

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY-DEMOCRAT HERALD

Spring brings flu worries, water news

Even as we look forward to the spring, which is scheduled to start at 2:58 p.m. today, we still have some winter-related business to get through:

First, Oregon (and much of the rest of the nation) remains in the grip of another particularly nasty flu season. The heartbreaking news from Portland last week about the death of a 37-year-old pregnant woman and her unborn child serves to underline the fact that influenza A isn't something to take lightly.

Typically, flu season stretches from October to May, so even as the weather warms, we still have another six weeks or so to go before we're out of the woods. Remember that flu season isn't confined to cold-weather months.

The most recent statistics from the Oregon Health Authority show about 4.1 percent of the visits to hospital emergency rooms during the first few days of March were because of influenza-like illnesses. This year's flu season already matches the totals seen in 2016-17 and could come close to the marks set last year.

The vast majority of the cases reported in Oregon are from influenza A — and this year's flu vaccine is only about 46 percent effective against that variant of the virus, which means that if you get vaccinated, it reduces your chance of getting the flu by about 46 percent on average. (The Portland woman who died had been vaccinated.) Still, if you haven't been vaccinated this season, you might want to give it some thought, because the vaccine can reduce the severity of symptoms and the possibility of complications if you do come down with the illness.

In the meantime, follow all the other advice you hear all winter long about keeping the virus at bay: Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands often with soap and water.

If you do come down with influenza, the federal Centers for Disease Control recommends you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities.

People with influenza don't necessarily need to report to a hospital, but the CDC recommends seeking emergency health care if symptoms include trouble breathing, bluish lips or skin, persistent chest pain or muscle pain, or dehydration and high fever.

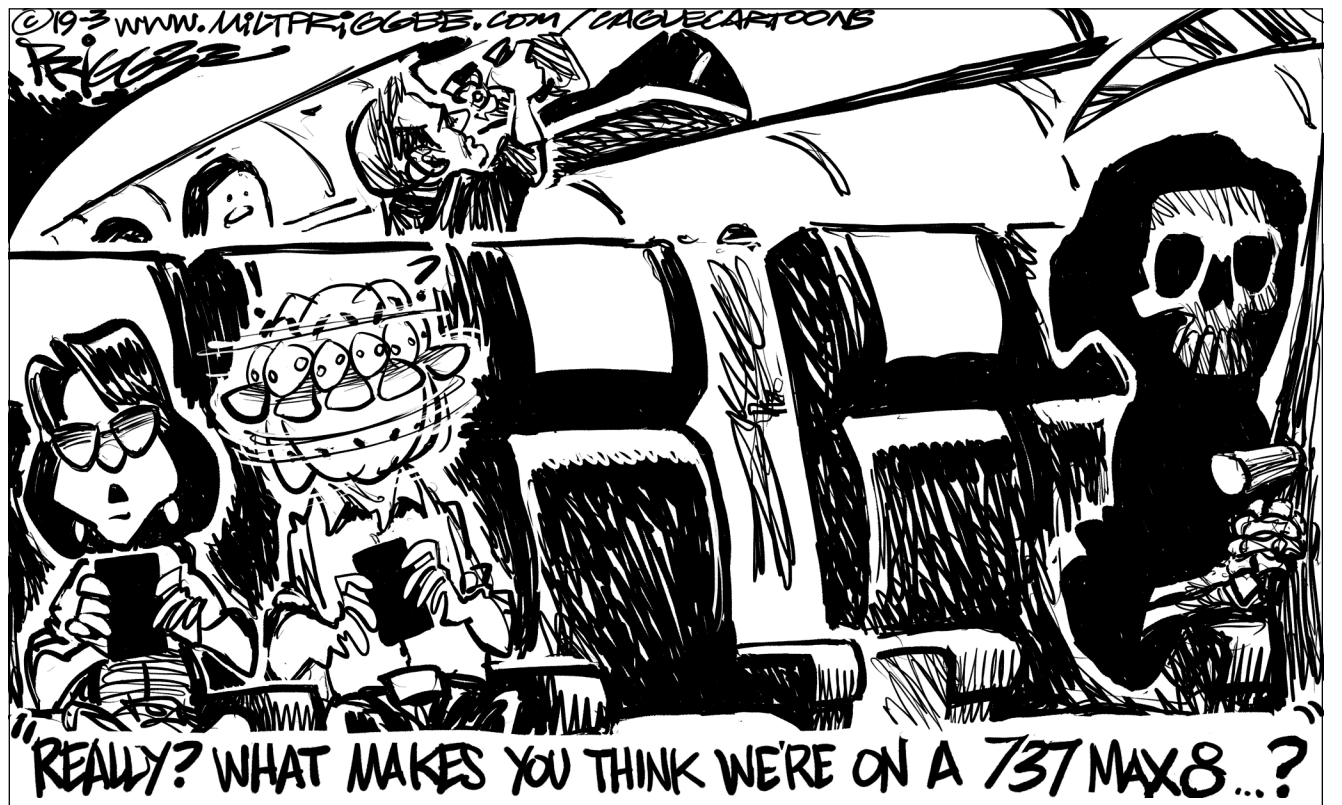
Influenza is a serious illness, and we need to treat it that way. There's no need to take a chance with this killer.

The other winter-related news is considerably more cheerful: A string of late-winter storms in February doubled the amount of snow on the ground in many locations across Oregon, and that dramatically improved the water-supply outlook for this spring and summer. Many locations around the state received more than twice the usual amount of precipitation during February.

As a result, the stream-flow forecasts for most of Oregon are calling for normal or above-normal levels this spring and summer — and that's good news for everyone who relies on adequate water supplies in our streams, rivers, lakes and reservoirs, which is to say, all of us.

This good news comes, of course, with an asterisk: The next few weeks will tell the tale for water supply. If we get a burst of cool and somewhat stormy early-spring weather, then water supplies should be adequate. But sustained warm periods and long stretches of dry weather could renew drought fears.

So, yes, we welcome spring — and this recent stretch of sunny 70-degree days has been a pleasant break from an unusually chilly February. With that said, though, we wouldn't mind a return to more seasonal norms — especially if it would help to ensure adequate water in the mid-valley well into the summer.



Local newspapers worthy of saving

Imagine for a moment it is 5:30 on a Monday evening. You are just home from work, and as you get ready for dinner, you feel the need to catch up on the local news. You've listened to the radio all day and now it's time to read. You head out the front door, bend over to check the bright orange newspaper box and ... no paper! Then you remember, the company that owned The La Grande Observer went bankrupt and stopped publishing the paper. Now how will you find out about the LHS Tigers, or learn about coming community events, or read about the latest actions of the Union County Commissioners or your city council?

Local newspapers all over the country are disappearing. Readership is down as more people turn to the internet for national and international news. Advertising, as well, is headed to the internet, where every mouse click yields pennies in revenue. Perhaps it is a valid argument that local news-

papers are a 20th century anachronism, have served their purpose and should now go the way of the dodo, quietly into extinction. Well, I strongly disagree with this argument for the following reasons.

A local newspaper, and the journalism it entails, cannot be found online or in magazines or on blogs. Reporting on issues and events close to home means knowing how to engage in your community. It means knowing what organization or agency to contact when you need to know more. As parents of school-age children, think of the photos or stories about school plays, community service or athletics you would miss. As an outdoor enthusiast, think of the hunting and fishing reports, hiking and skiing opportunities, and changes in land use practices you would miss.

Local newspapers are a reflection of the local culture. When I travel around the country, one of the first things I do is



My Voice ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Clements is a business faculty member at Eastern Oregon University and is the mayor of La Grande. My Voice columns reflect the views of the author

only. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

look for and read a local newspaper. I can find out about the issues city councils are addressing, how national issues are playing out locally, a good place to have dinner, or how to spend my evening other than in the hotel room. Local newspapers play a role in supporting tourism, but more important for rural areas, they help us see, know, care about and understand our communities.

So, back to The Observer ... There is a real chance the newspaper will stop the presses for good. And if that happens, La Grande and Union County will suffer. What can be done? The ideal situation is another media company could purchase the

paper and continue publication. Another, perhaps more creative alternative, is for local people to pool resources, sort of like investing in stocks, and buy the paper. There is a legal mechanism that makes this second alternative possible, but the process would involve attorneys, accountants and an organizing body. For either alternative, time is of the essence. Right now, you can write support letters to The Observer and the Baker City Herald, and urge the current owners to find a way to keep the presses rolling. The time is now, or ... when you bend over to look in that bright orange newspaper box, it might be empty and our lives with it.

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