

EDITORIAL

State officials need to release details on foothill fire

It's not clear, as of this writing, what started the fire that burned close to Baker City on Oct. 6, causing considerable anxiety among many people as they watched flames and smoke rising from the foothill just southwest of the city limits.

If fire investigators from the Oregon Department of Forestry have reached a conclusion, they haven't announced their findings publicly.

The state agency should release those results as soon as possible.

Moreover, if the circumstances warrant, state officials need to try to recoup the firefighting costs from whoever was responsible for the fire.

That bill will run well into five digits and potentially higher. Operating aircraft such as the MD-87 jet tanker that dropped several thousand gallons of retardant, potentially preventing the flames from reaching homes, is quite expensive.

The point here isn't merely to punish, although that's certainly reasonable when public dollars paid the firefighting tab.

Holding someone responsible could be even more valuable, though, as a reminder of how dangerous fire can be. The knowledge that even a brief moment of carelessness can have severe financial repercussions ought to serve as a compelling lesson, and potentially persuade someone in the future not to take what might seem a very small risk.

It's possible, of course, that investigators will conclude that the ignition source was something that even a careful person couldn't reasonably have foreseen or prevented.

But even if the facts don't justify the state saddling someone with a big bill, it can only be beneficial in the long run to explain to people exactly what happened on Oct. 6.

We learn from mistakes — even inadvertent ones.

But we can't learn if we don't know what happened.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



COLUMN

Republicans hold cards to cutting wasteful spending

BY MATTHEW DICKERSON

It's no secret that government spending has been out of control for years. But come December, Congress will have a golden opportunity to stem the tide of red ink.

Whether or not that happens is entirely up to Senate Republicans.

Congressional Democrats have been on an unprecedented spending spree ever since Joe Biden took the White House. This has fueled crippling inflation, which has cost the average U.S. worker \$3,000 in purchasing power and added more than \$3 trillion to the national debt.

But there is a way for senators to rein in some of this irresponsible spending and start getting the economy back on track. That's because Biden's multitrillion-dollar spending blowout — including the bloated American Rescue Plan and the misleadingly named Inflation Reduction Act — violated the budgetary rules put in place more than a decade ago to prevent this sort of abuse.

The Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 (PAYGO) requires any new spending that increases the federal deficit to be offset with spending cuts elsewhere. If Congress fails to pass the necessary spending reductions by year's end, the president is required

to make the cuts.

Bottom line: The act requires Congress — or the president — to trim more than \$130 billion this year. In comparison to the \$6 trillion in deficit spending they've pushed through over the last year and a half, that's a relatively small amount. But it would be an important step in the right direction and signal that the spending binge will no longer be considered "business as usual."

Of course, neither Biden nor the liberal majority in Congress want any part of this. They'd much prefer to waive the PAYGO rules and keep spending wildly — just as they did last year.

But waiving the statutory PAYGO requirement to cut spending requires Congress to pass a new law. That poses no obstacle in the Democrat-controlled House, but to get through the evenly divided Senate, a number of Republicans would need to join ranks with the Democrats to overcome the required 60-vote threshold.

What would be the consequences if Senate Republicans helped Biden waive statutory PAYGO? Government spending would be more than \$100 billion higher than what is required under the current law. That would mean higher deficits financed by money

printed by the Federal Reserve, which would translate into even higher inflation — with higher prices for gas, groceries and other necessities for already-struggling American families.

Lawmakers cannot allow this to happen. Spending cuts are needed now more than ever.

Congress has two options to make that happen. They can do nothing, thereby forcing Biden to make the specific cuts prescribed by PAYGO, or they can pass bipartisan legislation that specifies a different set of spending cuts totaling \$130 billion.

And specifics matter. PAYGO would not force the president to make "across-the-board" cuts. The act explicitly exempts many popular programs: Social Security, military spending, veterans' programs, welfare and more. Only about 2 percent of the \$5.9 trillion budget is subject to presidential cuts under statutory PAYGO.

Biden might trot out the old scare tactic that PAYGO would force him to slash seniors' Medicare benefits. That just isn't accurate either. Any reduction of payments to providers would be capped at no more than 4 percent out of the \$923 billion in anticipated Medicare spending this year. The nonpartisan Congressio-

nal Research Service says that Medicare beneficiaries would "see few direct impacts" as a result of the slightly smaller payments to providers and plans.

If the president doesn't like the specific cuts that PAYGO says he has to make, Biden can always ask Congress to replace them with other targeted cuts and reforms.

A good place to start would be rolling back the \$80 billion IRS slush fund, which will nearly double the number of IRS agents and subject more small businesses to audits. Another ripe-for-the-cutting program is the student loan bailout for lawyers and doctors, which will cost taxpayers up to \$1 trillion.

Washington has flouted the budget rules meant to control deficit spending for far too long. Now excessive government spending has pushed the American economy into stagflation.

Statutory PAYGO rules are the law of the land. Senate Republicans should make sure that Congress and the president use them to make responsible spending cuts and start steering the economy back on track.

■ Matthew Dickerson is the director of The Heritage Foundation's Hermann Center for the Federal Budget.

YOUR VIEWS

County had better options with opening roads

Regarding your Oct. 4 article regarding the road closure on Lookout Mountain, I want to make the following comments clear. The Forsea River Ranch LLC never received any of the \$125,000 paid by the county. The county spent that amount, plus lawyer fees, which was taxpayer monies. Those monies could have been used for much better purposes within the county. It has never been published as to how much taxpayer monies were spent on this issue.

There was already access to public ground up from Conner Creek that had been used in case of fire. Harvey lied to cover his butt on making such a statement on the need for more access. Nichols must have been asleep when it was an offer on the table to leave the Loop Road open if Todd Longgood could keep Conner Creek road locked. He's also trying to cover his butt.

Hunters and visitors already had access to the public lands. Harvey only wanted the road open from point A to point B (Conner Creek to Daly Creek Road) and wouldn't listen to anything else.

In the meantime, I have put in three more locked gates on my private roads, and at this point by permission only I have given access to hunters by walking only. No vehicles or ATVs. If we have problems with hunters, I may have to close our land altogether. Hunters should realize it is a privilege to hunt on private ground and land should be respected.

Keeping the Loop Road open makes more sense because it's a better road and less maintenance. You

would think that our public officials would try to use more common sense in making decisions using taxpayer monies wastefully and instead using it where it does the most good for the most people.

Dan Forsea
Richland

Family thankful for Calvary Baptist Church in Baker City

My family wishes to share the appreciation we feel for the Calvary Baptist Church of Baker City where we held a memorial service last August for our mother who had been a member there. Although Joyce Walter had not been able to attend for many years and many current members there did not know her, they served us as if we were their family. As their ministry they provided COVID-appropriate atmosphere and food with kitchen staff. They printed our programs and gave us a key in order to set up early.

Tamara Pierce, their office administrator, was warm and friendly, going the extra mile. When a family tragedy occurred the day before the service, they wrapped their arms around us. One of Joyce's granddaughters was in an accident in Germany sustaining severe brain damage. Olivia remains on their prayer chain as she rehabilitates. Baker City is truly blessed to have a church such as Calvary Baptist.

Gaylene Golden
Otis, Oregon
and the family of Joyce Walter,
former Baker City resident

County commission chairman endorsing Garrick

As we all know, Election Day is

fast approaching and it is up to the voters to choose someone they believe to be a good leader for Baker County.

After eight years of experience as your Baker County Commission Chairman, I know what it takes to do this job on a daily basis and the commitment you have to make to the citizens of Baker County.

I believe that Dan Garrick can fulfill this role and he has spent the past six months attending most of the Commission session meetings to learn the important issues that we are presently dealing with. To me that shows commitment to learn the job before you are elected into the position. I believe that Dan Garrick can fill this role as a leader and be a strong representative for the citizens of Baker County.

I am asking my friends and supporters to please join me in voting for Dan Garrick as Commission Chair position 3. He has demonstrated that he is the best choice.

Bill Harvey
Baker County

Alderson the best choice for county commission

There is one candidate for Baker County Commission Position 3 who merits your attention. ... Shane Alderson. We know Shane to be a forthright, honest, enthusiastic man who is committed to Baker County. He will seek advice and counsel from many persons whether or not they necessarily agree with his position on any given issue.

Voters from across the political spectrum appreciate Shane's approach to working together and welcome his commitment to addressing the issues of Baker County. He is not distracted by labels from those

supporting a different candidate and will focus his energies on doing what's right for us, equally and fairly. His support for our natural resources and for small businesses, while seeking reasonable solutions for our housing shortage for workers in those businesses, is what we should expect from our county leaders.

Shane is driven by an old-fashioned desire to serve us in Baker County with honor and integrity. Let's reward that desire by voting for him in November.

Dave and Joyce Hunsaker
Baker City

Garrick prepared, respectful, a good listener

Dan Garrick loves Baker and will serve the interests of all of Baker County. He and I served on the local school board. He never came to a meeting unprepared. Dan was always respectful of others even those that had a different opinion. He was and still is a good listener. Dan has an inquisitive mind. He wants to know what could make things easier or more profitable for our ranch. He is interested in all natural resource industries and will work for all of Baker County. I would trust Dan in the management of Baker County.

I hope you will too. Please join me in voting for Dan Garrick for Baker County Commissioner.

John Boyer
Haines

Garden Club helped keep Adler pathway beautiful

Barbara's garden on the Leo Adler pathway is a beautiful garden that needed some TLC this sum-

mer. We attended a meeting of the Baker County Garden Club to help us maintain the flower bed and help us come up with things to plant. We asked if they would be willing to be part of a work party. They said yes, and we rejoiced. We had a work party on Sept. 28 at 9 a.m. A great group of ladies from the Garden Club showed up and came up with ideas and helped us weed the area. We are so impressed and thankful for Karen, Janice, Liza, Deanna, Sue and Gayle.

We would encourage those that are interested in gardening and conservation to check out the Baker County Garden Club.

Sigrid Johnson
Jerri Wickert
Baker City

Garrick is the best choice for county commission

I have watched Bill Harvey and the great job he has done for Baker County as the Commission Chair. I have questioned many of my friends about the two choices we have to replace him. We decided that most of our information comes from news articles, other friends and different meetings both candidates have or have not attended. Both candidates are very personable but Dan seems to have the most experience in overseeing many employees and running a business.

At the Christine Drazan town hall, Dan was sitting in the front row and at the candidate forum Dan did a good job answering questions and seemed to be the most knowledgeable about forest access, mining and how the county budget seems to work.

My vote is for Dan and I believe he will be the best choice.

Harold Reed
Baker City