

OPINION

The opinions expressed in the letters below are “your voice,” and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Columbia Gorge News*, its staff, publisher or advertisers.

YOUR VOICE

Litter patrol

Last Sunday, on a scorching hot morning, Thrive Hood River volunteers picked up trash along a two-mile section of Highway 35, between China Gorge and Whiskey Creek Road. It was a record haul: 28 big yellow garbage bags, four tires, two pallets and assorted junk. We are part of the Oregon Department of Transportation Adopt-A-Highway volunteer corps and this is just one of the three sections of Hood River County highways that Thrive maintains. We decided to write an occasional letter to let you know what kind of trash we found as a way of raising awareness and trying to reduce its volume.

Cigarette butts are always the most common thing and are difficult to pick up with the grabbers we use. Other high-volume items are fast food containers like Dutch Bros. plastic cups, McDonald's food wrappers, hot sauce packets (more than 100 this time) and straws. Beverage cans, especially Modelo tall boys and hard cider, along with plastic bottles (sometimes filled with urine, yuck!) are always popular. Marijuana clutter from local dispensaries including plastic tubes to hold joints, plastic bags and warning labels are a new growth category as are COVID masks. We always find items that have blown off vehicles such as plastic shrink wrap, Styrofoam, building materials and fruit truck bin tags, so be sure to secure your loads, folks. There are also always surprises, this time a full wallet, something that looked like LSD and an empty blister pack of Viagra!

On the garbage and recycling front, there is some good news to report in Oregon. Senate Bill 582 just passed, despite vocal opposition from Rep. Bonham (The Dalles, R), and will require producers of paper, plastic and other materials to fund new initiatives aimed at collecting and recycling more of their materials — whether via existing programs or new efforts. It's only right to require the companies that make and distribute packaging to help pay to recycle it and is the first law of this type in the country. Let's clean up our act, locally and statewide!

Peter Cornelison
Barb Berry
Hood River

Voting Responsibility

Voting. Is it a right or a privilege? It is both and more. Importantly it is a responsibility. It is an individual responsibility that we should all

take seriously.

It is a privilege that citizens in this country have and can be lost by not following our laws. It is a right that we have by virtue of our constitution, by being a citizen.

But it is also the individual's responsibility to make sure that they make the effort and time to vote; that they are properly registered, knows how, when and where. Is that too much to ask? I think that most conservatives are merely asking for one citizen and one vote without any outside influence. It is also the responsibility of the county elections office to make sure that the voter rolls are accurate. Get rid of dead people and verify those on the rolls are local and eligible to vote, and when voting occurs as in Oregon and Washington, the signatures are verified. That is their responsibility.

“Disenfranchisement,” what a bunch of political BS. Voting seems to be the only are where you should not need an ID? Give me a break. I challenge you to give me one government program offered that you do not need an ID to use ... Just one.

As the previous owner of Postal Annex, each election cycle we get ballots for our box holders. Multiple ballots from areas they have lived in; ballots for deceased previous box holders, ballots for box holders who live outside the country. Each year you can read about elections both local and nationally which are decided by less than 10 votes. With this past election as an exception, national voter turnout has been decreasing. Historical high, 81.8% in 1876; recent high 57.1% in 2008. Maybe go back to teaching civics and civic responsibility in school? I want my vote to count every election, but only till I am pushing up daisies.

Steve Nybrotten
White Salmon

Freedoms infringed upon

Sheriff Bob Songer claims he is protecting the Klickitat citizens' individual rights by refusing to enforce laws and mandates he personally deems “unconstitutional.” He has refused to enforce the requirement that individuals wear a covering on their personal bodies in public places, stating that masking is a personal choice.

I await his proclamation clarifying his support for equal rights for ALL the citizens of Klickitat County by stating he will apply this same standard of freedom and no longer enforce similar laws that target the rights of women in the community. By his judgment, clearly this



A male osprey takes flight after visiting his mate and kids at the nest. Their nest overlooks the Riverfront Trail near Chenoweth Creek in The Dalles. Photo courtesy Gary Ellkinton

standard must include women's constitutional freedoms that have long been infringed upon by such oppressive standards as covering breasts in public.

This issue deserves immediate attention and action and should take precedence by Bob Songer because:

1. It does not risk killing community members.
2. The exact same action is legal for men but not women.
3. Women have been living under this unnatural bondage for generations, not just for one difficult year. If you haven't worn a bra, let me tell you, they are WAY more uncomfortable and oppressive than face masks.
4. It would be shame for Sheriff Bob to be exposed as holding double standards if he should so choose to cherry pick only liberty that affect him to defend in his self proclaimed position as the personal interpreter of the writings of our Founding Fathers.

Being exposed to seeing breasts in public is no more obscene than the willful exposure to COVID-19 killing friends and family.

Kelsi Stahl
Bingen

Heating up

Did you enjoy the heat last week? Would you like those hot days to get

even hotter and more frequent? Then vote Republican.

I'm not trying to claim that the Republicans caused the heat. But far too many of them continue to deny that Climate Change even exists. According to a Gallup Survey released earlier this year, 82% of Democrats believe that Climate Change is already impacting us, but only 29% of Republicans agree. Fifty-six percent of Republicans believe that Climate Change will either never impact our planet or won't occur within their lifetimes. Only 11% of Republicans believe that Global Warming will pose a significant threat in their lifetimes.

Only 32 percent of Republicans believe that human activities cause Climate Change — that's actually worse than it was in the early 2000s, when 52% of Republicans agreed. In contrast, 88% of Democrats believe the overwhelming consensus among climate scientists that human beings are indeed causing the problem.

Republican lawmakers reflect their constituents' beliefs. According to the Center for American Progress, 139 Republicans in Congress “have made recent statements casting doubt ... that the world is warming — and that human activity is to blame. These same 139

climate-denying members have received more than \$61 billion in lifetime contributions from the coal, oil, and gas industries.”

It is sad to watch so many Republican leaders scoff at science while lining their pockets with dirty money. To the extent that their power undermines efforts to make our planet habitable, their positions are also dangerous.

Rick George
White Salmon

School board & volunteers

I just completed a four-year term on the Hood River County School District Board. Prior to that, I volunteered several years on district committees ranging from facilities assessment to levy and bond campaigns.

The HRCSD Board has seven members, and I am so thankful for their shared work and commitment. The board and district have completed seven years of unmodified or “clean” financial audits; more than \$70 million of construction, equipment, and safety improvements; expanded career track options at HRV; improved

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Pandemic not yet over

■ By Miriam D. McDonell, MD

DUE TO THE INCREDIBLE hard work of Oregonians over the past year, COVID-19 infection rates are down, and 70% of adult Oregonian's have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

In response to these encouraging developments, as of June 30, Oregon Gov.Kate Brown rescinded the orders that imposed mask mandates, capacity limits, limits that required vaccine verification and physical distancing requirements in businesses and other sectors. The order imposing restrictions on higher education has also been rescinded. Decision making regarding the health and safety of students in K-12 schools is returned to local school districts.

There are settings, however, such as healthcare, public transportation, correctional facilities and other congregate settings where enhanced COVID-19 precautions will be necessary for an additional period of time, following federal guidance. Please see EO No. 21-15 for details (Executive Order No. 21-15).

On the same date, Oregon OSHA removed the facial covering and

physical distancing requirements of its COVID-19 rule for all workplaces, with exceptions including healthcare, public transit and airports. Not all of Oregon OSHA's COVID-19 requirements are going away immediately. For the rule addressing all workplaces, examples of measures that will remain in place longer include optimization of ventilation, notification of a positive case in the workplace, and proper steps to take if an employee must quarantine (see OR-OSHA A0 5-2021 for details).

Practically speaking, what this means is individuals are no longer required to wear masks in most public settings and workplaces. Restrictions on the number of persons at events and in facilities placed due to COVID-19 are also removed.

For those of us living in Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam counties, this is good and welcome news. As your Public Health Officer, I am incredibly grateful and proud of the compassion, ingenuity, hard work and generosity shown by the residents of our community. It is important to remember, however, that although we feel very done with COVID-19, it is not quite done with us.

Although low in numbers,

infections and hospitalizations from COVID-19 are still happening, with the vast majority occurring in unvaccinated people. Children under 12 and some individuals are unable to receive the vaccine at this time, leaving them susceptible to infection. Those who are immune-compromised may be vulnerable to infection even after being vaccinated. Finally, there are still thousands of residents in our three-county region who have not yet chosen to be vaccinated.

So while we celebrate the progress we have made, let us continue to protect ourselves and one another. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. If you have questions or concerns about their safety, please talk with a trusted medical provider to obtain accurate and factual information. Vaccines are the number one tool we have in reducing the risk of infection and long term complications from COVID-19.

Let's make this an amazing summer to remember — for all the good reasons!

Miriam D. McDonell is the Health Officer for North Central Public Health District

Want to write a letter?

Columbia Gorge News encourages readers to submit letters to the editor for the weekly opinion page. Letters on all topics are welcome.

Writers must include their name and hometown (for publication) and daytime phone number (for verification, not for publication). Letters from an agency or group must be credited to the author or a contact person.

Anonymous or “name withheld by request” letters are not accepted.

Letters must be 350 words or fewer; generally, the briefer the message, the better. Opinion pieces longer than 350 words may be published as a guest commentary at the discretion of the editor.

Letters are published as space allows, and efforts are made each week to provide as much space as possible.

Deadline for letters is noon on the Friday prior to publication.

We reserve the right to edit all letters:

Letters must be civil. Vulgar or inappropriate language will not be considered, nor malicious, false or misleading

statements.

Letters attacking an individual, rather than an opinion, are not acceptable.

Letters criticizing a particular business over a particular complaint or grievance will not be considered.

The opinions expressed in letters are “Your Voice,” and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Columbia Gorge News*, its staff, publisher or advertisers.

Letters may be submitted online at www.ColumbiaGorgeNews.com: Scroll to the bottom of the page and select “Submission Forms,” then select “Letter to the Editor.”

NEW — Letters also may be sent via email to Letters@gorgenews.com.

Or mail your letter “attention editor” to any of the Post Office boxes listed at bottom of this page.



Regional news for the Gorge

Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER | THE DALLES | WHITE SALMON

Columbia Gorge News (ISSN 0747-3443)
Published every Wednesday.

Known offices of publication: (Open by appointment)
1800 W. 10th Street, The Dalles, OR 97058
600 E. Port Marina Way, Suite B, Hood River, OR 97031
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Periodical postage is paid at The Dalles, Oregon.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
P.O. Box 1910, The Dalles, OR 97058

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