then, and in particular in the past decade, the prevalence of consumer genetic testing — through companies such as Ancestry and 23andMe — has given tens of millions of people details about their genetic building blocks.

Very specific details. And because much of that information is publicly available through databases, we've never been so capable of finding out if our personal story conflicts with the tale our DNA tells.

Moreover, some of us are learning about these life-changing discrepancies not through our own genealogical curiosity, but through someone else's — and quite likely a someone else who is a close relative, perhaps even a parent, whose existence we not only didn't know about but never had cause to even suspect.

This is the topic of one of the more fascinating books I've read in many



Jayson Jacoby

years.

"The Lost Family: How DNA Testing Is Upending Who We Are" is a 2020 book by journalist Libby Copeland.

Copeland examines in great detail how at-home DNA tests — you spit in a vial or swab your cheek, put the sealed package in the mail and get your results back in a few weeks — occasionally have ramifications that the person who did the spitting or swabbing never imagined.

What starts as a bit of a lark — most people are merely curious about whether their ancestry leans more heavily toward, say, Western Europe or Scandinavia — sometimes yields shocking results.

That your father isn't who you had always believed him to be, for instance.

Which is information apt to leave even the most even-keeled person floundering for a while.

Genetics is a complicated subject — much too complicated for me, who struggles with the soft sciences and is all but helpless when it comes to the hard.

Fortunately, Copeland's prose never gets mired in impenetrable jargon. She explains what a reader needs to

know to understand the topic.

Her book, fortunately, is a story not of genes and chromosomes, of vials and cotton swabs, but of people.

The pages of "The Lost Family" teem with ordinary Americans whose stories, whether tragic or mysterious or uplifting — and some are all of these and more — are always compelling and always deftly told.

I also appreciate that Copeland doesn't downplay her ambivalence.

She acknowledges that DNA testing, and the ever-expanding databases, not only can help adopted children reunite with their biological parents, but that these genetic reservoirs aid police in finding murderers.

Copeland writes about what's likely the most famous of the latter cases — the arrest of Joseph James DeAngelo, a California serial killer and rapist who was unknown for more than 30 years until his identity was revealed through a DNA match to a distant relative whose genetic information was in a public database.

Police, taking advantage of what's known as genetic genealogy, arrested DeAngelo in 2018, and in 2020 he pleaded guilty to multiple counts of murder and kidnapping and was sentenced to prison for the rest of his life. (Which might not be terribly long, as DeAngelo is 76.)

Copeland also describes the experiences of people who, through DNA tests, learned about extended families

— siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles — they would otherwise never have met.

In some cases these families, who suddenly and unexpectedly needed to grill a lot more burgers and hot dogs for their barbecues, were ecstatic about their discoveries.

Copeland writes about people who almost immediately developed powerful and loving bonds that, given their genetic links, ought not be surprising.

Yet for all these tearful meetings, Copeland doesn't blanch at writing about other episodes where the results of a DNA test left a person confused, bitter and sad.

She writes of people who find out that one of their biological parents is a stranger. But they, rather than being welcomed with hugs and kisses, are instead shunned — told, in effect, that their genetic connection is irrelevant and unwanted.

These passages are particularly poignant.

I can scarcely imagine finding out that my parentage wasn't what I believe it to be.

But to then compound that shocking revelation with the reality that my biological parents, or parent, had no interest in knowing me, strikes me as inexpressibly sad — akin to being promised a family and then having it yanked away, like a blanket that was sheltering you on a frigid night.

Although I have never seriously considered having my DNA tested — nor have I received a test kit as a Christmas gift, which apparently is a big part of the business — after turning the final page of "The Lost Family," I pondered the matter with a decidedly different perspective.

Having since thought further, though, I concluded that at some point I'll probably surrender some saliva in service of peering into my genetic background.

I realized that although Copeland's research raises questions about genetic genealogy — it's no parlor game, certainly — her book, for obvious reasons, concentrates on especially interesting cases.

While reading the book it's natural, I think, to overestimate how common it is for people to have their entire lineage erased and replaced with a wholly different hereditary tree.

But of course these cases are exceedingly rare. If they were common, I suppose Copeland wouldn't have bothered writing her book.

Still and all, I suspect anyone who reads "The Lost Family" might wonder, however briefly, whether they truly want to know what a DNA test would reveal.

It is human nature, certainly, to avoid answers we don't want to hear by simply never asking the question.

■ Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.