

EDITORIAL

Removing house was warranted

Baker City hired a contractor to tear down a home on the east side of town last week. But not because the property was strewn with trash and other debris.

Although the term “eyesore” is decidedly subjective, given that each person’s aesthetic judgment is different, the property at 1975 Birch St., at the corner of Birch and Washington, would have qualified as such for most people.

City officials had tried over several years to deal with the accumulation of debris on the property. From 2017 to 2021, the city paid four times to haul away trash. The recurring nature of the situation earned the property, owned by Lucas Buddy Lee Gwin, the dubious distinction of being the first deemed a “chronic neighborhood nuisance” under a 2019 revision to the city’s property maintenance ordinance.

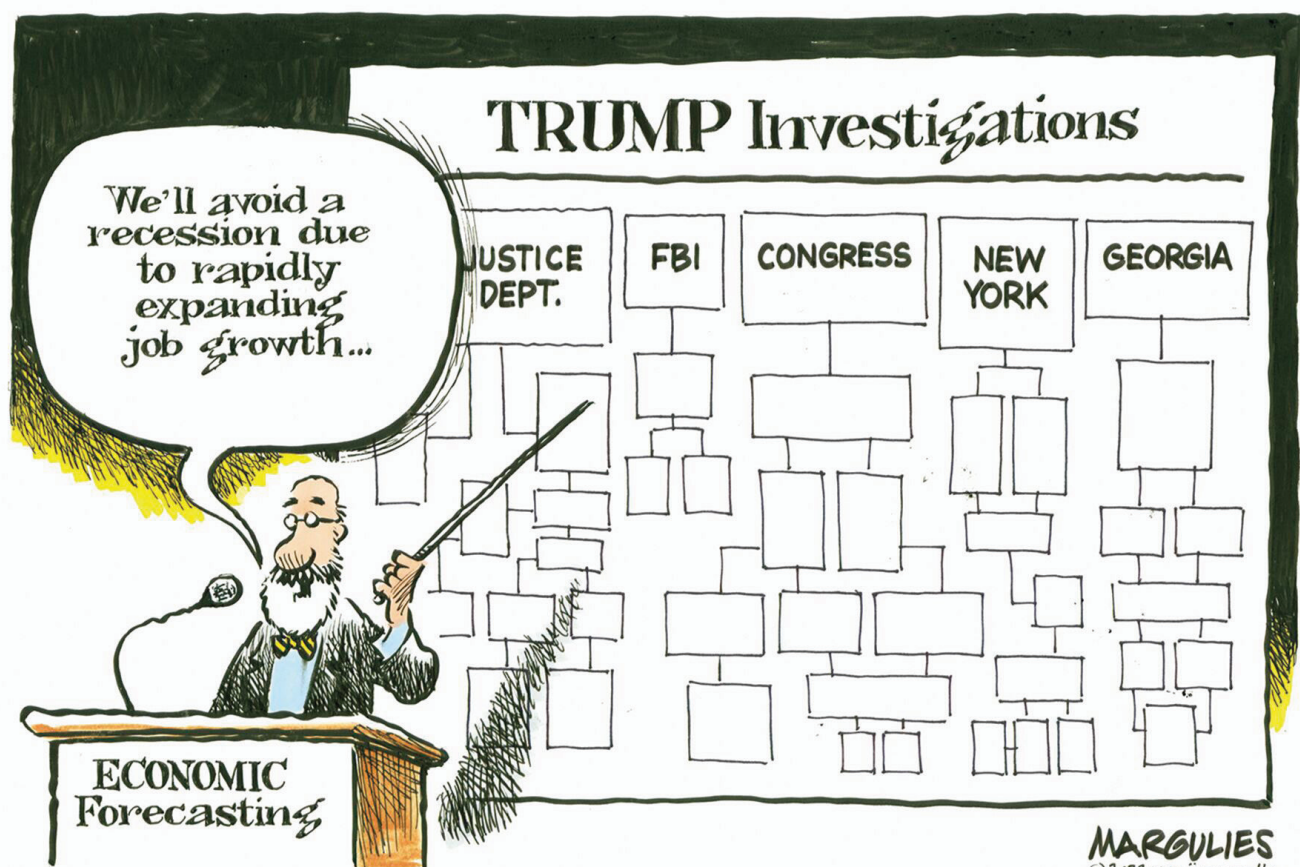
Gwin appealed that January 2022 judgment by Brent Kerns, Baker County Justice of the Peace, but the appeal was dismissed July 19. In an email to the Herald on Thursday, Aug. 11, Gwin, responding to a request for a comment about the city dismantling the home, wrote a single word: “heartbroken.”

The reason the 950-square-foot home no longer stands, however, isn’t how the property looked. The reason is that Dawn Kitzmiller, the city’s building official, after inspecting the structure on April 7, concluded that it was unsafe based on the city’s property maintenance ordinance. Kitzmiller said the home was in “terrible” shape, with interior walls removed and the ceiling failing in places. She said the house, which was built in 1900 and had a real market value of \$3,740, according to the Baker County Assessor’s office, “would have failed” at some point.

The city, in dealing with unsightly properties, must always balance the rights of property owners with public expectations.

But when city officials have determined that a home or other structure poses an actual danger because it could collapse, they have an obligation to deal with the situation. If the owner is neither able nor willing to fix the problem, as apparently was the case at 1975 Birch St., then dismantling the structure is reasonable.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



YOUR VIEWS

Those trying to overthrow GOP party aren't acting like conservatives

The far left must love Jake Brown, Kenny Hackett and Baker County United (BCU)! Claiming to be constitutional conservatives, they helped organize recall meetings against the conservative members of City Council. They attempted an overthrow of the Baker County Republicans (BCRCC). Hackett just traveled to another failed overthrow attempt of the Hood River County Republican Chair! Why?!

I attended our recent Republican meeting. The BCRCC executive committee wasn't removed, nor are they being “investigated.” Just because Brown writes long, tortured pages of “proof” doesn't mean his accusations are real. They aren't.

When BCU talks about “purging” the BCRCC, they're talking about your friends and neighbors who've dedicated thousands of hours volunteering to help elect conservatives, spending thousands of their own dollars to represent at state and national meetings. I

personally started with Reagan's campaign as a kid, blowing up balloons for parades, all the way through co-chairing Kevin Mannix's gubernatorial campaign locally, then working on Dennis Richardson's gubernatorial and Secretary of State campaigns, with many in between.

My mother, BCU's primary target, is the elected chair for Congressional District 2 and a Trump delegate sent to Cleveland for Convention. My ideologies are clear on Council where we stood up against the mandates and for our 2A rights. What were Brown and Hackett doing? Badmouthing these efforts systematically in and out of businesses across town. What triggered them in March 2021, before my gubernatorial race was even a thought, to begin their assault?

Most of the folks at that meeting had never participated in one before. They didn't know the people they'd never made to hate. They'd never personally witnessed ANY of the “problems” they'd ardently bought into. Not even Judge Vance Day, a staunchly Christian conservative, passed their litmus test. They wanted HIM canceled when he de-

cried their mob rule tactics.

Truth always bubbles to the surface, though it often takes longer than we'd like. In the big scheme of things, men like Brown and Hackett are impotent. As Day said, “They just want to burn down the house to rule over the ashes.” Antifa behaves like this. Conservatives don't.

Kerry McQuisten
Baker City

Oregon PUC shouldn't allow utilities to seize private land

I am an eastern Oregon attorney and an Oregon taxpayer. I recently learned that the Oregon Public Utility Commission is creating rules to allow utilities to enter onto and seize privately owned land in Oregon without requiring compliance with Oregon's condemnation laws. This concerns me as an attorney, because condemnation or “taking” of private land implicates landowners' legal/Constitutional rights. Allowing seizures of land that violate the law will generate expensive litigation, and is highly likely to be overturned by the courts. As a taxpayer and as an attorney,

I object to any waiver that will predictably result in costly litigation, at taxpayer expense, which is likely to lose in court.

Additionally, I am concerned about the extreme urban-rural divide within our state.

There is substantial support in eastern Oregon for the idea that the interests and values of eastern Oregonians are not taken seriously by west-side politicians. Any decision by the state to ignore private landowner rights in favor of billion-dollar utility companies will only fuel the resentment of rural Oregonians who feel that their state fails to acknowledge or respect their values — particularly the rights of private landowners. I often hear my neighbors' complain about this issue, and consider the political divisions in Oregon as frightening and serious. Any PUC decision to circumvent laws which protect private landowners will only deepen the divisions within our state. The PUC should exercise common sense, and deny waivers of the law if condemnation of private land is required.

Anne Morrison
La Grande

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244;

fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97504; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. bentz.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

COLUMN

College football continues to test my commitment

College football is trying to drive me away but I cling to it, a besotted and slightly pathetic suitor who can justify all manner of betrayals.

A four-team playoff system that blatantly favors a handful of traditional powers?

I dismiss this as a lovesick husband might when he comes home and finds a Dear John letter taped to the TV remote control. Probably it's just an ill-conceived joke. And anyway I can surely talk her out of it.

Besides which, my alma mater, the University of Oregon, has played in two national championship games in the past dozen years despite lacking the cachet of Alabama or Ohio State or Notre Dame.

(Yes, the Ducks lost both games, as my Beaver and Husky and Bronco friends, relatives and, in the case of the latter mascot, spouse, delight in pointing out. But you can't win a national title without actually playing in the national title game is my juvenile, but no less true, retort.)

A rule that allows athletes to receive six-figure payments for NIL — the use of their name, image or likeness?

Well, sure, this too lends a likely advantage to a relative handful of well-endowed programs (the U of O, thanks to the largesse of Phil Knight, among them). But players ought to earn something other than a scholarship for their toils, after all, considering they risk injuries that can



Jayson Jacoby

afflict them for the rest of their lives, a risk hardly any of them will offset with multimillion-dollar professional contracts.

I'll concede that even my great affinity for college football has been severely tested by what was, until recently, its most dramatic change — the dreaded transfer portal, a purgatory which favorite players frequently enter, only to emerge again clad in the uniform of, perhaps, a despised rival.

But even though I've muttered a passel of profanities at the seemingly endless litany of transfer portal announcements involving Duck players (and not only in football), I have ultimately come to accept it, as I might adjust to an annoying habit that suddenly crops up in a person I care for deeply.

And yet, just as I was becoming injured to the transfer portal and its catering to the whims of teenagers, college football tendered what might be the most serious threat yet to our relationship.

If the playoff system is a Dear John letter, then the defection from the Pac-12 Conference of UCLA and Southern Cal to the Big Ten conference starting in 2024, announced in late June, is akin to finding not a letter from your wife, but your wife

herself, engaged in adulterous hijinks with your best friend.

And with one of your favorite beers open on the bedside table.

The ramifications, it seems, will be far more dramatic than the loss of two schools which have been conference rivals of the Ducks for more than half a century.

The Trojans and the Bruins, having in effect entered the team version of the transfer portal, might well have doomed the Pac-12.

Speculation is rampant that the conference either will dissolve as other schools, including Oregon, seek refuge in another league, or be left so depleted as to lose its status as one of the so-called “Power 5” conferences.

Oregon has been mentioned as a candidate for multiple conferences, including the Big Ten and the Big 12.

It would be passing strange, to be sure, to have the Ducks travel to, say, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Columbus, Ohio, and Iowa City, Iowa, for conference games.

But if I can adjust to having Oregon's leading running back swap his Duck helmet for USC's cardinal and gold — Travis Dye was the highest profile of Oregon's transfer portal losses this offseason — I suppose I can get used to the Ducks competing in a different conference.

But there is one potential effect from this conference shakeup that, were it to happen, might actually sour, in a significant way, my fond-

ness for college football.

My fear is that the Civil War will go away.

What I mean is the annual football game pitting the Ducks against the Oregon State Beavers.

(I understand that the two schools agreed to drop the Civil War name in 2020, but there's nothing legally binding about that decision, at least not for me, and I will continue to refer to the game, and all other sporting events pitting the Ducks against the Beavers, as the Civil War.)

The Civil War is one of the older, and most played, rivalries in college football. The first game was played in 1894. There have been 125 meetings, and the game has been played every year since 1945.

Oregon has won 67 times, Oregon State 48. There have been 10 ties.

For me, the Beavers are the biggest rival, and by a vast margin.

No victory is more satisfying, no defeat more agonizing.

I can't conceive of Oregon having a football schedule that doesn't include the Beavers.

The schools needn't be in the

same conference to play one another each year, of course. And although it would bother me if the Civil War moved to, say, September, as a non-conference game, rather than its traditional place as the last league game, usually in late November, I can at least condone that change.

But no Civil War at all, even for one year?

No nervous hours waiting for kickoff, imagining the awful scenario of the Beavers gathering at midfield to celebrate a rare triumph over the Ducks?

No immense relief when Oregon romps to another win?

College football has disappointed me frequently over the past few years.

Undoubtedly it will do so again.

But canceling the Civil War, an event as inseparable from my concept of Oregon as public beaches and Crater Lake and Tom McCall and alpenglow on the Wallows and Elk-horns?

That's one transgression I simply can't forgive.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.