

OUR VIEW

Political
rhetoric won't
stop the virus

The decision by the Union County Board of Commissioners to approve a resolution last week protesting Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 mandates wasn't much of a surprise, and in the end it probably won't make much difference in terms of what is fast becoming a high-octane debate regarding the virus.

To be clear, this newspaper believes whether a person chooses to get a COVID-19 vaccination is a personal matter, best decided between a patient and their health care provider.

However, while not scientific, we are confident that most health care providers — the subject matter experts — would recommend vaccinations.

The decision by the county board, though, underscores how a medical and public health matter has spilled over into the public forum and become a lightning rod in certain areas of the state.

It is unfortunate the lines between medicine, public health and political rhetoric have become so blurred. While not exactly unexpected currently, the impact from such blurring is evident in measures like the one created and OK'd by the board of commissioners.

What really matters isn't so much the political aspect of this debate but the effect it can have on those who are trying hard to wrestle and defeat another surge in the COVID-19 virus.

The virus is alive and well in Union County. And it is killing people.

Often the refrain is "Well, COVID-19 isn't that bad. Most recover from it."

What if you are one of those the virus does hit hard? What if you are one of those who dies from the virus? What then? The virus is more than a nuisance, or a vague concept, for those who die from it.

The emphasis has shifted from a medical issue to a political one and that is where the public, at large, loses.

Whether we like it or not we have a major public health crisis going on and people continue to perish because of it. Much like the Titanic, while people die, the band, so to speak, plays on, and elected leaders quickly jump on the boat to chastise the governor.

Our emphasis should be on stemming a public health crisis and saving actual lives, not picking political battles.



LETTERS

Urgent action required to
save Northwest salmon

As a retired fish biologist who still spends a lot of time with rivers, I've observed the impacts of warming rivers on fish and other wildlife here in Northeastern Oregon for many years. This summer has been grim.

Water temperatures are through the roof. In July, the entire run of endangered Snake River sockeye had to be trucked from Lower Granite Dam to their spawning streams. Water in the Snake was hot enough to kill them.

Climate change means that every year, we must be ready to implement drastic solutions like this on a moment's notice or risk losing runs of salmon and other freshwater species. Our "rubber meets the road" solutions need to be flexible and immediate — not 10 years from now, but today.

Securing a future for our region's iconic wildlife and fighting climate change should go hand in hand. Oregon is a leader in both these arenas, and Gov. Brown was correct in her recent op-ed: A federal infrastructure appropriation is the right way to tackle these issues simultaneously. Sens. Wyden and Merkley, we need your leadership to secure federal investments for the Columbia Basin now.

Climate-smart energy infrastructure, and regional programs such as compensation to farmers who share their irrigation water with fish, are working solutions that make a difference right now. Expand these solutions.

Urgent action is required, or we risk a future filled with litigation, climate chaos and most certainly the extinction of many salmon species here in the Pacific Northwest.

Mary Edwards
Joseph

Compassionate people
provide hope in time
of unrest

The coronavirus pandemic, hurricanes and flooding, wildfires and the plight of refugees are fueling the division and political unrest in the United States, as well as the entire world. It is tempting to join in with the weeping and wailing and anger and blaming. And it tempts those of good will to sink into overwhelming depression and helplessness, not knowing how to deal with the suffering of so many human souls.

We forget to reflect on the courageous health providers who work long hours, sometimes unceasing, to care for the tragically sick and dying in our community and across the country. We forget to be thankful for the majority of citizens who care for the welfare of others in the community enough that they get their vaccinations and wear masks in public in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The astounding bravery of those people working to save the stranded in floods and devastation and to reconstruct the communities that are suffering is worthy of thankfulness, gratitude and praise. As are the tireless firefighters facing the wildfires' life-threatening danger.

The American service men and women, grateful for their assistance facing the enemy in Afghanistan, are providing an example of human compassion and brotherhood. Those workers and volunteers serving homeless refugees all over the world attempt to soften the suffering of so many without food, clothing and shelter.

I thank God for the compassionate people who work for the welfare of others and provide hope for us all.

Eveyln Swart
Joseph

We need to change
with the climate

A recent "Our view" editorial in The Observer, written after the release of the most recent report from the intergovernmental panel on climate change, implied that there are two sides to the climate debate.

But those two voices are really the same language spoken with a different accent.

It's understandable that there's a desire to put a positive spin on this. But getting policy proposals from academic experts is like buying your food from an auto dealership. That's not their business. It takes decades to get a dam built, decades that we don't have. And that's before we talk about the disappearance of salmon and steelhead whose numbers have dwindled to nothing. The steep drop off is because we've already dammed up so many streams. Those fish evolved in fast-flowing waters and that's what's in short supply.

That said, there's much to be optimistic about, but it's new stuff, stuff that will turn things upside down, and that's hard. This isn't about technology. Electric vehicles, charging

stations, solar panels, wind turbines, battery storage, digital controls to connect them all — all that stuff exists. It's about changing the way we do business, about who makes money and how it's made.

We need a clear understanding that we have only a few years left to turn the ship around. We have to adopt those new ideas, to move in with them psychologically socially, and culturally. We need to change with the climate.

We also need to protect our waterways. That's why the River Democracy Act should be supported by Union County. A changing climate is a serious threat to all of us because our fresh waters are what keep us all here and make agriculture possible. Whether that water comes as rain or snow, and how long it stays in the mountains, that's up to us. Capturing that water in reservoirs that will only heat up with the climate is a sure route to more fish kill. We need to protect what we have.

It's time to get real about what we face and what it will take to deal with it. The old ways are gone. It's time for the new ways to take hold. That's the voice we all need to speak with.

Norm Cimon
La Grande

Mason does outstanding
job researching and
formulating his stories

Although somewhat of a topic variation for Dick Mason, the article on the biologists' study of climate change affecting the elk was interesting and well written. The 1989 Starkey Project has provided an abundance of information on our local elk and deer populations.

Whether covering local news, our military heroes or historical information in Union County, Mason has always done an outstanding job researching and formulating his stories. I only hope the media organization and local readers realize the "jewel" we have reporting for The Observer.

I would also like to commend Ginny Mammen for her in-depth stories on the historical buildings of La Grande. I did not realize there would be so many articles or I would have saved them from the beginning. I hope she will incorporate this valuable history into a book for future preservation.

Gerald Hopkins
Island City

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