

# SPOKESMAN Opinion

COLUMN

## Congress must act to ensure vital pharmacy services for all

BY MARK GIBBONS

Even in communities hardest hit by the effects of COVID-19, a constant safe haven exists. Seniors have continued to rely on pharmacists as a trusted source of care and support to manage their health. The pandemic exposed how fragile our healthcare system is and demonstrated how essential pharmacists are to bridging gaps in access for older Americans.

But those lessons are lost if we fail to ensure that older Americans have continued access to pharmacist services beyond COVID-19. Congress has the opportunity to ensure seniors maintain access to tests, vaccines and treatments from pharmacists now and in the future — something the overwhelming majority of older Americans agree needs to happen now.



Gibbons

The pandemic has taken the greatest toll on older adults. Those 65 and older account for 16 percent of the U.S. population but 80 percent of all COVID-19 deaths. Research had found that transportation barriers to health are significant for older adults and can prevent access to essential services, which was made more critical at the height of the pandemic when tests and then vaccines were made available to seniors in their communities.

Pharmacists have been essential in protecting seniors from COVID-19 at those moments and ensuring older Americans can manage their health during the pandemic, including the 85 percent of adults 65 and older who have at least one chronic condition such as diabetes, arthritis and hypertension.

Unfortunately, pharmacists are providing these services under temporary federal authorities that were implemented with the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. When the emergency declaration ends, seniors and other vulnerable communities could lose access to the essential services they rely on for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases like influenza and strep throat.

This March, Congress introduced federal legislation to smooth over a potential access gap for seniors and ensure Medicare beneficiaries maintain access to essential care and services provided by pharmacists. Championed by Reps. Ron Kind, D-Wis., David McKinley, R-W.Va., Nanette Barragán, D-Calif., and Buddy Carter, R-Ga., the bipartisan legislation that would create Medicare Part B reimbursement mechanisms for pharmacists' services related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious diseases, including flu, strep throat and RSV. The bill would also ensure pharmacists are compensated for these services after the Public Health Emergency ends and during future health emergencies.

There is overwhelming support for the legislation. According to a new national survey, more than 80 percent of older Americans — including more than 90 percent of Hispanic-Americans — agree that the government should reimburse pharmacists for testing, vaccination and treatment for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. The same survey shows that four in every five older Americans want access to testing, vaccination and treatment at the pharmacy, including nearly 60 percent of minority communities.

The 65-and-older population grew by more than a third during the past decade and is projected to nearly double from 52 million in 2018 to 95 million by 2060. Aging populations will continue to rely on pharmacists as an accessible source of care and support today and tomorrow. Older Americans — particularly those in rural and underserved communities — rely on pharmacists to access care and services where limited or no other options exist.

Congress should heed the call of Americans who agree that the government should preserve patient access to essential services provided by pharmacists. Congress should act on the legislation to ensure patients can continue to have access to essential services from pharmacists now and in the future.

■ Mark Gibbons is the president and CEO of RetireSafe, helping to raise the platform in education and awareness for seniors. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.

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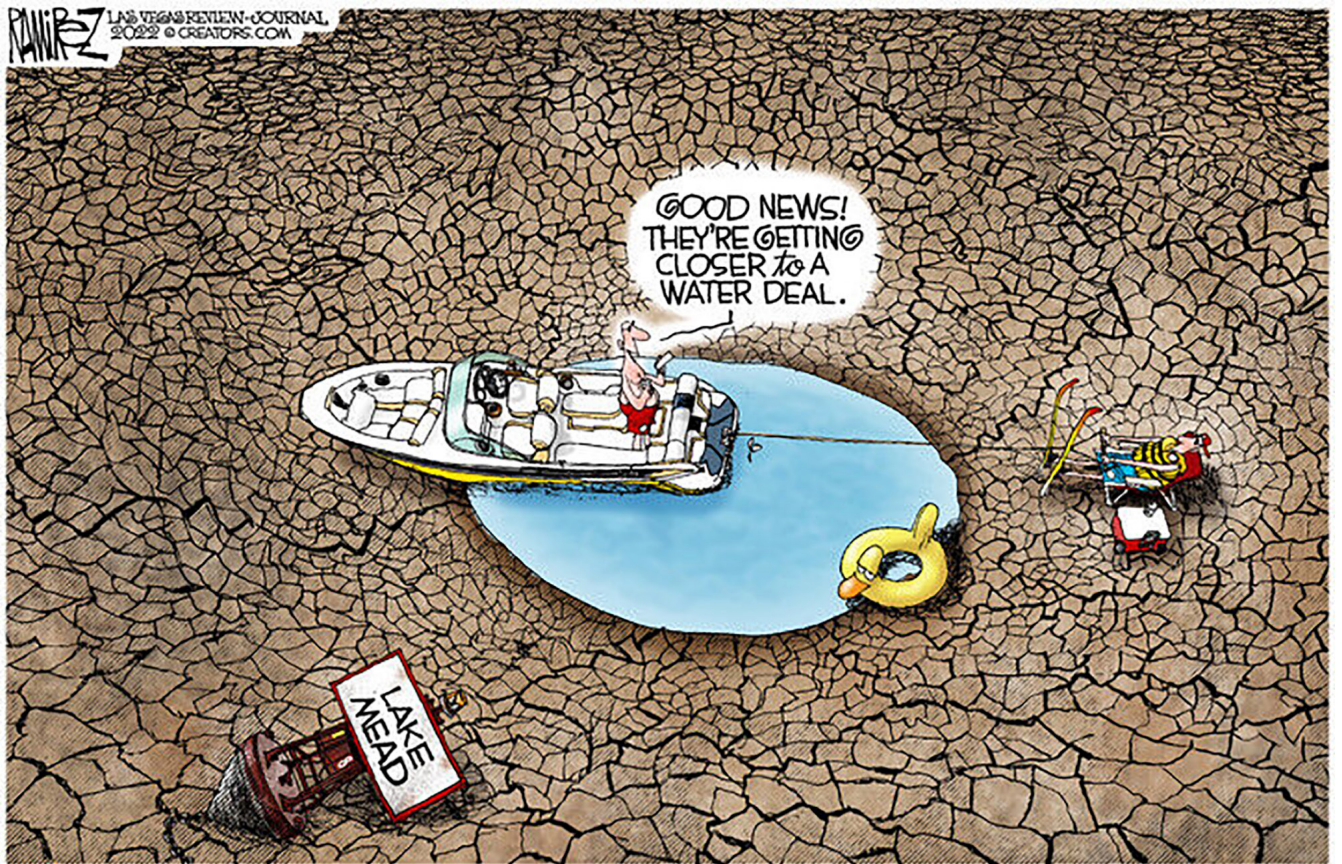
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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.



GUEST COLUMN

## Everyone has their biases

BY STEVE TROTTER

We're all in the same boat. We may protest, insisting "Not me!"

But it is in me. It's in you, too. Everyone. No exceptions.

Cognitive bias. "Cognitive" has to do with thinking, awareness, the way things get processed in the space between our ears.

"Bias" has to do with decisions, making a judgment, and the way we are almost pre-programmed to see things or people or situations a certain way. Bias is a shortcut, helping us decide or judge quickly, without having to spend much time considering or thinking.

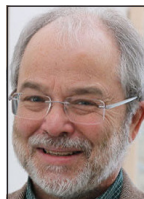
A few nights ago we had corn on the cob as part of dinner. My wife and I love the stuff. As I shucked the two ears I remembered spending the night with my cousins in British Columbia. My aunt Yvonne had found a nearby farm selling fresh corn. She bought, to my young eyes, what seemed to be at least fifty ears.

That was supper. Corn, which requires no improvement but some butter and a little salt, sure don't hurt. My cousin Drew and I consumed corn as if it were our last meal. We gorged ourselves. And then some.

Why not one more ear, just to top things off? OK.

I was awake the entire night, moving the contents of my digestive system into the bucket Yvonne placed on the floor beside my bed.

For years afterward I couldn't eat corn on the cob. I had developed a cognitive bias against corn on the cob. Frozen corn? No problem. Canned? If I have to. On the



Trotter

cob? Nope. Ain't gonna happen. I am biased against that horrific form of corn that caused me a long night of unpleasantness.

A few nights ago? I've learned a few things since that night at my aunt's. I had one ear I enjoyed with a little salt, no butter. It was tasty and satisfying. My bias didn't get in the way of my enjoyment.

What happened to that bias? I thought about it. I examined it thoroughly. Was corn the problem? Clearly not. Was it my aunt's house? No. Being in Canada? No, again. The problem was me: I was a glutton; I ate too much corn. It had unpleasant results. My bias formed and stuck for many years.

That's a bit silly, I admit. But biases frequently are. And the biases we all carry around stick around unless we pull them out, take a good long look at them, and make decisions about what is cooking in our brain whether we acknowledge it or not.

That's the challenge: we're not always aware of the biases we have. We see something or someone and our brain processes what we're seeing using our biases. But there's no flashing sign saying "Bias at work, a shortcut in your thinking. Be sure the conclusion fits the evidence."

I would see an ear of corn in a grocery store and feel myself getting uncomfortable, remembering that blessed night with the bucket. Rational? If "rational" means "thoughtfully considered," then no, it's not rational. That's how biases work.

Years ago I was interested in cars. Car repair. Automobile racing, etc. Somewhere, I have no clue where or when or how, I developed a bias against anything with four wheels manufactured by General Motors. Ford? OK. Chrysler? Less OK but better than GM. American Motors? (remember the Javelin? The Pacer?) OK

GUEST COLUMN

### Responses welcome

The Spokesman invited me to send in a column or essay, something that's not controversial, something that's perhaps light or perhaps with a bit more substance. It's a sort of journal, an invitation into the way I see the world and respond to what I see.

I plan to continue examining cognitive biases for a few essays, since they're something we all have in common. I'm guessing now, but I'll bet many of the biases we each have sit in our brain unexamined.

You may write me care of the Spokesman if I've raised something you're wondering about.

(we had a Rambler in my childhood.)

I have never owned a Chevy or Pontiac or Cadillac or GMC. Haven't even looked. Why? Well, I'm biased. It's not rational. General Motors makes many fine products, rated approvingly by critics. I have a bias against their products.

Crazy, huh? Yes. It is. That's how biases work and their short cut ways are crazy indeed.

■ Steve Trotter, with his wife Bonnie, has lived in many places before settling in Redmond for retirement. His last for-pay job was teaching at a small university in Central Washington.

## Mayoral candidate favors 'one child' policy

Hello, my name is Charles Baer. I want to talk about the meaning of one word. The word is "depopulationism."

I don't know who came up with this word first, but I came up with it in 2019. I don't know what the true meaning of this word is but I do know what the true meaning of this word is to me.



Baer

In 1980, China came up with the "One Child" policy. In 1985, when I was 16, I realized that this was not only the only way to save Earth, but that I would spend the rest of my life trying to explain this to my species.

The definition of depopulationism, according to me, is that it is illegal for humans to reproduce more than once for the first few centuries of this millennium.

Humans do not have the right to kill Earth. Humans do not have the "freedom"

to destroy the planet. Smart people realize this. Smart people are depopulationists. Smart people are the solution. Smart people are trying to save earth now.

Unfortunately, we are in the minority. However, we will not quit. We will not give up. We will continue to work in a peaceful and legal and political way to save the planet.

If you have kids, then you can become a born again depopulationist. It's never too late to change sides and hop the fence and be on the correct side of history.

The human population will soon reach 8 billion and continue to rise. This is a suicide course because when we kill the earth, we die with it. The Earth will survive however it will not be habitable for people. The only way out of this mess is to create a significant, sustained and immediate decline in the human population on Earth.

This will allow the environment time to heal itself. This will allow the human population on earth to move to a sus-

tainable level. This is a number that future generations will determine but I will guess that it is around 2 or 3 billion.

The voters of Redmond have a historic opportunity in the mayoral election of 2022 to lead the world by example. We can save Earth right now.

If elected mayor, I will work hard all 2023 and 2024 and hopefully beyond to make Redmond a depopulationist city, Oregon a depopulationist state, USA a depopulationist country and Earth a depopulationist planet.

Any Redmond resident found guilty of reproducing more than once will be fined and will have to do community service.

Once we accomplish this as a community, as a society, we will have the moral high ground and we can ask the world to join us because we did it first (actually that was the Chinese, but we are now the only ones doing it now). Because people are good and have common sense they will join us.

■ — Charles Baer is a candidate for Redmond mayor.