

Our View

Local restaurants need help, and local businesses need to comply

While we just wrote about this, please consider ordering takeout this weekend from your favorite bar or restaurant.

Gov. Kate Brown's two-week freeze is in effect, reducing food establishments to takeout only. That means laying off staff and cutting hours.

Union County is not the most densely populated place, but we have a fair variety of good restaurant choices. Let's ensure they can hold on through this tough time. And if you can help, they would appreciate it.

Sandy Sorrels, owner and operator of Ten Depot Street, La Grande, told us Friday that her food service representative was making the rounds to local restaurants, and their situation is dire.

"He said two different owners on his rounds this week broke down and cried," according to Sorrels. "They don't know what to do. They have expended all of their resources."

And while the \$55 million the state is providing in federal CARES funds will go first to businesses in the hospitality industry, restaurants and other business organizations say it's not nearly enough to prevent the freeze from leading to widespread closures.

Sorrels also said that's indeed the situation and the industry needs an infusion of federal funds to make it.

On the flip side of that, there is a local gym flaunting the freeze mandate and remaining open.

Anytime Fitness is not closing down nor requiring its users to wear masks. You can read more about that on the front page of this edition of The Observer.

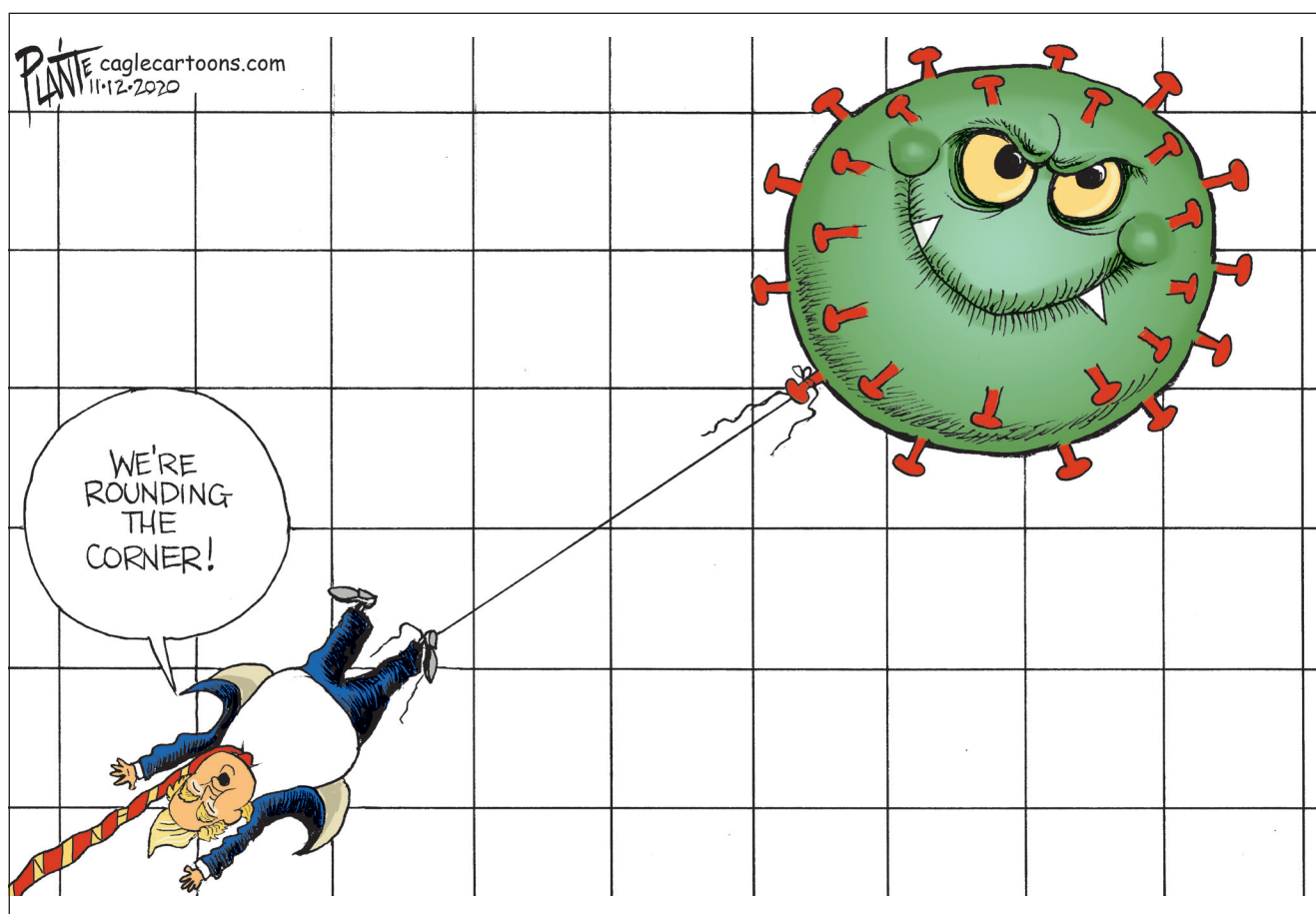
Sure, our local restaurants and gyms have not landed on the Oregon Health Authority's weekly report that includes information on workplace outbreaks. That also has been the situation statewide.

But that's no excuse to disregard the freeze. Union County saw in June what can happen when a local church puts itself above the rest of the community, leading to a raging increase in COVID-19 cases. That's not the kind of thing we want to see happen again.

The county's case count in the last two weeks has been on a steep increase. The freeze is about one thing — stopping that spike here and throughout Oregon.

You can criticize Brown's freeze for not getting the right mix. For being too harsh. For not happening soon enough. For the lack of federal help to ensure businesses will survive. For a state unemployment system that still is behind in getting people their benefits. Yes, what she proposed is wholly imperfect. But faced with a raging pandemic, it is not wholly unreasonable.

Disregarding the freeze or trying to find a way to run around it is the wrong move. Eastern Oregon lawmakers and county commissioners are pushing to have Brown revise her one-size-fits-all approach (you also can read about that on the front page). That effort becomes a larger river to cross each time a business owner or manager in rural Oregon thumbs their nose at actions to stop the spread of COVID-19.



Letters

Use your brain and do the right thing

I cannot find the words to express my anger that so many people refuse to save lives by wearing masks. What has happened to the brains of those who think they need to go to the bar or restaurant and laugh and cough and pick up each other's germs? What in the world is wrong with those who threaten the life of the governor because she wants to protect the citizens of Oregon?

How soft we have gotten that such a simple thing as wearing a mask is such a terrible hardship. The tired, overworked medical workers don't think it is a problem for you to wear a mask or stay a distance away. The guys driving and loading the mobile morgues in the cities wear masks. If those of us in good health would care enough to help out by wearing masks and isolating for a short time, the pandemic would be over sooner and masks would be unimportant.

If you think it is against your constitutional right to be asked to stay home for a couple of weeks, do it because it is the right thing to do. With thousands of people dying and millions crowding the hospitals, doing the right thing holds priority over your selfish claim to a constitutional right. Everyone has the same right but they choose to stay. They don't want to be near you in a business or on the street. But, because you refuse to do the right thing, others choose not to go out and the busi-

nesses suffer for a longer time.

So which has your priority — claim your constitutional right and refuse to cooperate, or do the right thing and save hundreds of thousands of lives? Come on, Oregonians. You have brains, so use them.

Evelyn Swart
Joseph

Not following safety mandates is unpatriotic

Once again, the U.S. Marines have met the enemy and prevailed. The whipped enemy is the coronavirus. Marine Training Center San Diego has no COVID-19 infections. The infection rate throughout the entire Corps is extremely low. As always, discipline and caring for your buddies won the day. The Marines modified training to carefully follow scientific hygiene guidelines. Masking and distancing are enforced, preventing COVID outbreaks and maintaining readiness to fight. Now, compare the Marine approach to that of Tootie Smith, newly elected Clackamas County commissioner.

Smith has gained notoriety, bragging she won't limit her Thanksgiving or Christmas celebrations, that she will "celebrate Thanksgiving dinner with as many family and friends as she can find." She appears to cherish the life of a super spreader. This lack of patriotism is appalling. Smith's unwillingness to make the smallest sacrifice to lessen the burden

on hospitals, doctors, nurses, therapists and floor staff is selfish. Her lack of concern for the lives of the elderly and those with diabetes, hypertension or other conditions is heartbreaking.

Smith's words mock the sacrifices generations of veterans have made. Assigned to a destroyer deployed to the Atlantic and North Sea, I missed many Thanksgivings and Christmases with family back in Eastern Oregon. And I had it easy — with a warm bunk and hot meals — compared to my fellow vets with year-long tours in killing zones of Vietnam, obviously without family or old friends for Thanksgiving or Christmas.

And we paled compared to the greatest generation. My father boarded a troop ship departing San Francisco in December 1941 for the Philippines, but rerouted to Australia, then to the jungles of New Guinea. After three-and-a-half years continuously overseas (and malaria), he returned stateside in April 1945. Yes, he too survived Thanksgivings with no family.

I fear for my family and country if Tootie Smith's attitude of others-be-damned and no-sacrifices-by-me (no matter how small) infects others because of her position of power. I pray Union County leaders will choose authentic patriotism over Smith-style posturing.

Charles Jones
La Grande

Contact your public officials

Local officials

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Elgin: City Hall, 790 S. Eighth Ave., Elgin, OR, 97827; City Recorder/Administrator Brock Eckstein, cityadm@cityofelginor.org; Mayor Allan Duffy, 541-240-9763, mayor@cityofelginor.org; Councilors Mary West, 541-805-0443, councilor3@cityofelginor.org; Kathy Warren, 541-786-9611, councilor6@cityofelginor.org; Risa Hallgarth, 541-437-9462, councilor2@cityofelginor.org; Rocky Burgess, 541-786-2417, councilor1@cityofelginor.org; David Reed, 541-975-3306, councilor4@cityofelginor.org; and Ryan Martin, councilor5@cityofelginor.org.

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Sen. William S. Hansell of Athena (29th District): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-423, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1729. Email: sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov

Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

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Sen. Ron Wyden: wyden.senate.gov.; D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885.

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