Letters to the editor

***Illinois Valley News* welcomes letters to the editor less than 500 words. Please e-mail them to dan@illinois-valley-news.com.**

POLICY ON LETTERS:
'*Illinois Valley News*' encourages letters to the editor provided they are legible and not libelous or scurrilous. All letters must be signed, including name, address and telephone number. The latter need not be published, but will be used to verify authenticity. The "News" reserves the right to edit letters. Letters are used at the discretion of the publisher.

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(Editor's Note: Views and commentary, including statements made as fact are strictly those of the letter writers.)

Coronavirus and a bit of history

"The Flu" by private Josh Lee, 1919

It stalked into camp when the day was damp and chilly and cold.

With a hand that was clammy and bony and bold, with breath that was icy and moldy and dank.

And it killed so speedy and gloatingly greedy, that it took away men from each company rank.

In a conversation with a friend and fellow historian we discussed our collective current plight that will forever change our world and freedoms we hold dear. The Spanish flu of 1918-19 did not begin in Spain, though they would suffer the most. Allegedly, eight million died there in May of 1918 alone. Spain was also not constrained by wartime news blackouts, so reporting was more robust on this topic than in other places. In the USA, we suffered a loss so great; the life expectancy was lowered by 10 years!

My friend pointed out that the origins were elsewhere. Some experts deliberate that immigrant Chinese laborers shipped in to construct trenches and other infrastructure had introduced a new strain of influenza. Yet, most agree it pointed to the small community of Santa Fe, in Haskell County, Kansas. Farmers were in contact with either a chicken and/or a pig and a flu broke out that could have easily been contained. But the world was on the move, driven by duty and honor, troops were needed overseas and the western training area at the time was Camp Funston, at Fort Riley Kansas. The camp had cramped conditions as men were in non-insulated barracks of 250 souls per barrack. A ripe breeding ground with no heating and thin blankets issued. Soon after, these men were shipped overseas into the war, once again, in cramped conditions aboard those transport ships. This opportunity created a perfect storm for the virus to rapidly spread even more in horrific sanitary conditions on that war front in Western Europe.

It was only a matter of time I suppose and an ingenious way by nature to halt World War I by smartly arranging there was no one left to fight it. Pay no heed to the carnage left in our wake by our own hand and use of new machinations of war. Must more than one horseman of the apocalypse leap forth and generationally finish the job? Only god knows how many innocents died with this influenza tsunami. Additionally, the plague of 1918-19 grew exponentially worse when a second and third wave of the pathogen hit by the end of 1918 and into 1919.

In 1918 children would skip rope in cadence to a simple rhyme:

"I had a little bird, its name was Enza. I opened the window, And In-flu-Enza."

In our contemporary times, is it possible this Covid-19 Coronavirus, on its first upward trajectory, will act the same way in bringing successive and stronger waves, then go away altogether? Or, as many experts believe, it will be a more virulent type of seasonal flu we would contend with every year. Currently, it lies in a cloud of pandemic uncertainty, with at least a year waiting on a vaccine.

I write this in the hope we learn from lessons in history, else we are doomed to repeat them. Our president, and of all places, Texas leadership, allude to a need for elders to fall on a viral sword for a younger generation to work and succeed, pushing aside lessons our elders offer, if only we listen. It seems these tainted values rest with monolithic wealth at all costs - an acceptable level of cultural casualty. Never mind the unmitigated growth of the problem, the risk to medical staff, a Hippocratic Oath and a microorganism ultimately deciding who lives and who dies. Governor Cuomo of New York was quoted recently as saying, "We all would like to see our economy return with minimal loss of life, but it is wrong to ask the American people to choose one over the other."

Stay safe, honor those medical workers by the practice of social distancing.

Greg Walter
Ashland

Guest opinion: Dr. John L. Gardiner MBE, PE (Oregon)

Breaking down the corona virus legislation

This summary is my attempt to translate the parts of the emergency coronavirus legislation of interest to the 'Oregon 99%'. I've combined several public reports, most of which condemn the package as an unnecessary gift to big business and not enough for Main Street or individuals.

So what did we (the 99%) get to pay our rent and mortgage until employment returns? After a bitter struggle, we got a temporary, nationwide eviction moratorium in place for any renters whose landlords have mortgages backed or owned by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and other federal entities. This will last for 120 days after the bill passed (3/25), and landlords also can't charge any fees or penalties for nonpayment of rent.

There will also be four months of more generous unemployment benefits for the millions who are being laid off and a one-time check of $1,200 per adult, eliminating the Republican restriction of just $600 for poor people.

In Oregon, the normal weekly benefit amount is 1.25% of the total wages in your base period (the earliest four of the five complete calendar quarters before you filed your benefits claim), subject to a weekly minimum of $126 and a maximum of $538. Benefits are available for up to 26 weeks. The 'rescue package' would provide all eligible workers with an additional 13 weeks; Oregonians would be eligible for a total of 39 weeks. The extra $600 payment would last for up to four months, covering weeks of unemployment ending July 31. For conditions of payments, see https://govstatus.egov.com/ORUnemployment_COVID19.

Single adults with Social Security numbers who have an adjusted gross income of $75,000 or less would get the full amount. Married couples with no children earning $150,000 or less would receive a total of $2,400. And someone filing as head of household would get the full payment if they earn $112,500 or less. Above those income figures, the payment decreases until it stops altogether for single people earning $99,000 or married people earning $198,000. In most instances, everyone must have a valid Social Security number in any given family. There is an exception for members of the military.

You can find your adjusted gross income on line 8b of the 2019 1040 federal tax return. If you haven't prepared a tax return yet, you can use your 2018 return, or a 2019 Social Security statement showing your income. If the Internal Revenue Service already has your bank account information, it would transfer the money to you via direct deposit. According to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, most people should get their payments within (now) two weeks, and you should get a paper notice in the mail within a few weeks after payment has been made. If you haven't filed in the last two years, file a return immediately, at least for 2018; you now have until 15 July (IRS and Oregon). Not having 2018 tax filings on record 'could affect mailings of stimulus checks'.

Most people receiving Social Security retirement and disability payments each month will also get a stimulus payment, as would veterans. Those who are unemployed, partially unemployed or who cannot work for a wide variety of coronavirus-related reasons would be more likely to receive benefits. Self-employed people would be newly eligible for unemployment benefits. These checks will not be garnished; under the plan, eligible workers would get an extra $600 per week on top of their state benefit, see: https://www.natlawreview.com/article/oregon-expands-unemployment-benefits-to-workers-impacted-covid-19.

Wage garnishment (from being behind on loan payments) will be suspended during this six-month period, as is the seizure of tax refunds, the reduction of any other federal benefit payments and other involuntary collection efforts. For the calendar year 2020, no one would have to take a required minimum distribution from any individual retirement accounts or workplace retirement savings plans, like a 401(k), protecting against a fall in value.

If you're experiencing symptoms or are seeking a diagnosis — and unemployed, partially unemployed or cannot work as a result — you'll be covered. The same goes if you must care for a member of your family or household who has received a diagnosis. If you rely on a school, day care or another facility to care for a child, elderly parent or another household member so that you can work — and that facility has been shut down because of coronavirus — you would be eligible. People who must self-quarantine would be covered. Individuals who are unable to get to work because of a quarantine imposed as a result of the outbreak would also be eligible.

Workers who are able to work from home, and those receiving paid sick leave or paid family leave would not be covered. New entrants to the work force who cannot find jobs would also be ineligible. However, you'd be eligible if you were about to start a new job and then couldn't get there because of an outbreak or if you were immediately laid off from a new job and did not have a sufficient work history to qualify for benefits under normal circumstances. For more, see: https://govstatus.egov.com/ORUnemployment_COVID19.

Expanded coverage would be available to workers who were newly eligible for unemployment benefits for weeks starting on Jan. 27, 2020 and through Dec. 31, 2020. Even if you're already receiving unemployment benefits for reasons unrelated to the coronavirus, your state-level benefits would still be extended by 13 weeks. You would also receive the extra $600 weekly benefit from the federal government, which will be a real relief, especially if the virus abates and you can find work again within those extra 13 weeks.

The federal government already waived two months of student loans' payments and interest for many federal student loan borrowers. Until Sept. 30, there will be automatic payment suspensions for any student loan held by the federal government, with no interest accruing. It is hard to contact many of the loan servicers right now, so check your account online in the coming weeks. Once you are logged in, look for the current amount due. There, you should be able to see if the servicer has reset its billing systems so that you are showing no payment due.

Older Federal Family Educational Loans (F.F.E.L.) that the U.S. Department of Education does not own would not be eligible, nor would Perkins loans, loans from state agencies, or loans from private lenders like Discover, Sallie Mae and Wells Fargo. The holders of all those kinds of loans may be offering their own assistance programs.

Agreeing with my last LTE, Economic Security Project stated the obvious: "$1,200 isn't enough." Senate Democrats will now have to fight for Stage 4, or accept a terrible future for many of the 99%. There is much more about (unnecessary) corporate benefit in this Act that I don't want to pass on here. Looking at U.S. history, such bailouts (corporate welfare - privatize profits and socialize losses) appear necessary on a cyclical basis, but Congress has plenty of time to craft serious programs designed to save industry, not merely people who own stock in industry. Working people, by contrast, do not have time to wait.

It will be legal for an internet provider to cut off service to an individual or small business that can't pay its bills, and utility providers can cut off service. The legislation did not provide necessary sick leave for families caring for loved ones or families left without childcare. Most importantly, it does nothing to address one of the biggest crises we face - the climate crisis and our remaining carbon budget.

While coronavirus testing will be free, Republicans unfortunately would not agree to make treatment free. Therefore the bill does nothing to protect uninsured or inadequately-insured patients from receiving massive bills for getting the treatment they need. As New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) has already said, the package will do 'next to nothing' to mitigate the disaster unfolding in his state. It mobilizes no new resources, organizes no production, improves no medical supply delivery and trains no new nurses.

Unfortunately, the House of Representatives approved this bill. Rather than vote it down (like the first bank bailout bill in 2008) and demand instead a simple relief bill for people who really need it — working families — and emergency measures to actually fight the coronavirus pandemic, they argued fiercely, won a few concessions and then passed the Senate bill, ensuring foreclosure on the next generation of American democracy.

Save the date

April 1

IVCanDo 2020 annual meeting set for April 1 at the Kerby Building has been CANCELED.

April 2

Native Plants, So What? April 2, 2020, 6:30- 8 p.m.: Gearing up for spring, Rogue Native Plant Partnership (RNPP) will share online video presentations about the significance of native plants and people who tend them: for culture, for pollinators, and for the importance of restoring landscapes now and in the future. See RNPP on facebook or roguenativeplants.org for more information.

April 11

Rough & Ready Wildflower Hike, Saturday, April 11, 10 a.m. has sadly been CANCELED

American Rose Society CANCELS Parking Lot/Plant Sale and April meeting.

Through May 31

Cobra Lily: a review of southwest Oregon literature and art is a print journal celebrating our region. Consider sending your fiction, poetry, memoir, essays, history, interviews with interesting locals, photography, paintings, and more (i.e. don't feel limited to these genre suggestions). Work should focus on the nature and culture of Southwest Oregon, or at least be the work of people who live in and love our region. The submission deadline for Volume 6 is May 31, with publication planned for late summer 2020. Work can be emailed to cobralilyreview@gmail.com. Contributors receive 1 free copy and a discount on additional copies. More information at CobraLily.org.

Ongoing

The Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance is excited to announce the launch of our after-hours Crisis Line which can be reached at 541-415-9367. The new local crisis line will be answered any hours the Safe House is closed. The line will be answered by an advocate who will be able to respond locally, also recognizing the barriers that may come up due to our rural location. For more information contact the Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance 541-592-2515.

***Public Health Clinic-** Location: I.V. Family Coalition, 535 E. River St., CJ, 1st Thursday of every month. Services offered STI Testing/Treatment, Women's Health Exams (Annuals/Problem Visits), Birth Control (All Methods Available), Pregnancy Testing, Pre-pregnancy counseling. 3rd Thursday of every month: STI testing/treatment, birth control counseling (methods limited), Pregnancy Testing, Immunizations. Call 541-474-5329 for an appointment, and make sure to tell the receptionist to schedule you in CJ. Walk-ins welcome! Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

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