

My Voice

Getting vaccinated is a civic responsibility — and the time is now

Vaccine hesitancy has emerged as an important issue in our society. For several reasons a significant segment of our population is reluctant to receive the vaccine for COVID-19. It may be argued that any reason at all is adequate for people to refuse to be vaccinated.

It might be seen as a personal freedom to refuse to be vaccinated. However, I do not think that such a position is best for our society as a whole.



DALE LAURITZEN
LA GRANDE

The central issue has to do with achieving herd immunity. Various estimates exist concerning the percentage of the population that has to be immunized in order to reach herd immunity. These estimates range from about 70% to 90% of the population. The critical level will be reached when the pathogen literally runs out of hosts to perpetuate its viability. Then, according to the experts, the virus will whither away. Because of this it appears that it is time to make COVID-19 immunizations mandatory.

We hear various arguments that maintain that civic responsibility should be the only force to ensure that people receive the vaccine.

A variety of arguments are used to resist mandatory inoculations. Some of the arguments include the following:

1) Needle fear. Of course no one looks forward to have a needle injected into your arm. However, it is a nearly painless procedure.

2) Belief in conspiracy theories. Such theories may suggest that people will develop long-range health problems if they take the vaccine. Of course there is no way to guarantee that absolutely no one might develop complications resulting from any immunization, but those kinds of outcomes are statistically much less dangerous than the possible results of actually catching COVID-19. The deaths of more than half a million U.S. citizens from COVID-19 is evidence of that.

3) Self-isolation. This view maintains that some people live such a sheltered existence that they are not likely to be exposed to the disease. Good luck!

I suspect the most common anti-vaxxer argument is that to mandate people to take the vaccine is an infringement on their personal rights and freedoms. This is probably the least credible argument of all. The truth is that we limit individual behaviors all the time in order to protect the common good.

Such restrictions include speed laws, licensing laws and public behavior restrictions (try getting away with wearing no clothes in public). Ironically, we demand that all children must be vaccinated against certain diseases before they are allowed to attend schools.

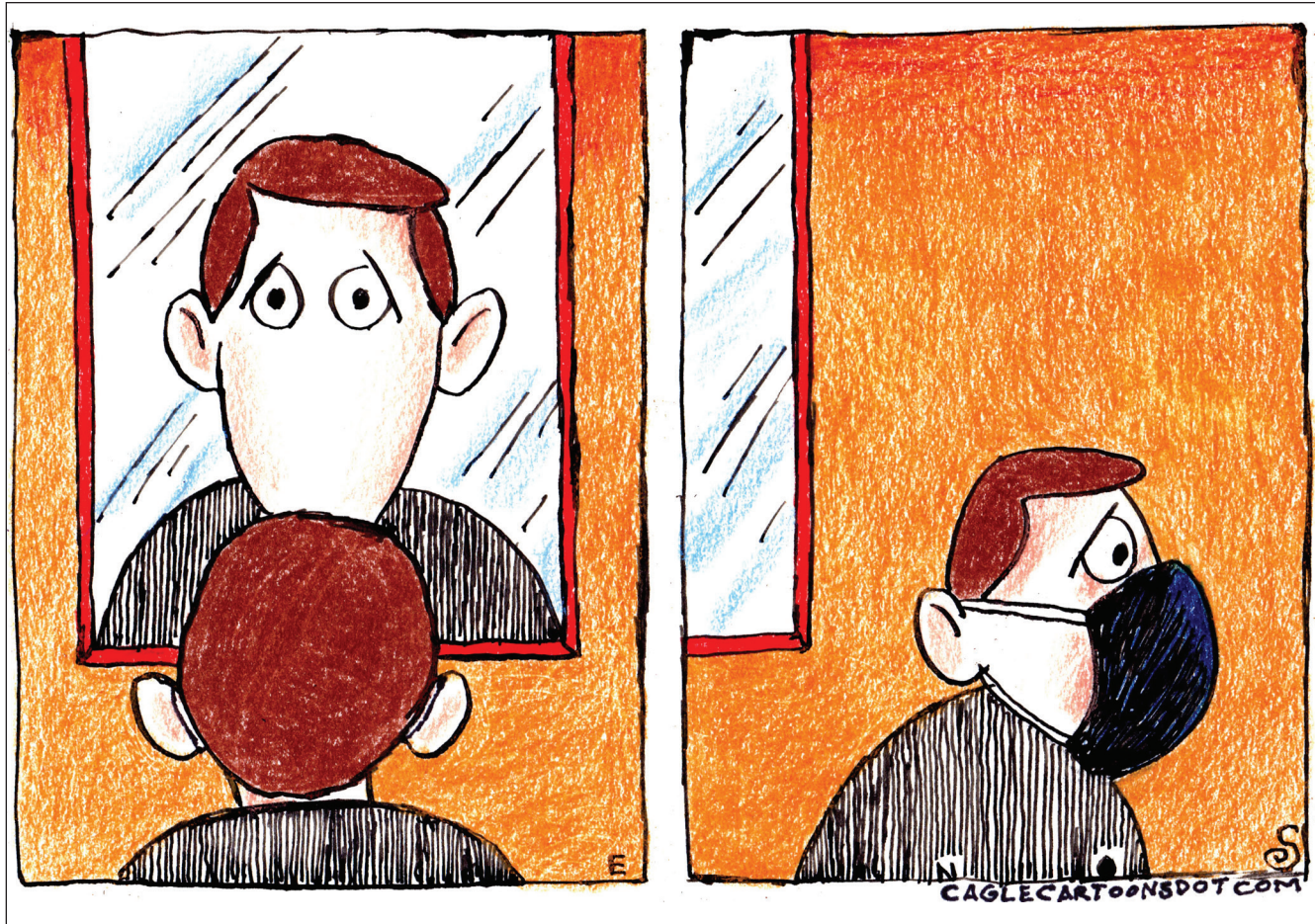
It might be possible to defeat the pandemic and allow some people not to be immunized. Perhaps everyone who receives the vaccine could be given a “vaccine passport.” Obviously everyone who refuses to be immunized would not be given such a document. There would be severe restrictions placed on non-passport holders. They could be prevented from leaving their homes, attending school or on-site work, as well as be unable to go to public spaces such as restaurants and supermarkets until the pandemic ends.

Of course the best way to deal with the current health crisis is for everyone to exercise their own civic responsibility. To do so they would line up, roll up their sleeves and protect both themselves and the rest of society. Although great progress has been made (131,000,000 people have received at least one shot at this time), it is not enough. It is time to guarantee that everyone perform their civic responsibility or be legally required to do so.

Perhaps the dumbest thing we could do is to allow what has happened in India during the last few weeks. Of course India faces challenges that we do not, but their numbers of COVID-19 cases have sky-rocketed. They are seeing up to one-third of a million reported new cases every day.

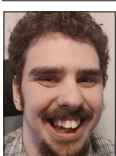
We have the resources and need only the commitment to make sure this does not happen in the United States. It is time to be certain that everyone is vaccinated.

Dale Lauritzen of La Grande is a native Nebraskan and remains a Cornhusker. He received his academic degrees at the University of Nebraska and worked as a social studies teacher and a professor of teacher education. He now is a dedicated golfer, enthusiastic angler and an avid traveler.



My Voice

Better accessibility would improve life for many



MATTHEW BRINEY
LA GRANDE

My name is Matthew Briney and I am a resident of La Grande who has a disability. I grew up in Union County. My family moved to Cove from Island City for my education to accommodate with my disability, cerebral palsy.

After I graduated from high school, my family moved to downtown La Grande for the convenience of not having to travel 20 minutes constantly from Cove to La Grande. This makes doing errands and our activities easier. I was planning to go to college at Eastern Oregon University, and my father would be closer to where he works. The advantage of the house that we moved into was that the college was just a block away and up a hill.

While living in La Grande comes with many benefits, there is a subtle

obstacle that became much more noticeable as I lived in La Grande for a while. This obstacle that I have experienced is an accessibility issue.

See, before this pandemic shut-down, I enjoyed taking walks, or “scrolls” in my case, in the spring and summer. Especially, if you live downtown, the walking distance to most if not all places is reasonable. In summer, I would like to “walk” to the farmers market on Saturday and to Cook Memorial Library or Le Bebe Cakes Bakery every so often. Despite having activities be so close, the majority of the sidewalks aren’t accessible and don’t have curb cuts.

This makes getting around this town challenging not only for the elderly, but for the people like me who have a disability that affects their mobility. When I go somewhere or just for a walk in general, it tends to feel like a maze trying to navigate and to find wheelchair-friendly sidewalks that I can safely get on/off of with my electric wheelchair.

Without these essential curb cuts, oftentimes I had been forced to drive

on the side of roads, which isn’t ideal and is a safety hazard. There are other times when I am fortunate enough to use the sidewalks but to do so I have to go the opposite direction than I intend until I have a chance to cross over, including driving up driveways. For example, the block where I live doesn’t have any curb cuts, meaning I have to use my neighbor’s driveway to get to my house, which is an inconvenience.

This is a problem that really needs to be fixed. Updating these old sidewalks would make life easier for residents of this town, especially those who are disabled or who are elderly.

I hope writing about this topic can bring awareness and make accessibility a priority not only in La Grande, but to Union County as well.

Matthew Briney graduated from Cove High School and is a La Grande resident. He is passionate about writing, being active in the community and sharing his experiences as a person who has a disability.

Letters

Munck is my hometown hero

Bailey Munck. What an incredible “silence breaker” at 17 years old. She too deserves to be on the cover of Time magazine, like the women in 2017 who launched the “me too” movement and began to hold accountable men who abuse their power and take.

I’m proud of my dad, state Sen. Bill Hansell, for not just listening to his constituents but taking action, for advocating to close the existing loophole that allows teachers be held to a lesser account in how they behave with students than coaches are. It’s time to fix that loophole. Bailey and her family picked the right senator. My dad, with five daughters, has been advocating for equity and opportunity for women throughout his entire career.

The recent article on “Bailey’s Bill” literally brought me to tears. As described, Bailey “enduring” sexual harassment from her English teacher, at home, during school and at sporting events shows that more must be done to ready consequences for teachers that take and abuse.

I’d put her friends, the ones on the bus that came alongside Bailey and heard her story and encouraged her to share, on the cover of Time magazine as well. They are young women that are saying “No More” and holding their predator teacher DeYoe accountable. I hope and encourage them to keep their voice and use it always.

Bailey, with courage, is sharing her story, speaking a powerful truth, and seeking justice.

I have a new hero from my Athena hometown — Bailey Munck.

*Elizabeth Hansell
Santa Monica, California*

Write to us

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.

Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author’s name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will not publish anonymous letters.

Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.

Longer community comment columns, such as My Voice, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot and a one-sentence biography. Like letters to the editor, columns must refrain from complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Submissions must carry the author’s name, address and phone number.

Submission does not guarantee publication, which is at the discretion of the editor.

Letters deadline for May 18 elections

The Observer does not run endorsements of more than 400 words.

The Observer will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day, if necessary.

We run local letters of endorsement on a first-come, first-served basis.

Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by 5 p.m. Friday, May 7.

We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run.

Election Day is May 18.

Send letters to:

letters@lagrandeobserver.com or via mail to editor Phil Wright, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

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