

Our View

Orders continue without legislative oversight

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Dec. 17 extended her COVID-19 emergency order through March. She joins other governors in the region, Democrats and Republicans, in extending one-person rule.

We ask the indulgence of frequent readers as we plow ground we have worked a few times during the ongoing pandemic. As long as the governor reissues these orders without the review and explicit consent of the representatives of the people, we feel compelled to continue to take issue.

Did legislators who passed statutes granting governors the authority to declare emergencies envision a governor would use them indefinitely to shut down large segments of the economy for undetermined lengths of time, to close private and public schools and colleges, to forbid religious services and private gatherings, declare some businesses “essential” and others not, to rewrite the terms of rental contracts, and restrict access to common health care procedures and the courts?

We do not deny state governments must take steps to control the spread of the virus and protect residents. The experience of the last nine months demonstrates emergency orders should come with a statutory expiration date and a mandate for the Legislature to review actions under them.

Here the laws of Oregon fail the people of Oregon.

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. Brown 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.

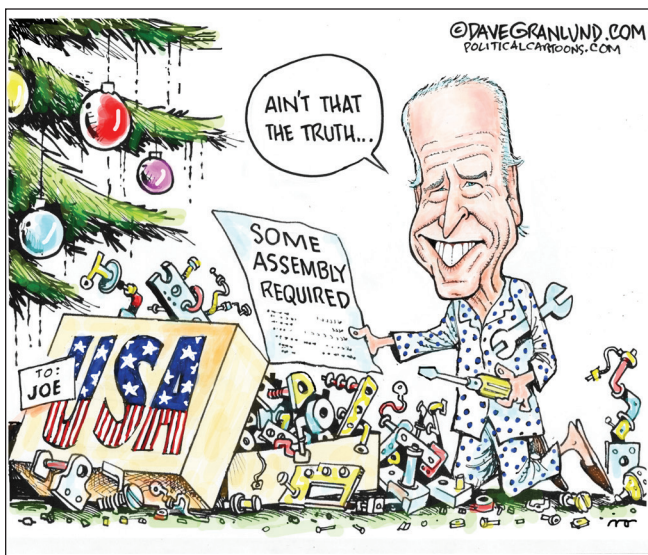
Although statute allows the Legislature to terminate an emergency declaration on its own authority, it does not require lawmakers meet to consider any of the actions taken.

The Oregon Legislature has chosen to remain silent, so the fault lies with it. It has not been alone. Few state legislatures have cast votes to either affirm or challenge emergency declarations and the diktats issued in their name.

We need to change state laws to mandate legislative consent.

The dangers of the pandemic are real. Thousands have died, and many thousands more have been infected. The dangers of the shutdowns and restrictions under the emergency orders are real, too. Hundreds of thousands have been thrown out of work, tens of thousands lost businesses in which they invested their lives and fortunes, millions of school children are falling behind.

No elected official should be allowed to rule indefinitely by decree. We need laws to limit the duration of emergency powers and subject them to mandatory legislative oversight. A benevolent dictatorship in all but name is nonetheless tyranny.



Other Views

Three things that kept me sane in 2020



JOHN L. MICEK
POLITICAL JOURNALIST

The end of this sad, strange, historic and transformative year is almost upon us. And like a lot of you, I found myself burrowing into ritual, structure and obligatory loaves of sourdough to fill up those hours of social isolation thrust upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But of course, you can't live on pandemic sourdough alone. So here's a quick list of the books, music and bits of culture that provided some peace and tranquility amid the frantic hours of work, moments of mourning and surprising intervals of joy and extreme gratitude that made up my 2020.

“1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed,” Eric H. Cline, Princeton University Press

When you're staring down what feels like the end of history, it's only natural to wonder if we've been here before, and what lessons those times of trouble hold for us now.

This slender, but massively weighty volume, by George Washington University classicist Eric H. Cline, takes up one of the great mysteries of human history. In 1177 B.C., after centuries of brilliance, the civilizations of the late Bronze Age Mediterranean came to an abrupt and cataclysmic end. Over the space of a generation or so, the Mycenaeans, the Minoans, the Hittites and the Babylonians slid into irreversible decline, vanishing from

history, into a centuries-long dark age that didn't end until the emergence of what we now know as the classical era around 750 B.C.

Historians are still trying to unravel the interconnected calamities, which ranged from incursions by seaborne groups of marauders collectively known as the “Sea Peoples” and internal unrest, to the severing of sophisticated regional trade routes, that hastened the end of the Late Bronze Age. While it's a very foreign world in a lot of ways, it's also one that is recognizably our own, reminding us that civilization is a delicate thing that needs to be tended to and nurtured if it is to survive.

“Folklore,” Taylor Swift

For all the ink that's been spilled about the death of the monoculture, July's surprise release of Taylor Swift's ninth record was a throwback to those seemingly bygone years where we were all listening to the same records at the same time.

The minimalist, folk-imbued electronica that Swift crafted in lockdown with The National's Aaron Dessner, and longtime collaborator Jack Antonoff of Bleachers, was just the sort of quiet escapism that we were all looking for. Sometimes the right record comes along at the right moment. Swift found hers with “Folklore.”

“The Mandalorian,” Disney+

After a concluding Skywalker trilogy that felt as overstuffed as often as it felt half-baked, writer/director Jon Favreau's space western marked a welcome return to smaller-scale storytelling that managed to evoke the pulpy best of the original film

series, while forging a ground that was uniquely its own. Pedro Pascal's laconic bounty hunter Din Djarin, the Mandalorian of the title, channeled fan nostalgia for the bounty hunter Boba Fett of the original series, even as he established himself as a new and serious player in the sprawling mythos.

Warning: Spoilers ahead.

Fan service abounded throughout the series, with such favorites as Jedi Knight Ahsoka Tano being brought to vivid life by Rosario Dawson (who's getting her own series). The resurrection of Boba Fett was another welcome (if slightly expected) moment. And, of course, the surprise return of a certain legendary Jedi Knight in the Season Two finale was one of those heart-stopping moments that the franchise excels at when it's at its best.

But there's no doubt the emotional center of the series was the emerging father/child relationship between Mando and Grogu (don't call him Baby Yoda anymore).

Some of the series' sweetest moments came when Pascal's bounty hunter let down his guard and allowed this impossibly adorable creature into his scarred heart. That journey into fatherhood is what keeps “The Mandalorian” from devolving into just another big-budget, Hollywood shoot-em-up.

An award-winning political journalist, John L. Micek is editor-in-chief of The Pennsylvania Capital-Star in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Email him at jmicek@penncapital-star.com and follow him on Twitter @ByJohnLMicek.

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Phone: 541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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STAFF

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