

From the Editor's Desk

It's all about changes

The coronavirus pandemic continues to force us to adapt and change, sometimes daily. The Observer's newsroom has reported on some of these changes, predominantly in business, education and school sports. But we know the changes go far deeper.

Over the past couple of weeks, our reporters have talked to locals about how the virus has

FROM THE EDITOR



PHIL
WRIGHT
OBSERVER EDITOR

changed their lives.

That has led us create a series of centerpieces we're running

in each edition of the paper next week that we're tentatively calling "Pandemic Profiles."

"Hyperlocal" is the mantra of modern community journalism and one I believe in. Communities like ours overflow with interesting, newsworthy stories. Community newspapers such as The Observer are the organizations that can chase those down and deliver these stories to readers.

Yet while doing that, we also can be the window to the larger world. We continue to tap into reporting from our related papers for regional and state news. And during the past few months, The Observer has worked to deliver relevant or interesting national and even international news. In the last few weeks we've dabbled in a smattering of "weird" news, for lack of a better term.

Selecting national and international news is something of an experiment for me as the editor. So many outlets provide that news, so I don't see much sense in running an Associated Press story on the latest flamewars involving the president, for example. But NASA working to put a massive rover on Mars, yes, that I want in our paper.

Likewise, we haven't published anything in the paper about the horrific explosion this week in Beirut. By the time we could have a a story in print, I doubt it would have told readers much they didn't already know. And we likely would have had to trim an AP story to its bare bones to fit on the page somewhere, and that would not have done the crisis justice.

To that end, you may see more of those stories on our website. Don't take that to mean we have lost a commitment to local reporting. It just means we can do more online than in print. Still, like a lot of experiments, we're going to have some inconstant results. For example, our website — for now — lacks a specific page to carry international news. And while you can email us a letter to the editor as long as 350 words, doing so on the website limits you to 250. We're working on that as well.

To that end, if there is something you think we should cover and have not, if you have suggestions about what you want to see in the paper or online, if you like what we are doing, or even if you don't, send an email about it to me at pwright@lagrandeobserver.com. I can't promise The Observer will adopt every recommendation or change, but I'll read them all.

Although maybe not next week, as I'm off for a bit of a break. But don't let that stop you.



Letters

Head Start should look closer

Perhaps Head Start should take a closer look as there is a lot of spurious information out there about children and coronavirus.

Children can carry the coronavirus, and they may also have serious disabling consequences. There is something called Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome that children can get when being around those who have the coronavirus. Search for "medical acronym MIS-C."

To see images of MIS-C, search "MIS-C images" and then the "show all images."

There is another one called "flaccid paralysis." Search for "flaccid paralysis reported in children," and pick the "children's hospital" link.

Stuart Croghan
La Grande

Changing state borders is the least of our worries

Thank you for your very wise editorial opinion regarding the "Greater Idaho" push (Observer editor Phil Wright's column "Greater Idaho does not warrant greater coverage" in the

Write to us

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Aug. 4 edition).

The ideas presented in the column are so cogent, I could have thought of them myself. You have so clearly pointed out the waste of time, effort and reasoning trying to change state borders when our post offices are threatened, the census is being damaged, voting is becoming more difficult for some Americans, Russians are paying Iraqis to kill our soldiers, and hundreds of thousands of Americans are dying from COVID-19. And more.

I agree. No more Greater Idaho articles. Let's learn about these other threats to the United States of America.

Evelyn Swart
Joseph

Disappointed by lack of Lighthouse Church accountability

Upon first reading the title of Roger Barnes' My Voice column ("Forgiveness is not forgetting,"

The Observer, July 28), my initial reaction was, "What, more?" But I thought he might have an interesting perspective so I read on. I was rewarded by having my eyes opened on the Lighthouse Church COVID-19 affair.

Mr. Barnes' main point is to wonder why there were no legal charges or punishment against the church. Previously I had not questioned the lack of charges. But his column made me consider a parallel case. If someone held a rap music concert with 100 attendees, received warning from law enforcement to cease, and then held another concert, would they be charged with violating COVID-19 orders? I am forced to believe they would. This leads me to the conclusion that those who might charge a private party organizer are biased by not charging a private religious organization, the Lighthouse Church. This is disappointing.

Lia Spiegel
La Grande

Our View

Subject emergency orders to review

For more than four months, Oregon has largely been under the rules of emergency executive orders in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

While we believe governors should have powers to deal with the exigencies that come with natural disasters and other emergencies, such as a pandemic, those powers should come with a limit on duration, and an extension of those order should be subject to mandatory oversight from either the Legislature or a substantial legislative committee consisting of an equal numbers of lawmakers from the two major parties.

The COVID-19 outbreak presented a clear and present danger as it unfolded in the early spring. We knew little about the disease when it arrived in the United States, but the catastrophic experiences of victims in other countries — China, Iran and Italy in particular — demonstrated the need for some action to curb infections.

Governors in all 50 states have exercised some emergency powers available to them to deal with catastrophic events — some more

aggressively than others.

To her credit, Gov. Kate Brown has not been as heavy-handed as some of her colleagues. Nothing here is intended to be a criticism of her choices.

That said, she has at times shut down large segments of the economy for undetermined lengths of time, closed private and public schools and colleges, forbidden indoor religious services and private gatherings, declared some businesses "essential" and others not, rewritten the terms of rental contracts and restricted access to common healthcare procedures — all by decree and without the consent of the Legislature.

Two separate Oregon statutes give the governor the authority to declare emergencies and exercise broad powers. One specifically addresses public health emergencies, and the other is for general emergency situations. She has invoked both as authority for her executive orders.

The first statute imposes a 14-day limit on the declaration of a health emergency, the other imposes no limit. Although statute allows the Legislature to terminate an emergency declaration on its own

authority, it does not require the Legislature take an up or down vote.

The experience of the last few months demonstrates those declarations should come with a statutory expiration date and a mandate for the Legislature to review actions under the declarations, and to approve any necessary extensions. The response to the virus has cost half a million Oregonians their jobs, destroyed thousands of businesses, cost the state millions in revenue and changed nearly every aspect of public life.

All of these actions may well have been necessary, but none have been subjected to review or challenge by the people's elected representatives.

The governor has called a special legislative session for Monday, Aug. 10. During that session, lawmakers should change the law. If they don't, the people should add such a measure to the ballot.

Would any Legislature override the actions of a governor in an emergency? That's difficult to say. But in a land with the government of, by and for the people, we should not allow an elected governor, even the most benign, to rule indefinitely by decree.

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