

My Voice

Reexamining the 'science' behind COVID-19 policy

Gov. Kate Brown recently extended, again, the state of emergency regarding COVID-19, citing only a vague reference to a "fourth wave." The Oregon Health Authority website reveals that daily case numbers for early May are level or slightly declining, as is the death rate from COVID-19. Hospitals are not overwhelmed — far from it. In the whole U.S., cases have dropped 30% in the past two weeks. We have breathing room to reevaluate state policies for handling the pandemic.



TOM HERRMANN
EOU, RETIRED

Any scientist knows that the science is never "settled." Years ago, two of my published

papers were challenged by some Japanese biochemists. While not thrilled, I welcomed their observations, because that's the way science works. Ideas and models should be freely criticized. However, in this pandemic, the so-called science tends to become political and policy makers often care more about looking good than about the welfare of the citizens.

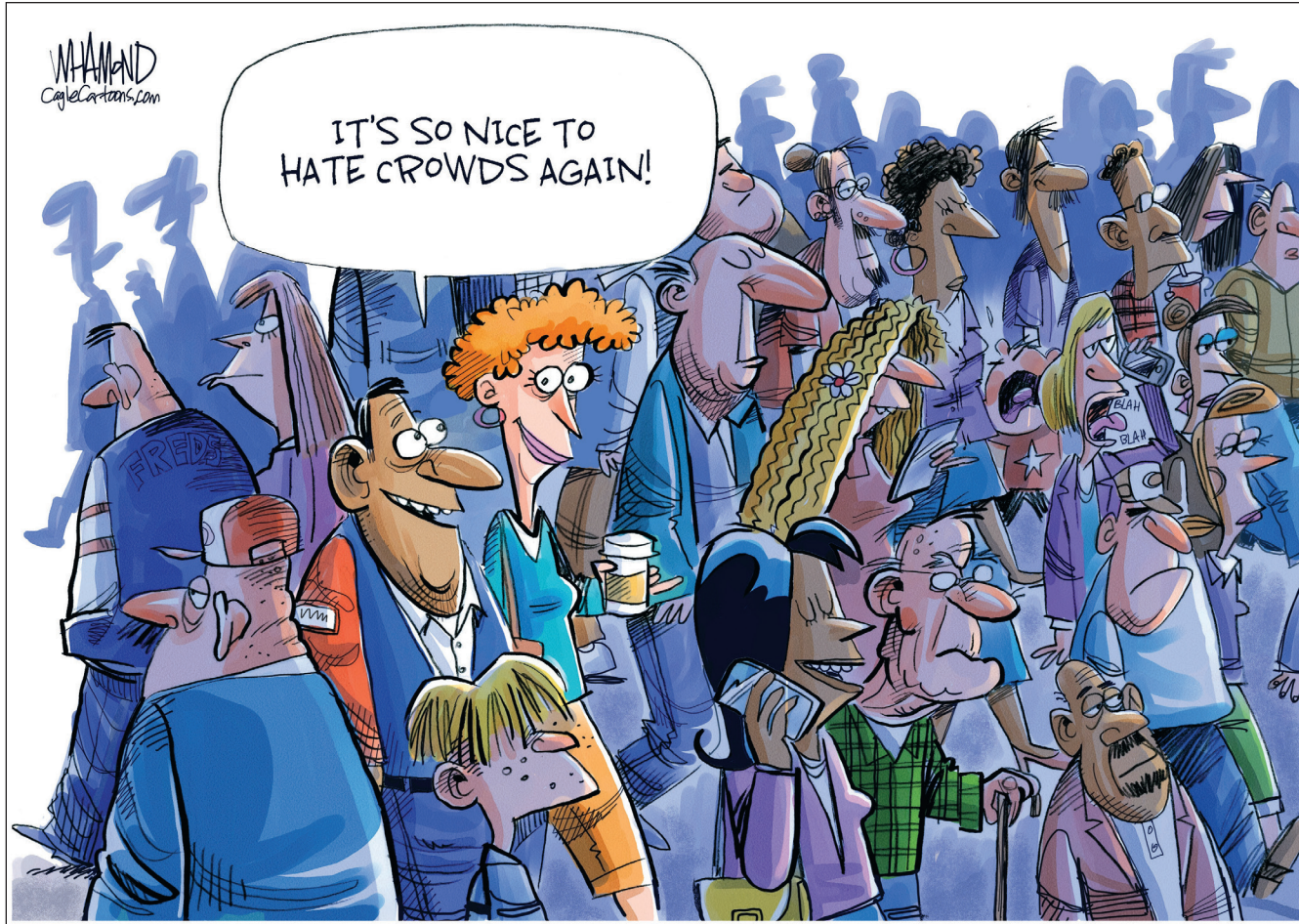
I have read seven published studies, including one in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and another in The Lancet, which conclude that lockdowns do not significantly reduce overall critical cases or mortality. We are all aware of some negative effects of the lockdown, but it may be worse than we thought. For example, hospitals are reporting a 30% to 50% increase in admissions due to alcoholic liver damage. The Observer (Oct. 24, 2020) reported a 70% increase in opioid deaths compared to the previous year. Unemployment is closely correlated with increases in spousal and child abuse. The OHA website gives us the number of deaths in Oregon, week by week, compared to the previous five-year average for those weeks. Since September 2020, the total number of "excess deaths" is now 4,925, while the total COVID deaths are half that, at 2,481. One suspects the lockdown is responsible for a large part of those non-COVID excess deaths. A European study comparing "hard-lockdown" and "mild-lockdown" countries suggests the same.

The OHA lists a total of two people younger than 20 having died of this coronavirus, yet our public schools were closed until recently, with heartbreaking loss in educational progress. Since longevity and income are correlated with educational achievement, a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association suggests this generation of schoolchildren will cumulatively lose more years of life than was lost by all COVID-19 victims. Another study by researchers at Johns Hopkins and Duke University predicts that "unemployment shock" will result in 0.8 million additional deaths over the next 15 years. One might be skeptical of these statistical predictions, but they are still sobering.

Those who maintain that lockdowns are helpful have some explaining to do. Even Dr. Fauci expressed puzzlement at the dropping death rates in Texas and Mississippi after these states opened in March. There is little correlation between state lockdown policies and infection rates: compare Florida and California.

Anyone who wants the vaccine can get it. Our young people are not at significant risk from the virus. There are now effective protocols for lessening the severity and recovery time of a COVID-19 infection. In light of all this, Kate Brown should rescind her emergency order and trust Oregonians to use common sense in handling the risk, while they get back to school and work.

Tom Herrmann is a fourth-generation Union County resident and retired EOU professor who lives in La Grande with his wife, Swannee.



Our View

State money comes with a gag order

We read something peculiar in the Malheur Enterprise: The board of a public development company has dictated that a family in Nyssa is forbidden to talk to the media if it wants up to \$400,000 to help with an industrial road.

That's the government saying if you want a benefit, you get gagged.

The background: The Froerers farm about 4,000 acres. The plan is to close a railroad reload center and move it to another location. That means the Froerers must truck their goods several additional miles to get them loaded. The money is from the Malheur County Development Corp. to build a new access road

for the Froerers. The state department of transportation is providing funding, according to the newspaper. The gag order expires when the project is completed.

The Froerers argue they were offered an unfair choice: Accept the gag order and get the money or no money. They signed.

It's not clear exactly why a gag order was put in place, though one reason could be obvious. The Froerers have in the past criticized Greg Smith, the reload center project manager, director of the Malheur County Economic Development Department and a state representative. Smith said he didn't put the gag provision in the contract. Lawyers did.

Gag orders do occur in court cases to limit publicity and

attempt to protect the right to a fair trial. And parties sometimes have similar provisions in legal settlements and nondisclosure agreements in development deals. For instance, Apple Inc. has had confidentiality agreements with Crook County and Prineville officials to keep them from talking about the company's plans there.

This seems different. State money is being spent only on condition that a family keep quiet, when the family has been outspoken in the past. Yes the farmers are getting a benefit to compensate them for an expense they will pay because the reload center is moving. But it also looks like state dollars are being used to muzzle criticism. Is that OK with you?

Letter

Greater Idaho website explains logistics

I'd like to answer some questions raised by an op-ed opposing the relocation of the Oregon/Idaho border.

Oregon state assets such as snowplows, prisons, land, buildings and pension funds were paid for by all the people of Oregon, including East Oregonians. We paid for some of it, and so it's certain that any deal negotiated between Oregon and Idaho will allow rural Oregonians to take their share of the assets with them when the border is relocated.

We propose that any legislation to move the border give 21% of state assets and liabilities to Idaho, since 21% of the population of Oregon would become citizens of Idaho. This applies to the state debt as well.

We recommend that the legislation to relocate the border should grandfather in the professional licenses, driver's licenses and local election results. If the law is clear, no court battles will be necessary. Idaho doesn't require professional licenses for as many professions anyway.

All of these questions and more are answered in our FAQ and our proposal at www.greateridaho.org

Mike McCarter, President, Citizens for Greater Idaho La Pine

Write To Us

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