

OTHER VIEW

Outbreak has Union County at strike one

Is everyone paying attention now? The virus has taken off in Union County and there will be many more cases. No more magical thinking, please. We aren't special and nothing will protect us from COVID-19 except our own efforts to keep this thing in check. If we can't do that, we will all be sorry.



NORM CIMON
COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

The failure to follow state guidelines by a local church has caused enormous damage to public health and to our economy. As the number of victims rises, the willingness of people to visit or even to stop in town while passing through will be sorely tested.

A concern for local businesses and the jobs they provide seems to have led our county commissioners to consider insurrection rather than leading by example. That was a mistake. Taking up arms isn't what this is about and violating open-meeting rules is serious.

As for the church leaders, I'm trying hard to find the Christian values in a strategy that seems to have gone out of its way to ignore every one of the Oregon Health Authority recommendations. Where is the love and concern in that attitude? There were no masks and lots of very close contact. There was also singing, chanting, and face-to-face talk. Those are all fine things except when they can lead to sickness and even death. That's exactly what's happened in other cities. We will not beat this by pretending we are immune to the pandemic and by disregarding the threat to our fellow community members. It isn't about judging the state either. That's not the way it works.

Here's the science so far. The disease is quite contagious and many can get infected. The virus zombies if you like, and 80% can show little to no symptoms. The remaining 20% will be affected to one degree or another, 15% may need hospitalization, while 5% will be severely impacted and need intensive care. Between 1% and 2% will die.

That's a small percentage, but if hundreds of people get the virus that could mean dozens of deaths. Those who recover can show serious effects that last for months and perhaps years. Not enough time has passed to understand all the implications.

Everyone should be wearing masks and practicing social distancing so that the 8 out of 10 who are zombies don't infect others. That's the right thing to do if we really care about our fellow citizens.

Recovery for our local economy is now an even bigger issue. There is an answer to this and it's in Washington. The Federal Reserve has started up the printing press. Before the pandemic collapsed the economy, corporations had built mountains of debt because interest rates were so low and banks were only too happy to let them dig those holes.

Now those businesses and their lenders are in big trouble, so the Fed has promised the borrowers and bankers that it will cover all the bad gambling debts. That's why the stock market keeps chugging along. There's more free money on the way.

Congress must do the same for the people who actually keep this country moving: the small businesses, the workers, local and state governments and the nonprofit organizations that provide support. That's the only way we're going to get out of this. The sooner we all buy in, the sooner it will happen. We have senators and representatives and those congressional members will be the difference makers as we move further into this thing.

There is no other way now that the virus has found us. Our county government should be in touch with those people. Have they done that? If not, the sooner the better.

One researcher used a baseball analogy to try to catch people's attention. He said we're only in the second inning of this thing. Union County now has a strike against it. It's time to prepare for the next pitch and to make sure the umpires are watching.

About the Author

Norm Cimon of La Grande is a member of Oregon Rural Action, a nonprofit, but his column only represents his opinion.



Your views

One must weigh consequences of trying to enforce social distancing rules

Regarding the article in the June 13 edition of The Observer concerning Eastern Oregon county commissioners challenges to the reopening rules, the biggest issue appeared to be that thousands of protesters were allowed to gather regarding George Floyd, violating distancing measures and large-group gatherings. By contrast, communities were not allowed to gather for indoor church services or for sports events and graduation ceremonies.

While I understand the commissioners' ire over this apparent inconsistency, one must weigh the consequences of trying to enforce such rules when thousands are violating them at one time. Police would be hard-pressed to enforce such rules on such huge numbers of people. The threat of the COVID-19 infection must be weighed against the dangers of a paucity of law enforcement trying to disperse so many protesters. Look at the backlash from the public when law enforcement violently dispersed peaceful protesters at Lafayette Square for President Donald Trump's photo op at St. John's Episcopal Church.

I'm curious as to how strictly the COVID-19 rules would be enforced at church gatherings, sports events and graduation ceremonies. I believe in those circumstances, it is not Oregon Gov. Kate Brown but the community leaders (pastors, coaches, school

boards, etc.) who see the value of such rules in preventing a pandemic in their particular area. I find it hard to believe that heavily armed police would come barging into such events to enforce the governor's mandate. I have not heard of such incidents anywhere.

Emelie Montgomery-Jones
La Grande

Why not follow the governor's rules?

Thank you so much for your excellent coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak in Union County. I rely on your in-depth reporting to have a realistic picture of the rapidly evolving situation. My questions now are for the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church and the Union County commissioners.

I would like the church leader(s) to address the community in The Observer and explain why they continued to gather in large numbers with no social distancing and no masks, which was in direct violation of Gov. Kate Brown's executive order. Also, I would like to know how the church plans to compensate the community for the costs of this outbreak.

The Union County commissioners also need to explain to the county why they met illegally in Prairie City to disagree with the governor's reopening plan. Finally, I would like to know if the commissioners have reflected on their criticism of her well-reasoned and science-based plan that kept our infection rates at very low levels when we followed three simple rules: 1) social distancing;

2) wearing masks in public; and 3) avoiding gatherings of more than 50 people (in Phase 2).

Parts of the community clearly did not follow those rules, and we now have the highest per capita infection rate in the state.

Patricia Kennedy
Union

Shame on the Lighthouse Church, and on The Observer

The galling, unconscionable audacity of members of the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City to congregate during lockdown is appalling.

Did you really think you are somehow immune to the virus? Did you give one single thought to anyone other than yourselves? To the members of our community who are older, or sick, or otherwise unwell? Your not-very-Christ-like selfishness has made a lot of people very ill. I'm going to pray for you, and hope that you don't get any members of our community killed. Shame on you.

And for you, The Observer, to run a front-page photo of the Black Lives Matter protest in an article about the outbreak — while the article itself had no evidence that the protest contributed in any way to the spread of the virus — is journalistic malpractice. You are smart people. You knew exactly what you were doing by linking the image of the protest to an article about the virus.

Christopher Rosevear
Union

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