

## EDITORIAL

## Caution with COVID-19 vaccine mandates

Whether, and where, a COVID-19 vaccine could become mandatory for children to attend schools, is uncertain.

It appears likely that the Centers for Disease Control will add the COVID-19 vaccine to the agency's list of immunizations recommended for kids. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recently recommended that the CDC do so, and the federal agency usually heeds the committee's advice.

But a CDC recommendation is not a mandate for states, or for school districts.

In Oregon, a state law administered by the Oregon Health Authority determines which inoculations are required for school attendance.

In this state, however, the word "required" should be appended by an asterisk. A big asterisk.

Parents can exempt their children from any, or all, vaccines on Oregon's list through a nonmedical exemption — which is to say, they don't need an opinion from a doctor about why a child shouldn't be immunized.

But even though the current law basically makes it impossible for Oregon to actually exclude from schools those students who don't take a particular vaccine, state officials should be cautious if they consider adding COVID-19 vaccines to the list of "required" vaccines, such as those for measles, mumps and whooping cough.

The risk here is that the extreme feelings about COVID-19 vaccines — which are political fodder in a way other childhood immunizations are not — could result in fewer children getting vaccines they would otherwise have had. And worse still, vaccines that protect them against illnesses which, quite unlike COVID-19, actually pose a significant health risk for children.

Indeed there's probably already a "vaccine gap" in the U.S., although researchers attribute this not to skepticism about vaccines driven by the pandemic, but to reduced access to clinics, a situation that, fortunately, is largely in the past.

Regardless, Oregon officials shouldn't ignore the statistics that show parents don't see the value in having their children vaccinated against a virus that poses a minuscule threat for serious illness or death for that age group.

(Of Oregon's 8,600 deaths related to COVID-19, almost 85% were people 60 or older. Just eight were children 9 or younger.)

Statewide, 41.6% of children ages 5 to 11 have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and 37% have had two doses. The percentage is much lower in Baker County — 12.3% of residents ages 5 to 11 have had one dose.

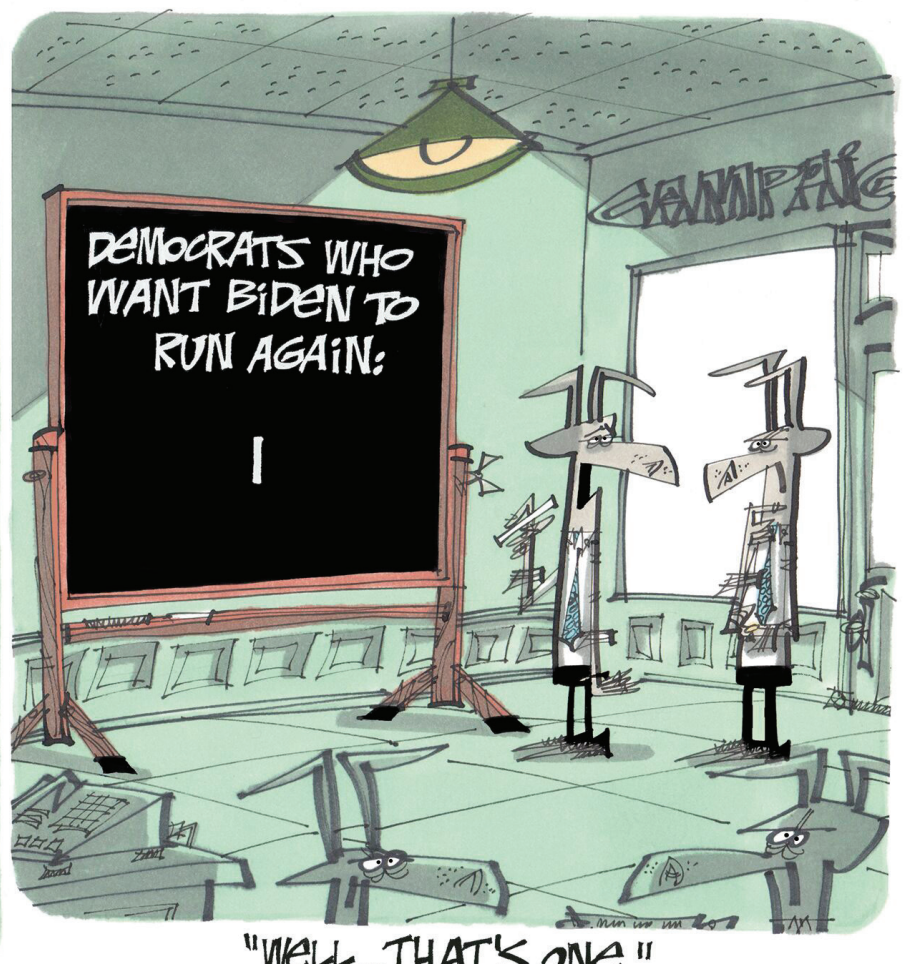
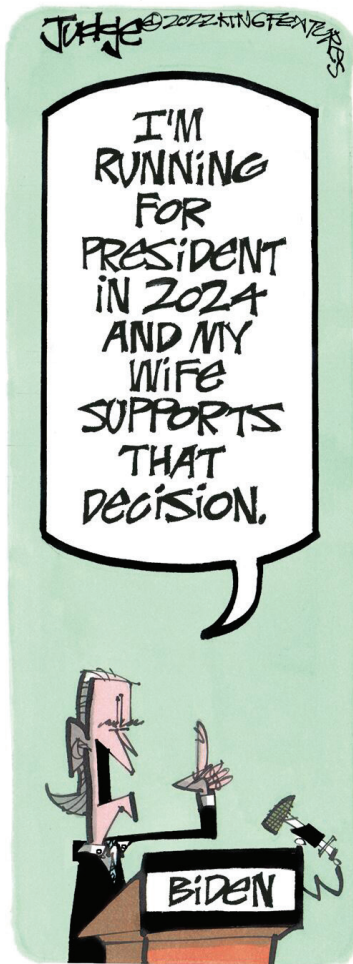
There's no compelling evidence that adding COVID-19 vaccines to the required list for Oregon students would help curb the spread of the virus or, more important, save lives.

But it's plausible to conclude that making COVID-19 vaccines "mandatory" for students — even accounting for Oregon's regrettably lenient law allowing nonmedical exemptions — would contribute to a declining vaccination rate for those other diseases which, thanks to high immunization rates, have been all but eradicated.

Certainly, parents' acceptance of COVID-19 vaccines for children to this point makes it abundantly clear that, if forced to decide, a significant percentage of parents would seek a nonmedical exemption were COVID-19 vaccines added to the list for school attendance.

If some of those parents also eschewed other vaccines, for whatever reason, then the requirement could not be branded as anything but an abject failure — a decision that, instead of helping children, would be more likely to harm them.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



"Well...that's one."

## YOUR VIEWS

### New benches are great addition to Geiser-Pollman Park

It is with much appreciation that this letter is written. Two years ago, we lost a very dear friend after a courageous battle with cancer. Many of us wanted to honor Merrie Hensley with a bench to commemorate our friendship. We worked with Lynette Perry, co-founder of the Baker City Events organization. Her vision was for donated benches to be placed around the bandstand in the Geiser-Pollman city park, a great way to increase seating for musical events and community activities while paying tribute to others.

We are happy that the seven new metal benches are now in place. Because this was a team effort, we would like to thank the following: Lynette Perry for her dedication to this project; Natural Structures for the sturdy and well-designed benches; R.D. Mac for donating the concrete pads; and Robert Collins for his work to install the benches.

As donors of a bench, we are happy that Merrie's many friends and family will have a great place to remember her. We are grateful to those who volunteered their time and efforts in making this project come to fru-

ition. What a beautiful park we are lucky to enjoy in so many ways, and now with a bench to honor a very special friend.

Patty Bogart, Victoria Howard, Fawn Robertson, Erin Callahan, Heather Palmer Johnson, Kathy Saunders, Diane Davis, Jean Justus, Julie Stout, Theresa Dennis, Kathy Mitchell, Jerri Wickert, Barbara Haynes, Kelly Nichols

### Support Baker Rural Fire District tax levy

On the Baker Rural Fire Protection District (BRFPD) tax levy, an informed YES vote. Please support all your local rural fire districts by volunteering, supporting, and encouraging others to do so! All volunteer organizations are in the same situation: short on operating budgets, and more importantly, volunteers. The service to the patrons of any district is directly tied to the volunteers, equipment, and training available. This is paid for by the patrons' tax dollars, and any grant money that can be acquired.

In response to Mr. Johnson's last two letters to the editor asking for no votes on the tax levy request — there was only a small sliver of accuracy: that being he was a member of the volunteer department for a period of time. The facts are: a few addresses were

affected by station location change, one was just outside by a few feet, and couple addresses were added into area. All affected addresses have been, and will continue to be provided service by the district. The department chief and training officers receive a small compensation for extra time spent to support the volunteers and patrons. The district is not required to, and does NOT, pay PERS. Personnel, volunteer or paid, levels fluctuate in any organization due to many factors. We have not had vast resignations, only two.

BRFPD board and budget meetings are open to the public, and legal notices and publications of both are made as required by statute. The current board of directors is working the same as those before: provide the best possible resources, training, and services to the volunteers and patrons of the district with what we have to work with. The board decisions are based on all factors with the information available and in the best interest of Baker Rural Fire Protection District patrons. Please be informed with the facts, not negative opinions. Contact any BRFPD board member or volunteer to help make an informed decision. Vote YES for BRFPD tax levy request!

Collin Kaseberg  
Baker County

## COLUMN

## Sliding on ice while still thinking about dust



Jayson Jacoby

I pressed the brake pedal and immediately wished I hadn't.

Not quite so firmly, anyway. Almost as soon as my boot touched the hard rubber square I heard the telltale scuffing sound of tires sliding on ice, felt the sudden and unsettling sensation that 4,500 pounds of vehicle was no longer rolling but rather floating.

Something my Toyota FJ Cruiser was decidedly not designed to do.

(Although its capacity to ford water, thanks to an elevated air intake, greatly exceeds the depth I'm likely to ever experiment with.)

Less than 48 hours earlier, driving the same vehicle on a different road, I was fixated not on ice but on what could be considered its antithesis — dust.

Dust, of course, is ubiquitous in summer on the unpaved roads around here.

(Which is most of the roads, if your destination is the woods or the rangelands.)

Nor is it rare for dust to persist into fall, tamped down only by the first good rain.

This year, though, was anything but typical.

For the first 20 days, October was distinguished not so much by its complete lack of rainfall — which itself is not so unusual — but by its consistent warmth.

On all of those days the temperature exceeded 70 degrees at the Baker City Airport.

Although many mornings were moderately chilly, the air warmed each day with a rapidity that reminded me more of late August than October. For my afternoon strolls about town I inevitably donned shorts and a T-shirt, attire I had become so accustomed to that the whereabouts of my sweatpants was something of a mystery, albeit one I had no reason to try to solve.

I was also used to the dust.

I was used to driving through it, spawning noxious gritty clouds that I tried to stay ahead of, even if that necessitated a higher speed and a commensurately bumpier ride.

And I was used to walking through it, each step creating a smaller but still annoying version of those vehicular dust storms.

The transition, then, from dust and sweat to ice and frigid fingers, was so sudden that I felt a trifle woozy, as though I had just tumbled off a merry-go-round propelled by energetic and muscular children.

On Friday, Oct. 21, the day the first great storm of autumn arrived, the dust was still thick where I walked above Denny Creek, south of the Powder River near the Burnt-Powder divide. The rain hadn't started, and although it was the first cloudy day in nearly a month, the air was still mild.

Less than two full days later my wife, Lisa, and I were trudging through 8 inches of snow on the Elkhorn Crest Trail near Anthony Lakes, so fresh even the squirrels, which are forever scurrying about, had barely blemished the soft white surface.

The temperature was 24 degrees.

The season's first snow always seems a bit jarring, to be sure.

In our somewhat elevated piece of ground, far from the moderating influences of the Pacific, the cold and the snow are inevitable.

We know this implicitly, but the difference between knowing something, and then slogging through 8 inches of it after months of sweltering, can't help but seem new and different.

The first day in spring when the sun shines with real authority, making a patch of shade a welcome refuge for the first time since before Halloween, has about it the same strange flavor, familiar but also largely forgotten over the long span of frigidity.

Our seasons are so distinct — a reflection of their extremes, particularly in temperature, with a few triple digit days likely in summer and subzero mornings even

more common in winter — that the transition is apt to seem abrupt regardless of the reality.

But this autumn was an especially dramatic example, it seems to me.

Although I would argue that, so far at least, there hasn't actually been much of an autumn.

The conditions that define that season — periods of sunny but cool weather interrupted by benevolent storms that lay the dust and perhaps briefly whiten the peaks of the Elkhorn and Wallows — have so far been absent.

No, in 2022 we leaped from a long-lingering summer straight to a fair approximation of December.

I resolved to myself not to begrudge this jarring jump, lest my incessant whining these past several weeks about summer's persistence brand me a hypocrite, if only in my own mind.

But during those treacherous few minutes as we descended the steepest grades below Anthony Lakes, I regretted, if not the weather, then at least that our Cruiser was still rolling on its mud-terrain tires.

(Although, as I mentioned, it was sliding as much as it was rolling.)

These tires, with their aggressive pattern of blocks with lots of space between, are designed to fling mud away before it coats the tread and leaves your rig foundering.

They are quite effective at this.

But on ice these tires, with their smooth, sipeless tread, are about as useful as drag-racing slicks.

The studded tires are still stacked in the corner of a shed.

Where, appropriately enough, they've been gathering dust during these months when my only interest in ice was making sure I crammed enough cubes into my water bottle to make sure it didn't turn tepid before I slaked my thirst.

■ Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.

• The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters.

• 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 include this information cannot be published.

• Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste

and legal reasons.

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