

OUR VIEW

It's time for government to trust the people

When it comes to COVID, we've always been in the pro-vaccine camp. But we can't support government efforts to mandate that citizens show proof of vaccination in order to gain certain privileges.

We understand that there are those with certain conditions who can't be vaccinated, and that others have religious beliefs that forbid the practice. Still others have decided to forgo the vaccination, betting instead that they are among the group on which the virus has minimal effect.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently changed its guidance, now holding that fully vaccinated persons don't need to wear a mask in most situations. If the vaccines work as we are told that they do, the vaccinated are unlikely to get COVID and are unlikely to spread it to the unvaccinated.

But the states hold the final word. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has said that she will lift most restrictions when 70% of eligible Oregonians are vaccinated. According to the Oregon Health Authority, only 52% had been fully vaccinated by May 28.

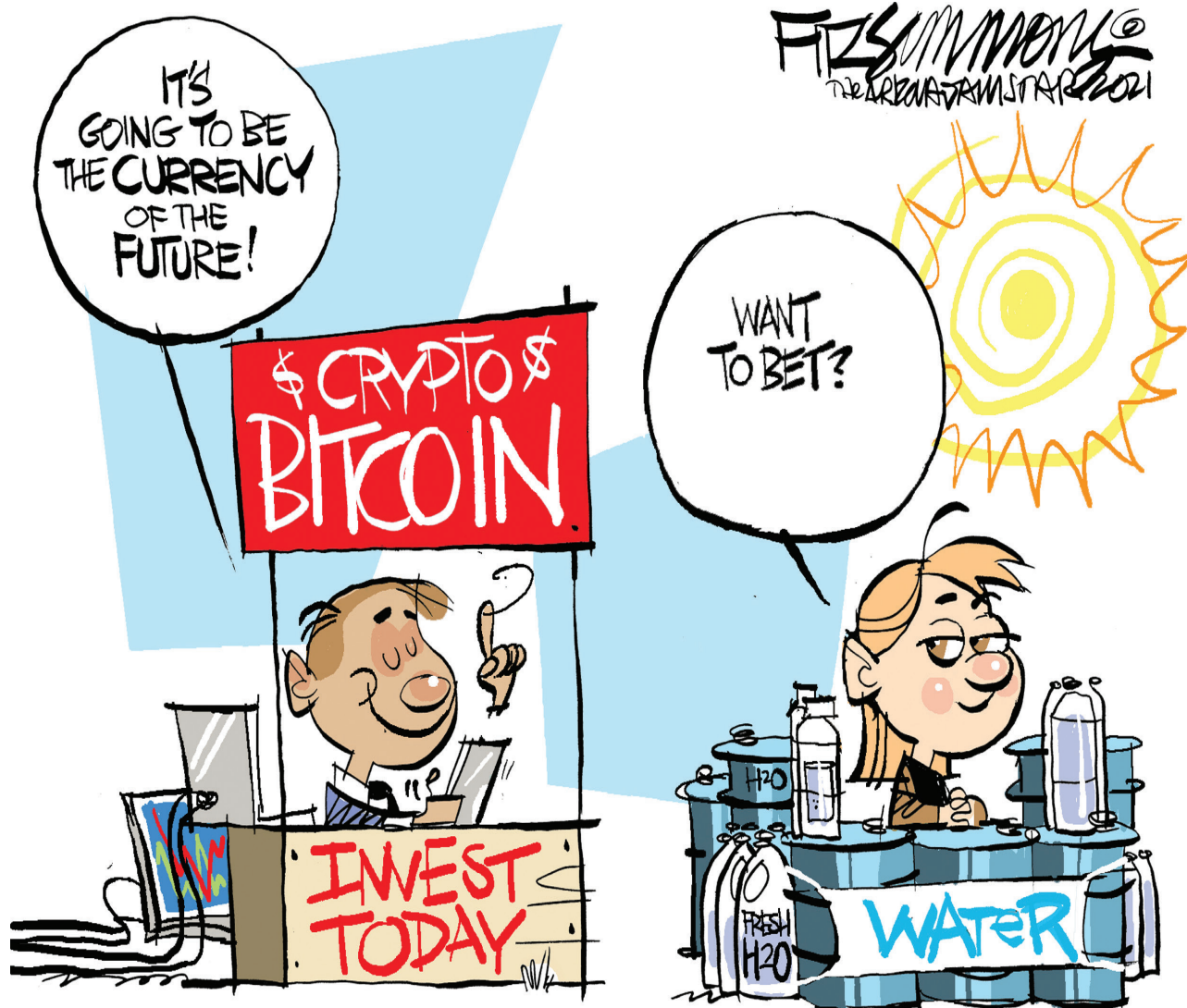
OHA rules say businesses, employers and faith institutions may allow vaccinated persons to go unmasked as long as each patron is checked at the door and those without masks can show proof of vaccination.

We are uncomfortable with requiring citizens to carry around a set of documents to prove their health status. Washington allows vaccinated persons to go unmasked, but does not mandate that anyone check their papers.

Private businesses and institutions are free to set their own rules. If a store or restaurant wants unmasked patrons to present their CDC vaccination record card before allowing entry, or continue to require all customers to be masked, that's their business.

And we suspect that many businesses will do the latter rather than set up their employees to pass judgment on the legitimacy of customer documentation and be subjected to the conflicts that could result.

Over the course of the pandemic, the public has been told that it must trust the government. It seems that the government should return the courtesy.



Key changes shape sports coverage

ANDREW CUTLER
FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

As an editor, nothing strikes so hard and so quick as the notion you must make changes to the existing product in order to meet economic realities.

I sometimes wish being an editor was like it was back in the day when the man in charge of the newsroom wore his fedora and sat with his sleeves rolled up and dealt strictly with the "news."

That paradigm, if it ever existed, is long gone from this business. Editors must wear a number of different hats in today's shifting economic landscape. Yet, this job, as editor, as a journalist at a small-town paper, is truly rewarding. If you are good at what you do, you get to make a real difference in the community nearly every day.

And that fact overshadows almost all of the negatives that are attached to this particular vocation.

It's no secret the impact COVID-19 has had on The Observer and our parent company, EO Media Group. It forced our hand on a few fronts and accelerated some timelines into decisions that — at the time —

seemed unthinkable.

So what does all this mean, you may ask.

Well, for one, it has meant the way The Observer is covering sports is starkly different than it was pre-pandemic.

When I arrived in La Grande at the end of 2012, The Observer had a two-man sports department. Through the years, attrition and the financial woes of The Observer's former company, Western Communications, eventually left us with a one-man department.

Fortunately for us that one man was Ronald Bond. Prior to COVID-19, Ronald worked harder than most adequately staffed sports departments in the state, covering games all across Union County and finding those interesting athletes with unique stories to tell. Once the virus brought sports in Oregon to a screeching halt, Ronald was forced into service covering news. As The Observer navigated its way through a COVID-19 world in 2020, Ronald provided stories to make sure there was a sports presence, but then last fall, Ronald was promoted to editor of the Chieftain, leaving a hole in The Observer's sports coverage.

Former editor Phil Wright filled that hole in early May with the hiring of Davis Carbaugh. Having Car-

baugh on staff is good news. However, having Carbaugh on staff to cover sports doesn't mean the way we report on local sports will return to the way we reported on sports before COVID.

Our digital news coverage is 24-7, reported as it happens. Game updates will be reported in real time, giving you your local sports results in the most timely manner. Print reporting will focus more on features and upcoming matches than on game coverage. Our sports pages will be devoted to telling unique stories on the athletes or teams in the area and preview some of the bigger games.

If you're a subscriber and haven't yet taken advantage of activating the digital features included in your print subscription price, call our customer service center at 800-781-3214 and activate your digital access.

These changes to our sports coverage matrix will take a little getting used to for all of us, but it offers the best of what The Observer provides — timely coverage and unique local stories in print and online.

Andrew Cutler is the interim editor of The Observer and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the La Grande Observer, East Oregonian and four more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.

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THE OBSERVER
An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com Phone: 541-963-3161

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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Send address changes to:
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La Grande, OR 97850

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