

MY VOICE

Pandemic, policy and politics

As I was nearing the conclusion of my first legislative session in May of 2013, someone asked me what my plans were for the interim. That caused me to pause. I had never even thought about it, because in my entire working life, I had never had an interim. But I quickly figured out the answer, which was to keep on serving the citizens of my Senate District, in any way I could.

Had someone asked me in February 2020, "What are my plans for a pandemic?" I would not have had an answer. But I sure do now. So far in this interim, the COVID-19 pandemic is front and center in everything we legislators are doing. Most all of what I am doing falls into three categories of focus: pandemic, policy, and politics.

I have learned more about this pandemic, this disease, this plague than I ever imagined. But to formulate good policy you should know what you are fighting and what you need to fight it.

The last pandemic was the Spanish flu of 1918 over a century ago. The one thing about the COVID-19 virus, that seems to be universally agreed upon, is the primary method of spreading is through breath droplets. Masks and physical distancing really do work, which I have been trying to do.

When it comes to policy development and resource allocation, this is where the bulk of my time has been being spent. I would never have guessed that I would be on hours and hours of daily conference calls. But such is life in a pandemic.

One of my high priorities and policy focus has been keeping our rural health care facilities functioning. Decrees from Salem, while probably good for the most part, have had serious impacts on rural hospitals and health care. I have made phone calls, I have worked with my colleagues, I have both authored and signed on to letters to the governor and other officials about the dire straits rural health care is facing. I believe funding, both state and federal, is beginning to be available, but it hasn't been without its drama.

The politics is the most frustrating. Why can't we come together across the aisle to do what is best for the citizens of Oregon? The COVID-19 virus is not a Republican or Democrat nor does it pick and choose its victims by party affiliation. This pandemic has made for strange bedfellows at times. From my perspective, the Senate Republican Caucus has been more aligned with Gov. Kate Brown much of the time than the other caucuses including her own.

But at the end of the day, this pandemic battle would be a whole lot easier and more effective if we could leave politics out of the game plan both on the national and state level. However, until that time comes, it will be part of what I need to do, to make sure rural Oregon does not get the short end of the stick. The stakes are too high.

Our office has been and will continue to help in any way we can. Please feel free to contact us. If you have issues with which you need assistance.

The best way, since we are all working from home, is by email at sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov. We will do all we can to be of help.

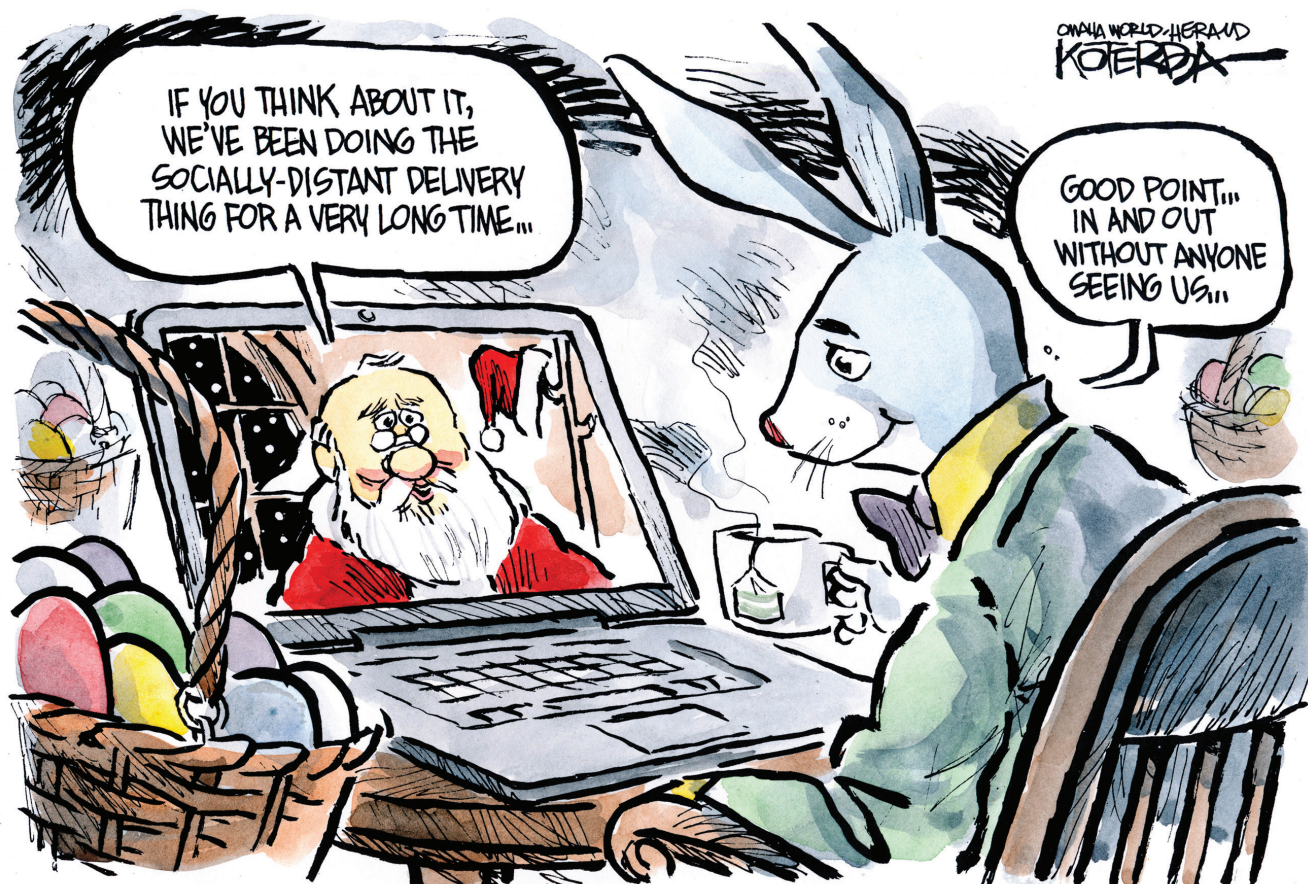
In the meantime, stay safe, be smart, and mask up in public.

About the Author

Bill Hansell is state senator of Oregon District 29 and from Athena. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he is spending most of his time in his home on Third Street.



BILL HANSELL
STATE SENATOR



Your views

An Easter prayer of joy and comfort

As we celebrate Easter, April 12, we praise our risen savior and give him all the praise and glory that he solely deserves for all he has done and is doing for us. Rest assured, our loving, gracious, merciful heavenly father is in charge of all that is going on now, and he is with us every step of the way.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalms 119:105).

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

What an awesome God we serve. May our loving, gracious, merciful heavenly father bless each of you this Easter with his joy, peace and comfort and keep you in his care. This is my Easter prayer.

*Janice Roberts
La Grande*

The pleasure of anticipation – snail mail to the rescue

Snail mail to the rescue. We've all seen numerous suggestions on how to creatively fill time while we are under what I call house arrest. Minus the global positioning device fastened to our ankles. A few years ago, my adolescent granddaughter and I decided to reinvent the wheel

with a little handwritten snail mail. Not typed and printed, not emailed, not Facebooked, and not tweeted ... whatever that is. I wanted her to feel the excitement of checking the mail each day, waiting for a letter from Grandpa, or a decoder ring, or a Betsy McCall cut-out doll, or news from the Buck Rogers fan club. Did I just date myself?

In this new world of instant gratification, we might be missing out on something that was ordinary, and special: anticipation. During the reinvention, which was intended for Mya, I found that, unbeknownst to me, I was running a little short of anticipation myself. I loved getting those four or five lines of news with backward S's, crossed-out words and a drawing of me (I think). I found myself walking a little more briskly to the mailbox wondering if there might be a letter from Hermiston, with a smudge, a handwritten address and a crooked stamp.

Try it, if you don't need to be instantly gratified. These are the good old days.

*Mike Hayden
Cove*

Union County can count on Mike Barry

I was mayor of Joseph from 2009-2019. During that time I worked closely with Mike Barry, who was the go-to person for the Small City Allotment grants that all small cities count

on to help with their street paving needs. Mike fought for Northeast Oregon against the other regions to ensure we got our fair share.

Mike was always aboveboard, and you could count on him to do what he said he would do.

I urge everyone to vote for Mike for Union County Commissioner. He knows the county and he knows how to work with Salem.

*Dennis Sands
Sierra Vista, Arizona*

Bill Miller's leadership skills would elevate quality of UCSO

As a former circuit court judge, prosecutor and police officer, I support Bill Miller for sheriff of Union County.

During my tenure on the bench, I had the opportunity to work with Bill in his capacity as a detective with the sheriff's office. I found him to be competent, honest, hardworking and, most important, fair in his investigations. When he appeared in court, he brought those same qualities.

I believe Bill has the leadership skills to elevate the quality of the services provided by the Union County Sheriff's Office. I also believe Bill's dedication to the job and his sense of fairness will improve the morale of the men and women he will lead.

*Brian C. Dretke
Union/Wallowa Circuit Court
Judge, retired*

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