

Other Views

Anytime Fitness ignores threat of COVID-19

Recently, Anytime Fitness manager Lynette Williamson defended her decision to keep operating the gym in La Grande in direct violation of COVID-19 restrictions requiring such gyms to close.

Williamson stated, “We are taking our chance. We’re gonna remain open until something happens,” and added members were not being required to wear masks.

“We’ve got disinfectant, everybody’s kind of distant. Everybody’s socially distanced, yeah.”



MICHAEL
HOWARD
LA GRANDE

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has spent a lifetime studying and working on preventing the spread of infectious diseases worldwide, and for months we have heard him explain the need to wear masks and to socially distance.

We’ve watched countless ICU doctors and nurses on TV plead for Americans to follow government restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Yet Williamson — her own science and epidemiology qualifications admittedly unknown — feels confident enough of her own understanding of how the virus spreads to utterly disregard the information and directions coming from the medical/scientific community: “We are taking our chance.”

The problem is that Williamson isn’t just taking a chance with the health and lives of her staff or members. Rather, she is so confident that she knows better than the medical experts how to prevent the spread of the virus that she is willing to “take a chance” with the lives of every member of our community. Approximately 20% of people infected with COVID-19 show no symptoms, but can continue to spread it. There is no way for Williamson to assure that every member working out at her gym is COVID-free, and no way for her to know that an infected member won’t infect others at her gym.

And while the entire medical community insists on the need to prevent further spread of the disease, prevention is clearly not Williamson’s concern. Instead of complying proactively with measures designed to keep COVID-19 from spreading, she cavalierly asserts, “We’re gonna remain open until something happens.” (A call to their number on Dec. 11 said open to members.)

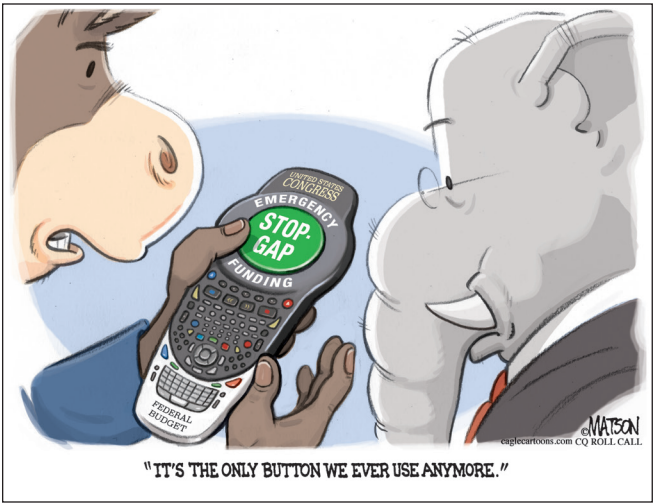
At least Williamson can have a clear conscience: She’s unlikely to know if a member from her gym carries the virus home to a vulnerable parent or grandparent, or transmits it to a diabetic coworker or to a Safeway checker. She is unlikely to learn if her willingness to flaunt government restrictions causes someone else in our community to die. She is clearly willing to take that chance.

In Salem, three gyms defied orders to shut down; the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined them \$90,000. In regard to La Grande’s Anytime Fitness, OSHA has apparently done nothing. Our small rural county has seen nearly 900 COVID-19 cases to date, 10 deaths, and the case count rises daily. Experts predict the next few months will be worse than the months we’ve just endured. When business leaders are willing to play roulette with the lives of other people, one has to wonder why OSHA refuses to defend the lives of members of our community as vigilantly as it does those of the politicians and bureaucrats of Salem.

Michael Howard, 75, lives in La Grande and is a forensic scientist in private practice. He retired from the Oregon State Police Forensic Services Division in 1999 as director of the Bend crime lab.



✿ GRANDPA had to TAKE OUT the NAZIs. You have to WEAR A MASK and GET TAKEOUT.



Our View

Reconsider the restaurant restrictions

The Observer’s related publication, The Baker City Herald, recently asked Gov. Kate Brown’s office to explain why Oregon’s new risk level system for COVID-19 prohibits restaurants and bars from having indoor dining in 25 counties, including Union and Baker, that are in the extreme risk category.

The question, which no doubt many Oregonians have pondered, stems from the lack of evidence that restaurants and bars have contributed significantly to the surge in virus cases that started this fall and has affected almost every Oregon county, including Baker.

Indeed, the governor and other government officials have said repeatedly that private parties and other social gatherings are driving the trend.

Liz Merah, the governor’s press secretary, responded to the query with an email that fails to establish a connection between indoor restaurant dining and the troubling trend in the pandemic.

Merah wrote the current guidelines restrict “businesses/activities that are considered high risk (for reasons such as requiring people to be gathered indoors for extended periods, requiring removal of face coverings, or being difficult to maintain strict physical distancing).”

But the point here is not whether a business or activity is “considered” a high risk. What matters is whether there’s demonstrable evidence that a high risk exists.

Merah also wrote the restaurant restrictions “model the changes we need Oregonians to make in limiting gatherings and physical con-

tact with others.”

But it’s clear not all gatherings pose a comparable risk. Eating at a restaurant might seem similar to having a party at your home, but the data from COVID-19 contact tracing shows the parties, not the restaurants, are the problem. This is hardly surprising. Restaurants, when open for indoor dining, required masks. They limited seating to maintain distancing. They sanitized. Their buildings have better ventilation than a typical home.

The governor should reconsider the current slate of restrictions, in particular those on restaurants and bars. Taking steps to curb the COVID-19 spread is wise. Imposing severe limits on one group of businesses, without a definitive benefit, is neither wise nor fair.

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