

EDITORIAL

Bringing Amtrak back to Baker

The concept might seem silly, that in one respect Baker City is more isolated, two decades into the 21st century, than it was for much of the 20th.

But when the topic is trains, the claim has merit.

For much of the city's history, residents could catch a train here and, from the depot near Broadway Street, begin a journey that could take them pretty much anywhere in America.

But that mobility went away in 1997 when Amtrak ended its Pioneer line, which started in Seattle and passed through Baker City.

In the ensuing quarter century, rail advocates — among them Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden — have lobbied Congress to revive the Pioneer, or at least a version of it. These efforts have failed, but the campaign might have more momentum than at any time since 1997. There's more money potentially available, at any rate.

Members of All Aboard Northwest, an advocacy group, noted during a public Train Trek meeting on Aug. 13 in La Grande that the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill Congress passed last year includes \$66 billion for Amtrak's repair backlog. Train supporters hope that money, even though it's allocated for improving the existing rail network, will make it possible to also expand passenger service.

It's a worthwhile goal.

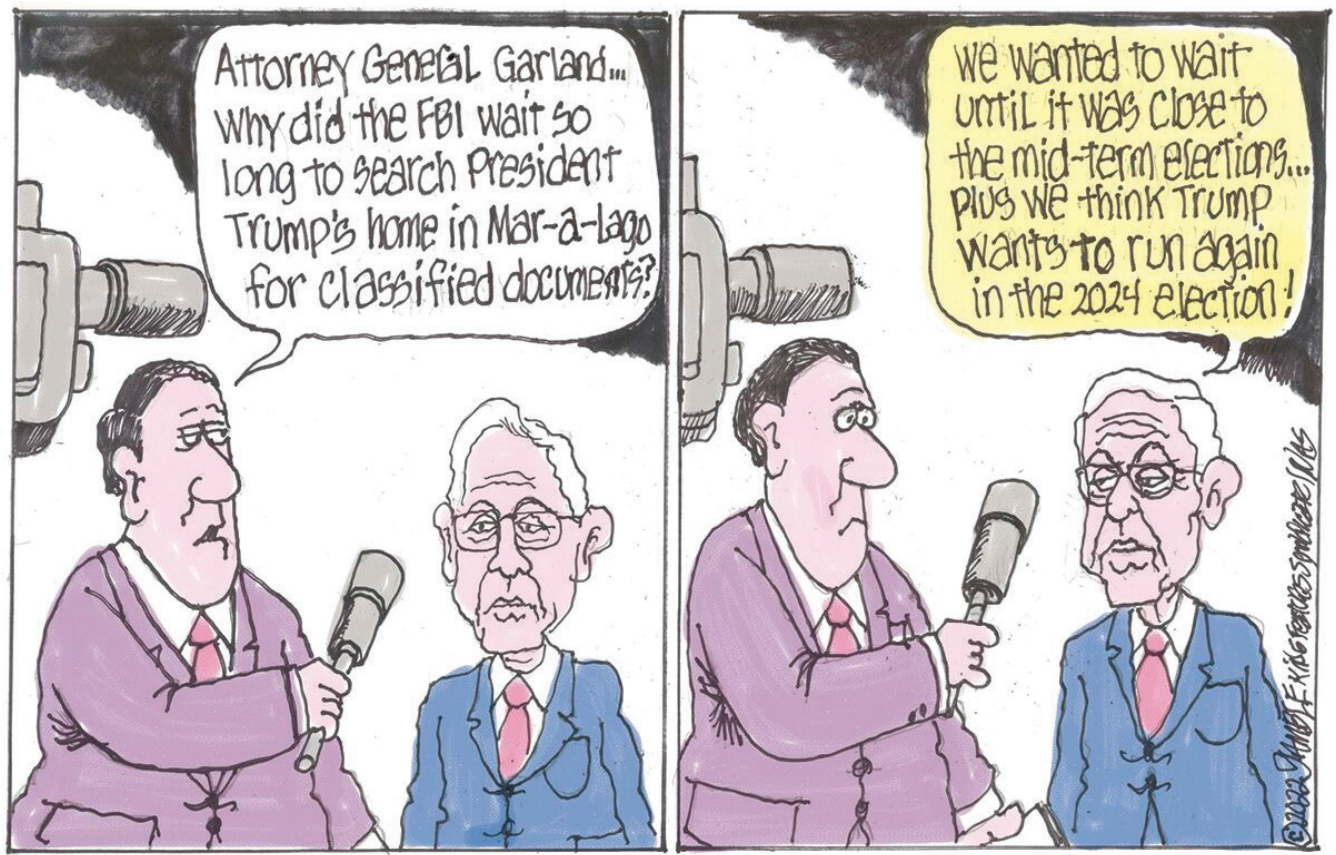
Amtrak relies on government subsidies, of course, but so do other forms of transportation. Tax dollars, after all, pay to build and maintain highways and to run the air traffic control system.

Reviving the Pioneer would give local residents another travel option — and one that might be especially attractive when, for instance, winter storms have again closed Interstate 84. The return of Amtrak could also be a boost for the tourism industry in Northeastern Oregon, a region where commercial air service is quite limited.

The federal government will spend hundreds of billions of dollars on transportation projects over the next several years. Baker County residents probably won't notice the results of the vast majority of that massive outlay.

Bringing back Amtrak would be a welcome exception.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



YOUR VIEWS

Baker County United isn't targeting any Republicans

It's strange that Mayor McQuisten highlights Jake Brown and Ken Hackett as "leaders" of Baker County United (BCU). BCU began on my patio last year — it started with the three of us and Carrie Matthews. There are no leaders in BCU. We are patriotic people who strive to live by the golden rule. We are primarily a community service organization. BCU has not, and does not, publicly endorse any candidate.

I was appointed to the Baker City Council budget board by a previous council, and I met McQuisten after she was elected to council, so I called her to ask about the county's Republican committee. I was excited that she might share the same political goals, and I wanted to talk to her about them. After three calls over a week, wherein I left messages asking her to call me back, she instead sent me a text telling me not to call the number anymore. I stopped. Then I found out that she had played my messages for Jonathan Cannon, the city manager, in an effort to have me removed from the budget board. I called Mr. Cannon and explained that my medical condition sometimes makes speech difficult for me. He apologized and sent an email to all of the councilors explaining my condition. Instead of apologizing, McQuisten further defamed me by replying to Cannon and the council — calling my messages "bizarre and creepy, at best." Soon after, she voted against highly qualified volunteers who wanted to serve on council. This kept the council votes a 3-3 tie. Council took months to resolve this while McQuisten traveled the state hoping to be governor. She even tried to "deputize" her cohort, Councilor Joanna Dixon, to be vice mayor in her absence.

BCU never "targeted" McQuisten's mother, nor did we "target" McQuisten. We decided that if the Baker County Republican Central Committee (BCRCC) wasn't going to host candidates for all offices, then we would try. BCU is not behind the effort to recall anyone. BCU never attempted to "overthrow" anything nor anyone. BCU has not "talked" about purging BCRCC. What BCRCC does is their business, not BCU's.

Why does McQuisten blatantly lie about BCU?

I started my political life making calls for Gerald Ford. I campaigned and voted for Reagan twice while McQuisten inflated balloons. I interned for Pete Wilson in Washington, D.C., when he was in the U.S. Senate. After graduating from Stanford, I lived and worked in Japan for two years in the legal department of Alps Electric Co., Ltd. I moved to Baker City in 2007, following my father who moved to Halfway in the early 1990s. I love this county and my country.

Since BCU hosted a number of other gubernatorial candidates, BCU invited McQuisten to meetings and asked her to speak. She declined and instead smeared BCU as "an-

tifa" and a "mob." Regardless, the invitation stands: Mayor McQuisten, please join us to help elect honest, patriotic candidates this November.

Jason Bland
Baker City

Baker County United doesn't support left wing

Here we go again with more personal attacks from Mayor McQuisten.

What liberal or Leftist causes has Baker County United (BCU) ever supported?

BCU started in the vacuum created by the failure of Suzan Jones' leadership of our Republican party. BCU has a history of standing up against the RINO establishment culture that McQuisten and her mother have fomented here. And it's sad when merely asking for accountability from them is considered "antifa" and "mob rule" amidst their claims of victimization. Sounds like the "social justice warrior" calling card.

BCU has championed Constitutional resolutions passed at the county level in defense of every single citizen against Kate Brown's mask and vaccination over-reach. Mayor McQuisten openly worked against that effort.

BCU pushed to temporarily suspend our payment of property taxes until the city and county protected the jobs of our emergency service providers against termination for failing to be force-vaxxed. Mayor McQuisten openly worked against that effort as well and ignored a letter signed by a hundred Baker County citizens on this issue.

BCU provided a stage for other conservative gubernatorial and senate candidates as Suzan Ellis Jones ignored and blackballed them from our Republican audience here for over a year. Mayor McQuisten went along with this effort.

BCU actually meets twice per month and has great attendance and participation, far better than Jones' few Republican meetings over the past two years.

And for doing this, Jones and McQuisten, the mother-daughter duo, make outrageous claims against a truly conservative and constitutional group by calling BCU "Antifa." Is this a joke?

Suzan Jones has refused to convene Republican committee meetings this year, and has only mentioned that we'd have one committee meeting.

... AFTER November's election. Why has she shut down the Republican party in Baker County? Mother and daughter are not acting as conservatives at all.

The party met on July 28, 2022, but the committee members had to call the meeting because Chair Jones refused to. The vote from the floor to suspend Chair Jones and her executive committee was unanimous. It was also voted on to investigate Jones' actions and behavior as the Chair. If Suzan Jones and her daughter want to plug their ears and close their eyes and claim they can't hear or see anything, they can do so. But it doesn't change what happened.

In fact, Chair Jones did lose her first precinct spot to a

non-balloted write-in candidate and only beat the other write-in by a few votes; in her own precinct. That's unheard of! And three other members of her executive committee weren't even reelected. At all.

I am not "targeting" Suzan Jones or Kerry McQuisten. Their unpopularity speaks volumes by their actions, not mine. I was never part of any recall effort against the Mayor. McQuisten fabricated that claim as she has so many others.

We have a lot to do. The Baker County Republicans want to get back to work with effective leadership and dig in with forward movement heading into this election.

Jake Brown
Halfway

Baker City watershed project is vital to city's future

The forested watershed that provides Baker City's water supply is at high risk of severe wildfire. Active forest management is urgently needed to restore this federally owned land back to health and reduce risks to local communities.

The good news is the Walla-Walla National Forest has proposed the Baker City Watershed Fuels Management Project to thin overstocked forests as well as to protect municipal water supplies and reduce severe wildfire risks to homes and vital infrastructure that are identified within the Baker County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The project would also help restore ecosystem resiliency and reduce fuel loads by establishing shaded fuel breaks, and by carefully reintroducing fire on the landscape. The project has been in development for the past couple years in consultation with city leaders, and the National Forest is now accepting public comments through Aug. 30.

Considering the area's history of wildfires, the Baker City Watershed Fuels Management Project would create conditions that would give firefighters better and safer opportunities to protect the watershed and nearby communities. Many of the treatments are focused on areas within the wildland urban interface — where forests and homes intersect — so they can provide defensible space for more safe and effective firefighting operations.

We should encourage the National Forest to implement this project as soon as possible to protect local water supplies, homes and infrastructure. They should also maximize forest health treatments across the proposed project area, including riparian areas that are at high risk of wildfire.

A strong public-private partnership is necessary to ensure this project is implemented successfully. Public lands managers should work proactively with contractors to allow a variety of forestry equipment that can improve safety and reduce ground disturbance. There is also an important opportunity to support local jobs and Eastern Oregon's forest infrastructure through commercial thinning treatments that provide wood products.

By reducing the risks of severe, high-intensity wildfire, the project will help maintain high-quality drinking water supplies for Baker City residents that all depend on healthy, high-functioning forests. You can submit a comment directly at Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities web site here- <https://bit.ly/3AjROD8e>

Nick Smith
Executive director,
Healthy Forests, Healthy
Communities
Sherwood

Democrat watches the Baker County GOP squabbles

Kerry McQuisten's letter to the editor on Aug. 13, begins with this statement: "The far left must love Jake Brown, Kenny Hackett, and Baker County United!"

Considering myself a member of the "far left," plus an elected Baker County Democratic Precinct Committee Person, here's my reaction to the squabbling among Baker County Republicans.

Kerry McQuisten's mother, Suzan Ellis Jones, Chair of the Baker County Republican Central Committee (BCRCC), likes to keep tight control of Republican Party politics in Baker County. One example I've noticed is that she has a closed door policy when the BCRCC holds meetings. Contrast that behavior with that of the Baker County Democratic Central Committee, which for decades has always welcomed anyone and everyone who wants to attend our meetings.

Second example. On March 25 the BCRCC held a candidate forum at the Baker Elks Lodge for several Republican candidates for Oregon governor, including Suzan Ellis Jones' own daughter, governor candidate Kerry McQuisten. One meeting ground rule prohibited videoing, except by the committee itself. When a person refused to abide by that rule, the police were called and the person was duly escorted from the forum site. Others left at the same time to show their support of the person who violated the committee videoing rule.

Third example. Special treatment of unsuccessful governor candidate Kerry McQuisten. The BCRCC donated \$2,500 to McQuisten's campaign, in spite of the fact that such a donation violated the BCRCC's own rule that before the May primary election all Republican candidates for governor be treated equally, i.e., \$2,500 to each. Since the BCRCC had only \$3,799.87 in its bank account, Suzan Ellis Jones got the committee to remove the equal treatment rule, thereby benefiting just one candidate for governor, her own daughter, Kerry McQuisten.

In closing I want everyone who doesn't already know, that rather than "loving" Jake Brown and Baker County United (BCU), I've condemned harshly both Brown and his BCU in letters to the editor.

Turkeys gobble and Baker County Republicans squabble. Are you guys turkeys or what?

Gary Dielman
Baker City

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 97850; 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., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Kenyon Damschen, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

Baker School District: 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witte. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Chris Hawkins, Andrew Bryan, Travis Cook, Jessica Dougherty, Julie Huntington.