

OUR VIEW

Keep practicing social distancing

All but three counties in Oregon submitted plans to the state for a phased reopening, and we hope soon Union and Wallowa counties will be able to see the light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel.

Union County's total number of confirmed cases stands at four as of Wednesday, and the Oregon Health Authority counts three as recovered. Wallowa County has one case, also recovered. The governor's office wants counties and businesses to meet certain criteria before reopening, such as a decrease in COVID-19 hospitalizations, which has not been much of an issue out here.

Even with standards to meet, the decision as to when we can reopen rests firmly in our own hands.

We need to adhere to social distancing measures — proven to be effective throughout the nation. Neighboring Umatilla County, for example, has more than 80 cases of the coronavirus and at least two dead. While more testing there can account for some of the spike, the single overriding factor in the rise, according to the health department, is instances where residents are spreading the sickness at social gatherings.

Union and Wallowa counties can't afford to ignore the lessons just some ways down the road.

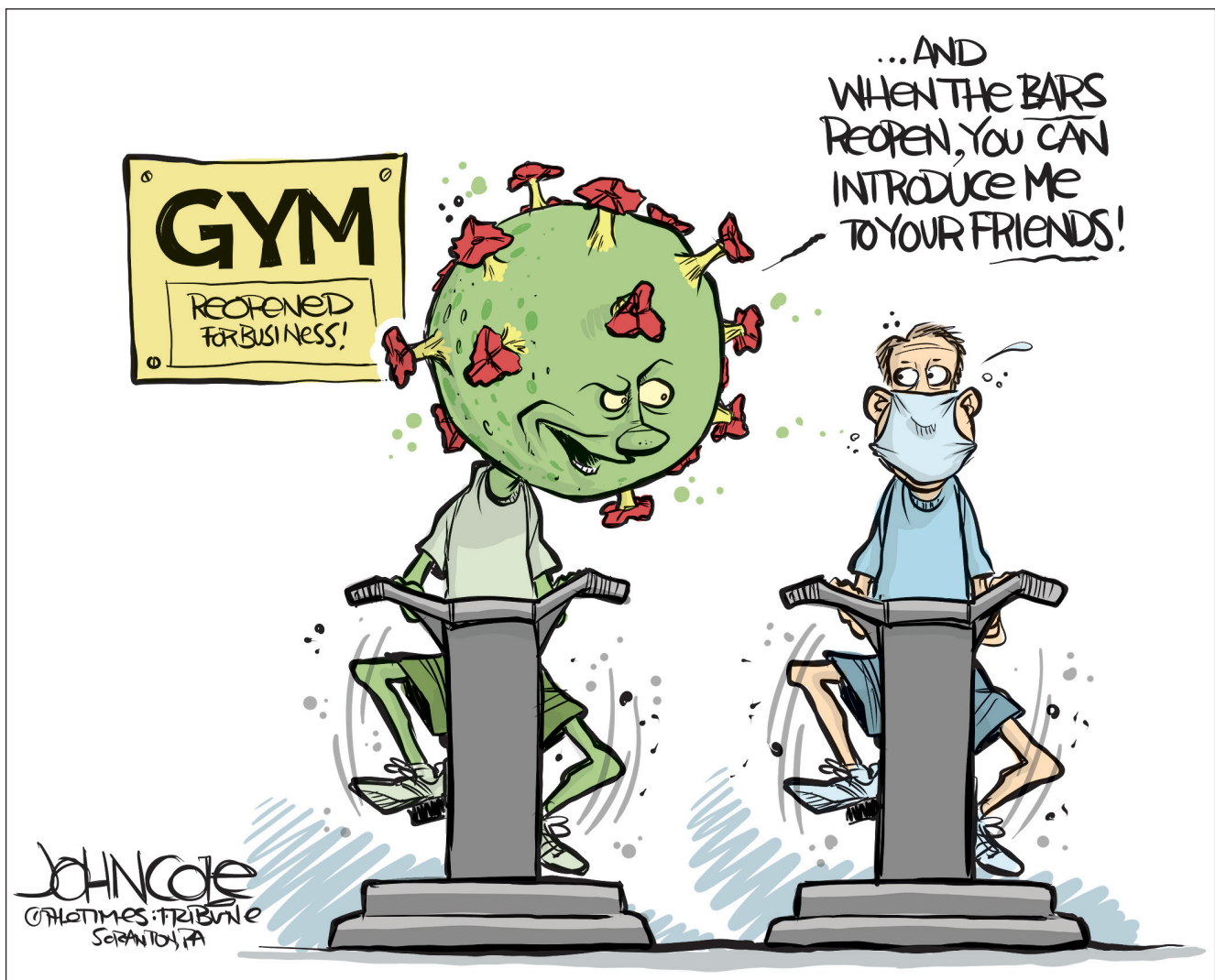
In a way, we would like curtailing the spread of virus to be more complicated than just a willingness to follow a few simple guidelines. But it isn't. Health officials from the federal level on down have repeatedly stated the steps — easy to follow — to stop the spread. When we fail to do that, we create an environment for the virus to flourish, even in the rural parts of Oregon.

The COVID-19 virus has killed over 80,000 in the U.S. and more than 287,000 globally. It is highly contagious. It isn't "just like the flu." It is more dangerous than the flu. Because it is so highly contagious, we all must subscribe to the methods that health officials outlined to stop the virus from spreading.

None of the social distancing rules or the shutdown of the state itself has been easy. Yes, statewide we've seemed to cut the spread of the contagion. On the other side of the coin, however, thousands are out of work and the small business community is suffering terribly. There is an understandable urge to get things going again. We get that.

But rather than rushing to reopen, we need to take careful steps.

So, practice social distancing. Wear a mask. Let's all work together to get past this as fast as possible.



OTHER VIEW

Using a mask to mask your feelings

I have been trying to do my civic duty. I stay more than 6 feet away from most people. I live alone, so my trips to the store are surgical strikes. I have social distanced from vulnerable friends and relatives, mastered the art of Zoom and Facetime, and learned to make my own damn coffee.



CHRISTINE FLOWERS
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

But I draw the line at the masks. At least, I used to. Slowly, though, I am beginning to capitulate like a Frenchman during the Nazi occupation.

It's not like I didn't initially try and cooperate with the "suggestion" that we wear masks. That was when health experts said that wearing a face covering would protect us from contracting the coronavirus, which we've always known is highly communicable. I started seeing some folks with those Darth Vader style face coverings, and purchased one. I tried it on, gasped for air, and that was the end of that thing.

Afterwards, when the health experts told us to leave the professional grade masks to the health care workers, I felt vindicated. Virtuous is the better word. I said to myself, "Don't wear that mask, Christine, you need to leave it for the courageous first responders in hospitals." I could feel the halo forming over my head.

But then, I saw other sorts of masks emerging on my neighbors'

faces, bandanas and handkerchiefs attached by rubber bands and homemade quilted pieces of folk art and things that looked like turtlenecks on steroids.

Stories about reading groups that had turned into sewing circles made the rounds. Social media ran ads for stylish masks made out of "breathable" fabric (which led me to believe that being able to actually breathe cost a bit more, but that you could get a non-permeable mask made out of lead for cut-rate prices).

And then I started hearing that it was my obligation to wear one of these monstrosities because I could be Patient Zero, Typhoid Christine, and that I owed it to my neighbor with whom I've shared less than five words in our entire relationship to keep her safe from my hypothetical germs.

That's when I rebelled. The idea that I was a petri dish waiting to infect the world grated on my nerves, and I started walking around in public with my naked face (of course it wasn't entirely naked because I will not go out without makeup). I made sure to stay away from other people, walked to the other side of the street if I saw another person approaching on the sidewalk, kept a mask in my hand as a prop as if to say, "I just took this off to breathe for a moment but I usually shower with the damn thing," and always wore a mask in closed

environments.

I even wore a mask on public transportation, which actually made the experience more enjoyable since it filtered out the usual sweat-and-controlled substance aroma that usually permeates the cars.

But I pushed back against wearing the mask as a default position. Until, that is, I started getting "the look" from little children. Apparently, paranoid adults have been indoctrinating their tiny tots into believing that people who don't wear masks outside, everywhere and at every moment, are dangerous. They are up there with child molesters and anti-vaxxers (and in the Philadelphia area, Trump supporters).

The look in those little kids' eyes was an epiphany for me. I do not like being hated, even though I could solve that problem by just pretending I'm a liberal columnist and be done with it. But I would rather eat a bat from Wuhan before I did that, so I have come to the sad conclusion that — for the sake of the children, mind you — I will wear a mask whenever I am not in my house.

Unless I decide to join that small, hardy band of French-speaking resistance fighters in the Delaware Valley and we manage to overthrow the Vichy regime in Harrisburg.

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