

O P I N I O N

Editorial...

Follow the science

The arrival of COVID-19 vaccine in Central Oregon marks a historic moment in a public health crisis that has roiled the world, killing more than 317,000 Americans and disrupting the lives and livelihoods of millions more.

The swift development of a vaccine that is considered to be extraordinarily effective against the notoriously elusive coronavirus is a triumph of science — but it doesn’t get us out of the woods just yet. It’s going to take a while for vaccines to get far enough out into communities to quell the pandemic.

To steal a phrase from Winston Churchill, “This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

We still have months to go to navigate this pandemic. Throughout, we have often been exhorted to “follow the science” in our response. It’s a snappy hashtag, but things aren’t quite so simple. Science doesn’t tell us how to balance tradeoffs between public health protection and economic damage, between safety and liberty.

That balance is up to policy-makers to achieve — and it’s a tough job.

As the science evolves — as we learn more about how COVID-19 spreads — policymakers must adapt if their policies are to be effective rather than merely symbolic or performative. Ideally, policies would be modified so that they attack the spread surgically, with a scalpel instead of a cleaver.

Solid studies and the reporting of public health agencies make it clear that gyms that observe strict protocols for physical distancing,

masking, ventilation, and sanitation are not a significant vector for COVID-19 spread. Gym owners are right to urge Governor Kate Brown to reassess the restrictions that have shuttered clubs. They are right to note that there are very significant negative impacts to the health and well-being of the public when people are constrained from accessing beneficial exercise. They are right to argue that their model could point the way for maintaining activity while responsibly managing COVID-19 safety.

Following the science should mean taking a hard look at whether shuttering gyms, entirely prohibiting indoor dining and keeping schools closed is actually effective and necessary. Good policy-making should question whether the discernible safety benefits outweigh the substantial social and economic costs.

Following the science also puts the burden of slowing the spread of COVID-19 squarely upon our own shoulders. The data shows clearly that the main source of COVID-19 spread in this deadly fall-winter wave of the pandemic is from small, indoor gatherings — from family-and-friends get-togethers.

The government should not be regulating who we have in our homes — and trying to do so is likely to generate reflexive resistance, making such efforts counterproductive.

As always, though, demanding respect for our liberties also entails taking individual responsibility and self-governing without threat of law.

We know how this disease spreads and we each are responsible for acting accordingly.

*Jim Cornelius*  
*Editor in Chief*

Letters to the Editor...

*The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer’s name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is 10 a.m. Monday.*

*Editor’s note:*  
*There will be no letters to the Editor in the forthcoming December 30 “Year in Review” edition. Letters to the Editor will resume in the January 6 edition.*  
*Jim Cornelius*  
*Editor in Chief*

To the Editor:  
I have had the pleasure of living next to the Peterson Trail for 15 years, and walk those trails with my dogs many times a week. However, I have seen it transition into a haven for homeless camps in the last five years or so. Currently within a one-mile range of

Sisters, there are at least four camps, and two camps are within 20 feet of the trail along Tin Can Alley, and the other just south of the new 5A junction.

The Sisters Trail Alliance has worked hard to develop these trails for the residents of Sisters, hikers as well as bicyclists. Many from out of town use these trails when they visit Sisters. I have tried repeatedly to get the Sisters Forest Service involved in trying to get these people to relocate their camps. I feel the Deschutes Forest is big enough, that we do not need to trash our trail systems. Nor should we risk the safety of the young women that love to run on these trails.

See **LETTERS** on page 14

Vaccine is critical to ending pandemic

By Mitchell Luftig  
Columnist

Like everyone else, early in the pandemic I was terrified of the “novel corona virus” as it hopscotched across the U.S. leaving bodies in its wake.

The fact that so little was known at that time about how the virus was spread helped to fuel my panic. Someone emailed me what was reported to be the minutes of a Stanford University board of directors meeting in which facts and recommendations about the novel coronavirus were shared. I learned from these minutes that by simply holding my breath for 10 seconds and observing any tightening in my chest I could tell whether I had been infected with COVID- 19.

However, after sharing this information with friends I learned that the Stanford University “minutes” were entirely fake. According to an expert on the spread of misinformation who was interviewed on NPR, one reason that people like me unwittingly spread misinformation is that in our desire to allay others’ fears about something like the novel coronavirus we fail to take the critical step of checking the reliability of information before we pass it along.

In JK Wells letter to the editor of December 16, I believe that he made the same mistake that I did by passing along information without first checking out its reliability. For instance, in his letter Mr. Wells made the following statement: “What if former Pfizer vice-president and chief scientific advisor Michael Yeadon, Ph.D., said ‘there is absolutely no need for vaccines to extinguish the pandemic. I’ve never heard such nonsense, you

don’t vaccinate people who aren’t at risk from a disease and you don’t set about planning to vaccinate millions of fit and healthy people with a vaccine that hasn’t been extensively tested on human subjects.”

As recently as November 30, the Associated Press weighed in on the accuracy of this information. CLAIM: The COVID-19 pandemic is ‘effectively over’ and there’s no need for vaccines. AP’S ASSESSMENT: false. The “claim, made in an article by a former employee at the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, ignores that large numbers of people continue to fall ill and die from the coronavirus in many parts of the world. The United Kingdom, which is the subject of the article, saw a surge in coronavirus cases this fall and exceeded 50,000 coronavirus-related deaths earlier this month. Experts say coronavirus vaccines will be powerful tools to help prevent millions of people from contracting the virus.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Immunization with a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is a critical component of the United States strategy to reduce COVID-19-related illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths and to help restore societal functioning. The goal of the U.S. government is to have enough COVID-19 vaccine for all people in the United States who wish to be vaccinated.”

The takeaway is that we all bear the responsibility to check the reliability of information before we pass it along, especially in regards to the COVID-19 vaccine, a critical component to ending the pandemic, according to the CDC.

*Opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and are not necessarily shared by the Editor or The Nugget Newspaper.*

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Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

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| <b>Wednesday</b><br>Mostly Sunny<br><b>41/24</b><br>     | <b>Thursday</b><br>Mostly Sunny<br><b>44/28</b><br> | <b>Friday</b><br>Showers<br><b>41/32</b><br>       |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>Rain/Snow Showers<br><b>42/25</b><br> | <b>Sunday</b><br>Partly Cloudy<br><b>40/24</b><br>  | <b>Monday</b><br>Partly Cloudy<br><b>37/24</b><br> |