

Our View

# Preparing for the next pandemic

The next global pandemic looms. Will Oregon and the world be more prepared? Maybe. But panic, scramble and then relax is the more typical pattern of response to a threat. Oregon should do better. The world is not going to get less crowded or less connected. We can't allow ourselves to get sick of all the focus on sickness.

With the virus raging, now may not be the best time to distract health policy experts and politicians with pandemic preparedness. There are plenty of lessons to learn from this outbreak, but there also are some old emergency preparedness plans worth dusting off to see if they are adaptable to an outbreak. Those plans had their home in Eastern Oregon.

The former Umatilla Chemical Depot near Hermiston stood as a threat to everyone for miles around. While the U.S. Army did a solid job disposing of the piles of chemical munitions there, the federal Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program worked with Hermiston and other communities to ready everyone from grade school students to parents to police officers and firefighters about what to do if there was a terrible accident at the depot that could mean danger for those living nearby.

Massive annual exercises trained first responders and others on how to keep safe, including on the proper use of personal protective equipment and how to shelter at home. Yes, a chemical emergency is a much faster moving event than a virus outbreak, but there are parallels, and one key element of CSEPP's work worth considering is developing community buy-in.

The program worked diligently to encourage residents near the depot to take preparation seriously. Local community leaders such as county commissioners, mayors and police chiefs played vital roles in pounding home that message. The program also went a long way in making the effort a bit easier for folks to protect themselves, providing, for example, free kits to seal homes. A virus preparedness kit, then, could have some proper face masks, sanitizer and perhaps toilet paper.

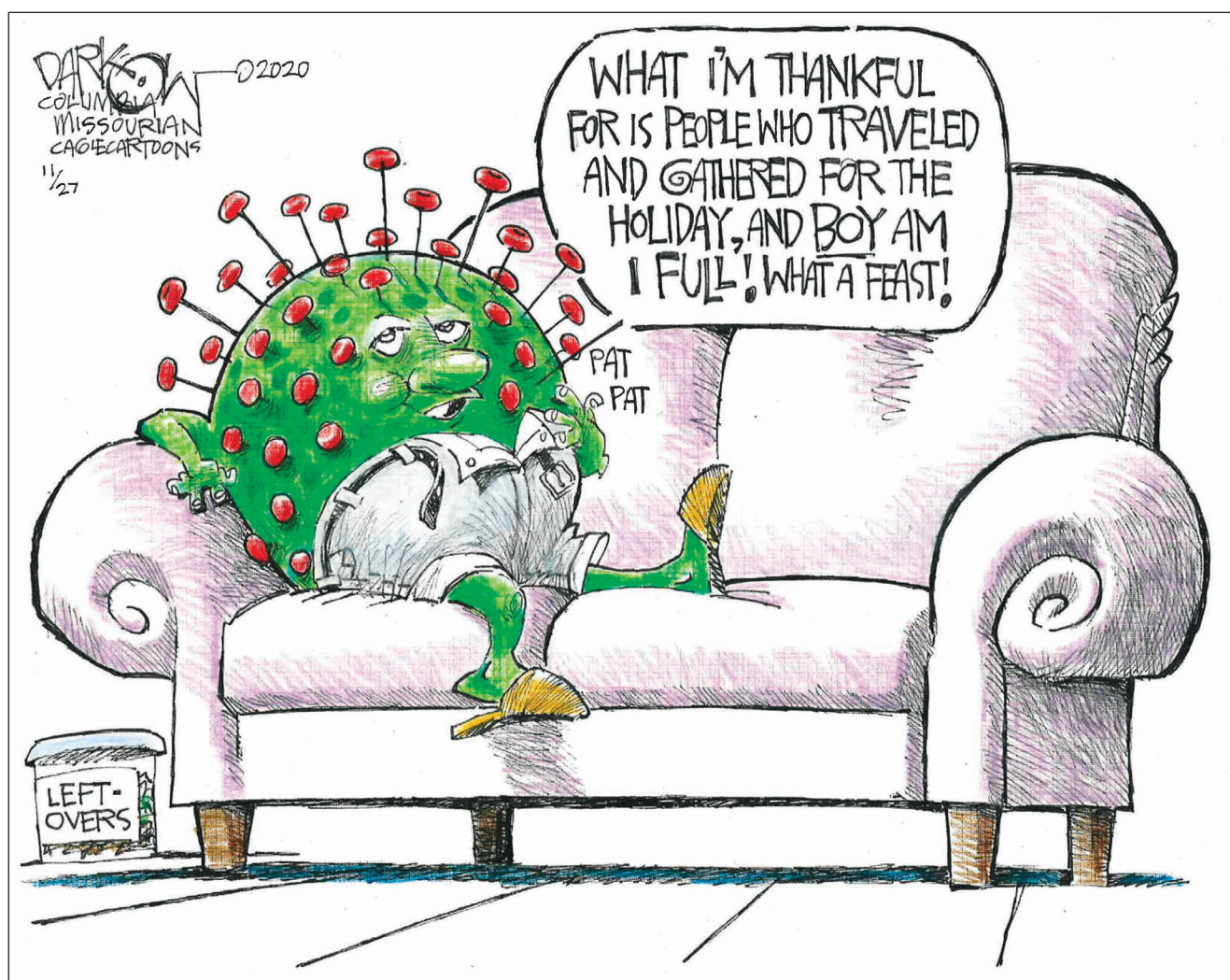
Adapting and implementing those plans might need some help from the state, but probably not a federal agency or program.

At the national level, however, Congress needs to pass another relief package. The Oregon Legislature should do something about renters who may be evicted when the moratorium expires — among other things. There also are a couple longer-term matters to address.

Authority is one.

What role should the Legislature have in making decisions about such sweeping regulation of freedom and the economy? Now its role is near zero. Is it right that Brown should be able to revise and extend emergency orders for month after month? At what point should the law require a governor to get legislative approval? Can the Legislature be nimble enough and functional enough to respond to that? All questions worth revisiting.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended a national campaign to commemorate the 1918 flu pandemic. It was a way to remind people of the dangers of viral pandemics — deaths, the disruption of lives and the economy. People won't need that sort of messaging now. But government at all levels needs to take action to ensure we are better prepared for the next one.



Other Views

## The importance of reading to children



SCOTT SMITH  
EDUCATOR

For generations, we have heard how important it is to read to children. It provides adult time the child (or children) so often crave. You model reading and share in the adventure or learn about the subject matter. There are so many benefits that impact children and they will apply them later in their classrooms at school and for life.

Taking the time to have your child sit and read with you has a big impact on their attention span. Learning to sit and listen is not a natural behavior. We are wired to move. Having your child sit and listen is teaching them and training them that there are times when you have to focus on information they might not be so interested in.

Start off slow. You have to remember the child wants control and the way this is accomplished is by getting you off task. You might have to start with two minutes of sitting and looking at a book. Then later in the day or the next day add a minute. Make each session longer and soon they will realize they are getting your time.

Later, when they start attending school, they have an easier time sitting and focusing on what is happening in the classroom. Again, this is not a natural thing to do but a taught behavior.

If the child is struggling with paying attention, having them draw

or color while you read will defeat the purpose of reading to the child. You have changed the focus of learning and now are reading for your pleasure, not the child's skill-building.

When they draw or color as you read it appears that you are receiving the behavior you want. They are engaged, however, they are not engaged in learning to sit and listen to expand their ability to learn. The focus of reading to the child is to help the brain develop skills the child will need when they are older.

While reading with the child, it is important to interact with them. Talking about the pictures and what the characters are doing or are going to do helps keep their attention.

Preschoolers are not reading, but they can listen. Remember, listening is a learned skill. Talking about what is being read and discussing it builds understanding or comprehension. Listening understanding and comprehension will then transfer to reading understanding and comprehension when they are older and in school.

When children reach the intermediate grades, we see them often struggle with comprehension about what they have read. Quite often, they also struggle with language comprehension. We have to build the child's ability to comprehend what they have heard before they will be able to apply that skill to their own reading.

Often, many teachers feel they have to focus on reading comprehension when their students have not yet acquired the skills of language (listening) comprehension.

There is no question one of the best things you can do for a child is to read to them. If you wish to have a huge impact on a child's learning as they get older, it is key to build their endurance in listening, reading, and discussing. It may only start with less than five minutes. Once you let them draw or color, remember the learning skill has changed and you are teaching them that, "If you do not want to do what I want you to do, it is OK to draw or color."

Reading and discussing what is happening builds pathways in their brain that will later transfer to their own reading comprehension and to life. As you are out driving with your child and see a lake you can ask them questions like, "Do you think there are fish in that lake, like in our book?"

By doing this, you are taking reading to your child to a whole new level of inferencing and prediction. Who knows, they might be the child who understands things uniquely and is able to make changes in our world we had never thought about.

Keep reading and discussing with your children.

*Scott Smith is a Umatilla County educator with 40-plus years of experience. He taught at McNary Heights Elementary School and then for Eastern Oregon University in its teacher education program at Blue Mountain Community College. He serves on the Decoding Dyslexia Oregon board as its parent/teacher liaison.*

## Contact your public officials

**Local officials**

**La Grande:** City Manager Robert Strope, 541-962-1309, fax 541-963-3333; RStrope@cityoflagrande.org; P.O. Box 670, La Grande, OR 97850; Mayor Steve Clements, mayor@cityoflagrande.org; Councilors Gary Lillard (mayor pro tem), glillard@cityoflagrande.org; Nicole Howard, nhoward@cityoflagrande.org; Corine Dutto, cdutto@cityoflagrande.org; Mary Ann Miesner, mmiesner@cityoflagrande.org; Justin Rock, jrock@cityoflagrande.org; and through the city manager's office.

**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.

**Cove:** City Hall, 504 Alder St., P.O. Box 8 Cove, OR 97824; City Recorder Donna Lewis, 541 568-4566, donna.lewis@cityofcove.org; Mayor Del Little, 503-508-6727.

**Union County:** County Courthouse: 1106 K Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-963-1001; fax 541-963-1079; Commissioners Donna Beverage, dbeverage@union-county.org, Matt Scarfo, mscarfo@union-county.org, and Paul Anderes, panderes@union-county.org; administrative officer Shelley Burgess, sburgess@union-county.org.

**Wallowa County:** Courthouse, 101 S. River St., Enterprise OR 97828, 541-426-4543 ext. 15; fax 541-426-0582; Commissioners Susan Roberts, ext.133, sroberts@co.wallowa.or.us; Todd Nash, ext.132, tnash@co.wallowa.or.us;

John Hillock, ext.131, jhillock@co.wallowa.or.us.

**State officials**

**Rep. Greg Barreto** of Cove (58th District): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-384, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1458. Email: rep.gregbarreto@oregonlegislature.gov.

**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.

**United States officials**

**President Donald Trump:** The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

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