OUR VIEW

## Polio's tiny, but troubling, return to U.S.

Polio, the specter that haunted America during the first half of the 20th century, leaving parents frightened that their children would be killed or paralyzed for life, can seem as relevant today as manual typewriters or black-and-white TV sets.

And for more than three decades, the viral disease has been relegated to history.

Polio hasn't spread widely in the U.S. since 1979. And the federal government declared the disease eradicated from the U.S. in 1994.

The reason is simple — vaccination.

Vaccines have all but eliminated polio, along with other previously widespread diseases that mainly afflicted children, such as measles, mumps, diphtheria and whooping cough.

Yet earlier this month a young adult who is not vaccinated against polio and lives in Rockland County, New York, north of New York City, contracted the virus and was paralyzed. More troubling, the virus was found in sewage samples in a few New York counties, as well as in New York City.

Vaccination rates remain high in most of the country, fortunately. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that about 93% of 2-year-olds have had at least three doses of polio vaccine (federal officials recommend four doses, although some states require only three for students attending school).

But the CDC also notes, in a report on the recent New York state polio case, that vaccination rates have dipped during the COVID-19 pandemic, largely due to disruptions in some vaccination programs.

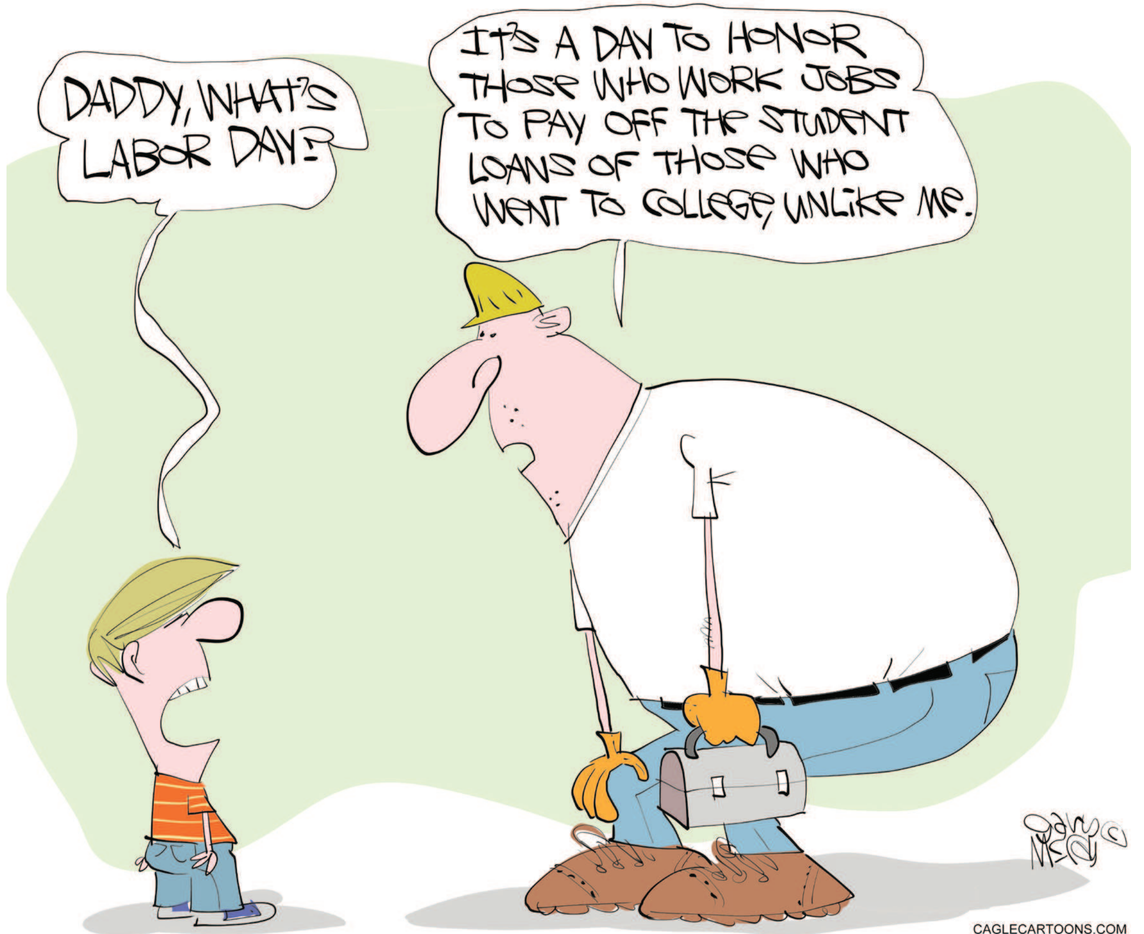
There's another potential concern — that the politicization of COVID-19 vaccines will convince some people to eschew polio and other vaccines whose effectiveness and safety are indisputable based on voluminous data over many decades.

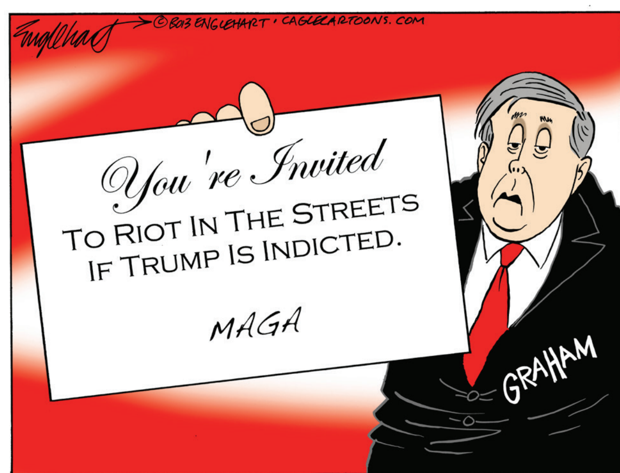
According to the New York State Immunization Information System, vaccination rates among children 2 and younger in Rockland County was 60.3% as of August 2022. In some communities, the rate was as low as 37.3%. That puts a significant number of children at risk of contracting a preventable disease.

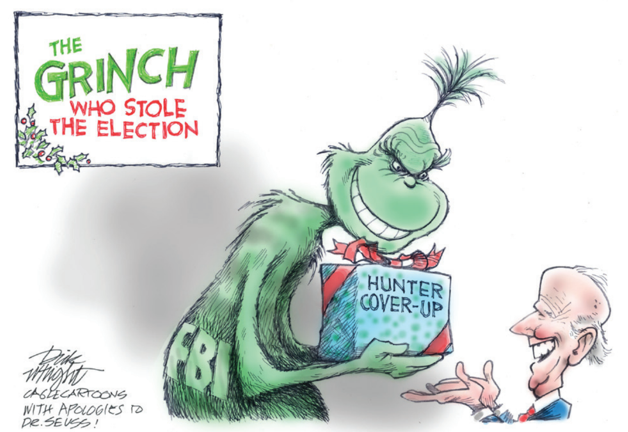
New York officials believe polio arrived in the state by way of a person infected with a strain of the virus linked to samples found in wastewater in Israel and the United Kingdom. That person either had few or no symptoms — which is the case with most people who are infected with the polio virus — and then spread it to others, including the person who, due to the paralysis, became the first known confirmed case in the state.

The reappearance of polio, even in a very limited sense as is the case in New York, doesn't mean the disease is going to become widespread again. But the episode should be a valuable reminder to Americans of how vital vaccination is, and how much inoculations have done to spare both children and adults from terrible, and potentially fatal, infections.

Sadly, someone's life was irrevocably changed in the process.




OTHER VIEWS

## As you sow, so shall you reap

BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

The relationship between hunters and prey is complicated.

I love stepping into the hunter role, creeping quietly through the woods with the dials on all my senses turned to the max, paying attention to shadows, air currents, the distant crack of a twig or a subtle shift in a shape on the opposite hill. Did that log just move?

Yes, the hunt makes me feel truly alive.

But then comes the moment when hunter and hunted meet. Deciding to pull the trigger or release the arrow marks a change in the experience. As hunters, we say this is where the fun ends and the work begins, but it is more than that. True statement: None of my hunting partners enjoys the killing part of the hunt, and I wouldn't hunt with anyone who did.

A few of my friends have taken to referring to filling a deer or elk tag as a "harvest." As in "I hunted hard for seven days but was not able to harvest an elk." I suspect this is a way of taking some of the angst out of the killing, trying to convince themselves that hunting is simply another way of gathering food from nature's bounty, like a walk through the vegetable garden.

Personally, I am puzzled by this choice of words. By choosing the clean euphemism of "harvest," the hunter seems to be trying to make hunting somehow seems less violent or dramatic. But to the hunted, it is still a violent dramatic event.

We usually think of a harvest as something that completes the cycle of sowing, tending, watering, and weeding. It implies sweat equity, and the harvester is invested in the crop.

I remember my mother talking about how she and her Stanfield High School classmates would make late summer midnight raids on a watermelon patch, more than once being chased away by a farmer with a shotgun. I doubt the pranksters considered their purloined melons as a harvest, having no investment or commitment into the care and feeding of the crop.

Are hunters any more deserving to call the result of a successful hunt a harvest? I am not talking about the high fence Texas game ranches, where a "hunter" can pay $20,000 to shoot any of a long list of exotic game animals. These herds are cultivated much like domestic livestock, and use of the word harvest may indeed apply. But is this hunting?

I recently had a wonderful discussion with a new friend and tribal member about his perspective on hunting and harvesting. The traditions around hunting for his culture do involve investment. Learning to be a tribal hunter means understanding the creation stories and the deal struck long ago between the four-leggeds and humans. Deer will provide people with food, clothing, and other raw materials, and in exchange people are to take care of the deer.

And there's more to it. Spiritually, I have heard hunting referred to as an act of prayer, and there's a feeling of the hunted giving to the hunter.

Every crop has a prime harvest season. It's watermelon and wheat season now, and the huckleberries are ripe in the Blues. Bow hunters are out chasing bull elk in a season when the animals are more concerned about mating than avoiding hunters. Pursuing big game while they are rutting can be a lot of fun, but it usually doesn't bring the best meat. Similarly, the largest bull or buck is not the best eating no matter when it is hunted; you can't eat antlers, and I'd much rather fill my freezer with the meat of a young cow elk or a doe.

There are ways for hunters to invest time and energy in their bounty. As public landowners. we can advocate for intelligent management of habitat, like a farmer maintains soil health, and we can invest time, energy, and sweat in improving the ground. In our corner of the world, the Blue Mountains, we have tools like forest thinning, prescribed burning, road management and control of invasive species to provide habitat for thriving herds of deer and elk.

Crops can't grow well on ground that is constantly disturbed. Once the sown seed has germinated, the farmer stays out of the fields. Likewise, wild animals need secure undisturbed habitat. For some species this means areas without motor vehicle traffic and wise hunters know that bombing around the forest on ATVs in midsummer will affect the herds they hunt in the fall.

Those who think of hunting as a harvest should be willing to put in the upfront investment of time, energy, and treasure into the crop. Join and support hunting and conservation organizations that work to improve habitat. Respect, and encourage, road management on public lands by keeping motor vehicles where they belong, thereby providing secure habitat year-round. Get engaged and educated on public land management issues and be an advocate for sound resource management.

As you sow, so shall you reap.

*Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.*

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