

On Tax Day 2026:

Narrative Spectacle vs. Evidence in the Strait of Hormuz

Tax Day is not merely an act of payment; it is a transfer of trust. Citizens surrender a portion of what they earn on the understanding that those resources will be used lawfully, prudently, and in accordance with governing principles.

When Americans pay taxes, they are not simply funding government operations. They are extending trust to those who exercise power in their name. In return, they are entitled to truth, accountability, and evidence-based justification—especially in matters as grave as war.

There may be narrow domains where deception directed outward toward a true adversary is justified. Deception directed inward toward the American people is not strategy. It is a fundamental breach of the public trust.

Today, that breach operates through what can be understood as narrative spectacle.

Narrative spectacle is not about truth or falsity. It is about capturing attention, triggering emotion, and fixing belief before verification occurs. It arrives in familiar form: breaking developments, urgent escalation, “everything you need to know.” A storyline is presented with force, repeated across channels that present themselves as independent, and absorbed before the underlying facts are tested. Once embedded in the public mind, it is difficult to unwind.

History offers a caution. What is often described as the “big lie” reflects a simple dynamic: repetition can substitute for proof. An assertion, repeated with sufficient scale and consistency, can be accepted not because it is verified, but because it is familiar, especially when it comes from authority. This is not confined to any one era or regime. It reflects a persistent vulnerability in human judgment.

This becomes most dangerous when tied to claims of conflict between nations. We are told a familiar sequence: a supreme commander eliminated, active bombing campaigns underway, a critical global chokepoint shut down, and yet objectives fully achieved—while further escalation is nonetheless threatened, and the terminology shifts from “closure” to “blockade”.

Under an evidentiary standard, each claim stands alone and must be tested against independent, verifiable information. Without that, it remains assertion, however forcefully presented.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most strategically significant waterways in the world. A substantial portion of global energy supply passes through it. If it were truly closed, the consequences would be immediate and unmistakable. Tankers would halt and stack up in queues at each entrance. Insurance rates would spike. Supply chains would falter. That is not what the evidence shows.

Industry services like MarineTraffic aggregate AIS signals—digital VHF transmissions from commercial vessels—to generate near-real-time maps of virtually all traffic worldwide,

displaying each vessel's position, speed, course, and identity. The conclusion from this widely relied-upon system is direct: over the forty-five days since the U.S. presidential announcement of warfare, the Strait of Hormuz has remained fully operational, with continuous commercial transit.

While there have been credible reports of heightened regional tensions, security advisories, and operational risk, there is no evidence that the Strait has been shut down or materially impeded. If it were truly closed, we would see clear and unmistakable signs: official notices telling ships not to pass, repeated maritime warning broadcasts signaling closure, coordinated statements from governments confirming it, and obvious changes in behavior—tankers rerouting, ports slowing down, queues building at each entrance, and traffic coming to a stop. None of that is happening.

The mechanism for breaking narrative spectacle is simple in principle: evidentiary discipline.

The common law developed rules of evidence to separate what is claimed from what is proven. Statements made outside direct examination, offered to prove the truth of what they assert, are treated as “hearsay” and are generally inadmissible because they cannot be tested. Regardless of position—whether President, Secretary of Defense, or NATO Secretary General—authority does not convert assertion into fact, no matter how many times or how loudly repeated.

But the law also recognizes exceptions to the general rule. Certain categories of hearsay are admitted because they demonstrate exceptional reliability. Information from continuously maintained data systems—relied upon by independent actors making real-world decisions—falls within the well-established “business records” exception, grounded in demonstrated reliability.

The AIS-based ship tracking systems fall squarely within this logic. They are relied upon daily by shipping operators, port authorities, insurers, traders, logistics networks, and naval forces alike. Their reliance is operational. If the data were inaccurate in any material respect, ships would collide, cargo would be lost, and markets would fail. The system persists because it works with sufficient reliability to guide real-world decisions. That continuous, high-stakes reliance is what gives the system evidentiary weight.

There is also a governing legal reality that must be understood. The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical international transit corridors. While bordered by Iran on the north and by Oman and the United Arab Emirates on the south, it is governed by established principles of international law that guarantee the right of transit passage for global shipping. No single nation has the lawful authority to unilaterally close it to international traffic or impose tolls at will. Claims of mass stoppage or compelled passage are inconsistent with governing law and observable reality.

History reinforces the point.

During the Iran–Iraq War, and particularly the Tanker War phase of the 1980s, commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz was not merely threatened, it was directly attacked. Iran and Iraq struck hundreds of commercial oil tankers, product carriers, and cargo vessels—many of them neutral—using missiles, aircraft, naval mines, and small-boat assaults. Ships were

damaged, insurance costs surged, and risk intensified—yet the waterway remained operational. Maritime traffic did not cease.

Claims of a complete closure today therefore require evidence of comparable magnitude, not assertion alone.

Despite a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, rapid narrative construction, and the expanding capacity for fabrication, certain realities remain directly observable in real time. The movement of global commerce and energy flows can be seen, tested, and verified.

As he left office in January 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the growing “unwarranted influence” of the military-industrial complex. Only an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry,” he observed, can ensure that power remains aligned with truth.

That obligation endures.

And so, on this Tax Day 2026, Americans must ask what they are paying for—and what they are receiving in return.

If a false claim of this magnitude—capable of being tested through readily available tools and independent data—is nevertheless accepted as truth, the consequence is not confined to a single misstatement. It establishes a precedent. It conditions acceptance of future assertions increasingly disconnected from verifiable reality.

It is therefore imperative that every spectacular narrative advanced in concert by authority and press be subjected to strict evidentiary scrutiny. That obligation does not end with any single claim. It applies everywhere.

To insist on that standard is not cynicism. It is discipline.

The Strait of Hormuz is open and unobstructed. That is what the evidence continues to show—overwhelmingly. The more important question, then, is what other assertions are being accepted as true without verification—and why?

Tax Day drives home a hard reality: do we have the discipline to remain on guard and demand exacting evidentiary scrutiny before treating any narrative as truth rather than spectacle?

James Hungelmann

Ketchum, Idaho

Dawn Hofheimer

From: James Hungelmann <jim.hungelmann@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2026 12:17 PM
To: Peter Prekeges; Matthew McGraw; Randy Hall; Spencer Cordovano; Tripp Hutchinson; Participate
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT: Ketchum Is Taking Back Its Police

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

Submitted as public comment for inclusion on the record of the next council meeting:

This Was Never About Cost: Ketchum Is Taking Back Its Police

Ketchum's decision to reestablish its own municipal police department has drawn sharp commentary. Much of that criticism treats the issue as a narrow question of cost. It is not. At its core, this is a question of governance, community identity, and the proper relationship between law enforcement and the people it serves.

Ketchum is not a city acting under financial duress. When a community has the means, it is reasonable to prioritize alignment, culture, and long-term cohesion over marginal differences in cost. Public safety is not a commodity to be procured at the lowest bid. It is a foundational element of daily life.

The central issue is not whether law enforcement will exist. It is what form it should take. There is a meaningful difference between a model that operates within a broader county framework, and one that is locally rooted and embedded. A municipal police department, properly led, is not simply an enforcement body. It becomes part of the fabric of the town itself.

Ketchum has lived this before, for most of its history. The city maintained its own police department for decades, and it worked well. There was no breakdown in local policing that necessitated change. Officers were visible and familiar. They walked the streets. They rode bicycles through neighborhoods and business districts. They knew residents, and residents knew them. That kind of presence is not incidental. It shapes behavior. It reduces friction. It encourages resolution before escalation. The later shift to a county contract was driven by cost and administrative considerations deemed important then, not performance. The decision today reflects a different, experience-based judgment: that alignment, presence, and community integration matter more.

The expectation now is not abstract. It is a return to that model of proximity and presence. Bicycle patrols, officers on foot, regular interaction with shop owners, families, and visitors. A posture that emphasizes maintaining peace and harmony rather than operating primarily through surveillance and enforcement. This is not a rejection of law. It is a refinement of how law is lived within a small, interconnected community. That approach does not diminish enforcement; it places it within a framework of judgment, familiarity, and proportionality.

A locally governed department also brings clearer lines of accountability. Leadership is directly answerable to Ketchum's elected officials and, through them, to the residents themselves. That proximity matters. It ensures priorities and standards are shaped where their impact is felt. This also allows performance to be measured locally, with clear expectations and visible results evaluated in the open by the community itself.

This direction has not emerged suddenly, nor was it driven by any current city official. It reflects a sustained undercurrent within the community, with many residents raising concerns, offering input, and placing their

views on the public record repeatedly over time. The decision should be understood in that context: not as an abrupt shift, but as the culmination of ongoing civic engagement and local preference.

It is important to be clear about what this decision is not. It is not a condemnation of the many individual deputies who have served Ketchum with professionalism and commitment. Their work is recognized and appreciated. This transition is not about individual performance. It is about policy direction and structural alignment. Good people can operate within systems that are not perfectly suited to a particular community's expectations. A change in structure does not diminish their service.

Nor is this a call for separation or conflict with the Blaine County Sheriff's Office. On the contrary, the expectation is continued cooperation. County resources, experience, and specialized capabilities remain valuable and, when needed, essential. The proper relationship is one of coordination, not competition. Municipal officers handling day-to-day policing within city limits, with the sheriff's office available for broader support, is a time-tested and widely used model across the country.

For that reason, the tone of the public discourse matters. Continued bickering, sharp rhetoric, and personal characterization do not serve the community. They do not enhance safety. They do not build trust. They distract from the shared objective, which is effective and respectful law enforcement. The hope is that all parties, including the sheriff's office, will move forward in a spirit of professionalism and cooperation consistent with the standards the public expects.

Ultimately, this decision reflects a straightforward principle: the character of policing should reflect the character of the community. Ketchum is choosing a model that emphasizes familiarity, restraint, and accountability at the local level. It is a model grounded in its own history, supported by its financial capacity, and consistent with how many American communities structure law enforcement.

It should be understood for what it is: not an impulsive break or a rejection of those who have served, but a considered return to policing shaped by the people who live with it every day.

Jim Hungelmann