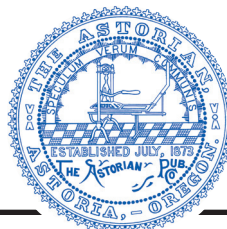


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## OUR VIEW

# Breaking the silence on opioids

Every day, we get the latest on the coronavirus pandemic. How many people tested positive, and how many have died. The number rolls higher and higher as our political leaders struggle to find a way to slow its spread.

But there's another epidemic that has swept across the U.S. over the past decade: opioids.

Call it the quiet epidemic.

While newspapers and other media have reported on its impact on urban America, reporting on rural counterparts has often been missing.

Yet between 2008 and 2017, nearly 274,000 Americans died from opioids in the rural United States. In the rural Pacific Northwest, 1,347 have died.

Nationwide, a survey found that 3 in every 4 farmers and farmworkers have been directly impacted by opioid abuse. Even worse, the same ratio reports that it is easy to access large amounts of opioids without a prescription — but only one-third say it is easy to obtain addiction treatment.

Those are stunning statistics, yet few are willing to talk about it.

In much of rural America, the stigma of a drug overdose creates a bubble of silence around the vic-



Gado Images

**Opioids are pain relievers. If improperly prescribed or abused, they can lead to a downward spiral of addiction.**

tim, the family and the community.

To address a problem, we first need to talk about it.

That was the realization leaders of the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Farmers Union came to. Those two organizations rarely find themselves on the same side of a political issue,

but when it comes to the matter of saving rural lives from opioids, they speak as one.

Together, they launched "Farm Town Strong," a campaign aimed at breaking the silence. Their website, farmtownstrong.org, offers help to families and others who are impacted by opioids.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Combat pay

Many workers in different companies have been officially deemed "essential" because their services are required to keep our country functioning. Food, fuel, utilities and health care workers come immediately to mind.

I pray "wartime President" Donald Trump realizes the benefits of combat pay, and extends it to essential civilian workers just as we do for our members of the military, who also face anxiety, fear and danger for simply doing their job. Combat pay increases paychecks, and provides valuable tax benefits.

R.D. SMITH  
Gearhart

### Relieve the suffering

As the world counts the number of those affected by COVID-19, the Oregon Community Foundation is working to relieve the suffering of Oregon residents. The foundation has established the Oregon Community Recovery Fund. The purpose of the fund is to rapidly deploy resources to community-based organizations at the front lines of the coronavirus outbreak.

The focus of these resources will engage with other organizations to fill gaps in funding not met by the public or private sectors during the crisis, including: addressing the increased need for child care during school and day care closures, support for hard-hit small businesses and not-for-profit organizations, addressing social isolation of seniors and others during social distancing and providing educational opportunities for kids out of school.

The details of grant guidelines and requirements can be found at [oregoncf.org/COVID](http://oregoncf.org/COVID)

The Oregon Community Foundation has already raised \$6 million and donated \$2.2 million to 35 organizations. The requirements are very flexible, with a brief application process. The foundation's priority is to effectively deploy resources to those in need as fast as possible. The range of gifts has been between \$20,000 to \$100,000. The foundation is also accepting donations for this worthy cause.

We encourage those on the front line of the fight against COVID-19 to apply for funding to reduce the suffering on the North Coast.

DAN STEIN  
DAN GAFFNEY  
Astoria

### More surprises

Climate scientists have been warning since the 1980s that along with rising sea levels, ocean warming, etc., there would be pandemics.

What has most probably occurred countless times over history is that a bug originating in a sparsely populated corner of the world would infect a handful of people in an isolated village and then quickly die out.

But with today's coronavirus, a likely scenario is that a bug that would historically have been geographically restricted is now able to spread, due to a warmer climate. And we see this sort of occurrence happening regularly.

For example, here in the Pacific Northwest, aphids have migrated north due to warming climate, and are attacking spruce trees.

You can bet that as we continue dumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and the earth continues to warm, there will be many more surprises in store for us.

ED JOYCE  
Astoria

### One world

Wendell Willkie wrote a book years ago titled "One World." If our current crisis doesn't teach us anything else, it teaches us that we live in one world — pain in any part of the world is felt by all

people.

Certainly there is a crisis, but more than a crisis, it is a cathartic, a cleaning. It is squeezing warm blood from cold hearts. It is uniting nation with nation, individuals with individuals. It is recognizing our selfish ways. It is not my way, but it's our way, together.

President Franklin Roosevelt, years ago, said the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. These trying times show us that love conquers all, and that perfect love casts out all fear. Love prevails, fear fails. So here's to one world, united in love for all.

JIM BERNARD  
Warrenton

### Harsh reality

America is being led down a path of self-destruction. The failed president wasted months downplaying the severity of the COVID-19 threat, and continues to contradict the advice of experts because he's worried, as are all Republicans, about being reelected. As a result, the pandemic is exponentially worse than it should have been.

Now, the coronavirus economic relief bill the GOP has crammed through Con-

gress is a cruel joke. Printing money increases inflation, making the dollar drop in value. And, by gifting it to corporate America with no oversight, it will do nothing in the long term for the economy and only fatten the ultrarich.

The harsh reality is that capitalism doesn't work if John and Jane Q. Public don't have disposable income to buy things beyond the bare necessities they need to survive. That is where we are at. Millions of average Americans will lose everything. Some will lose their business, many will lose their homes and many will unnecessarily lose their lives.

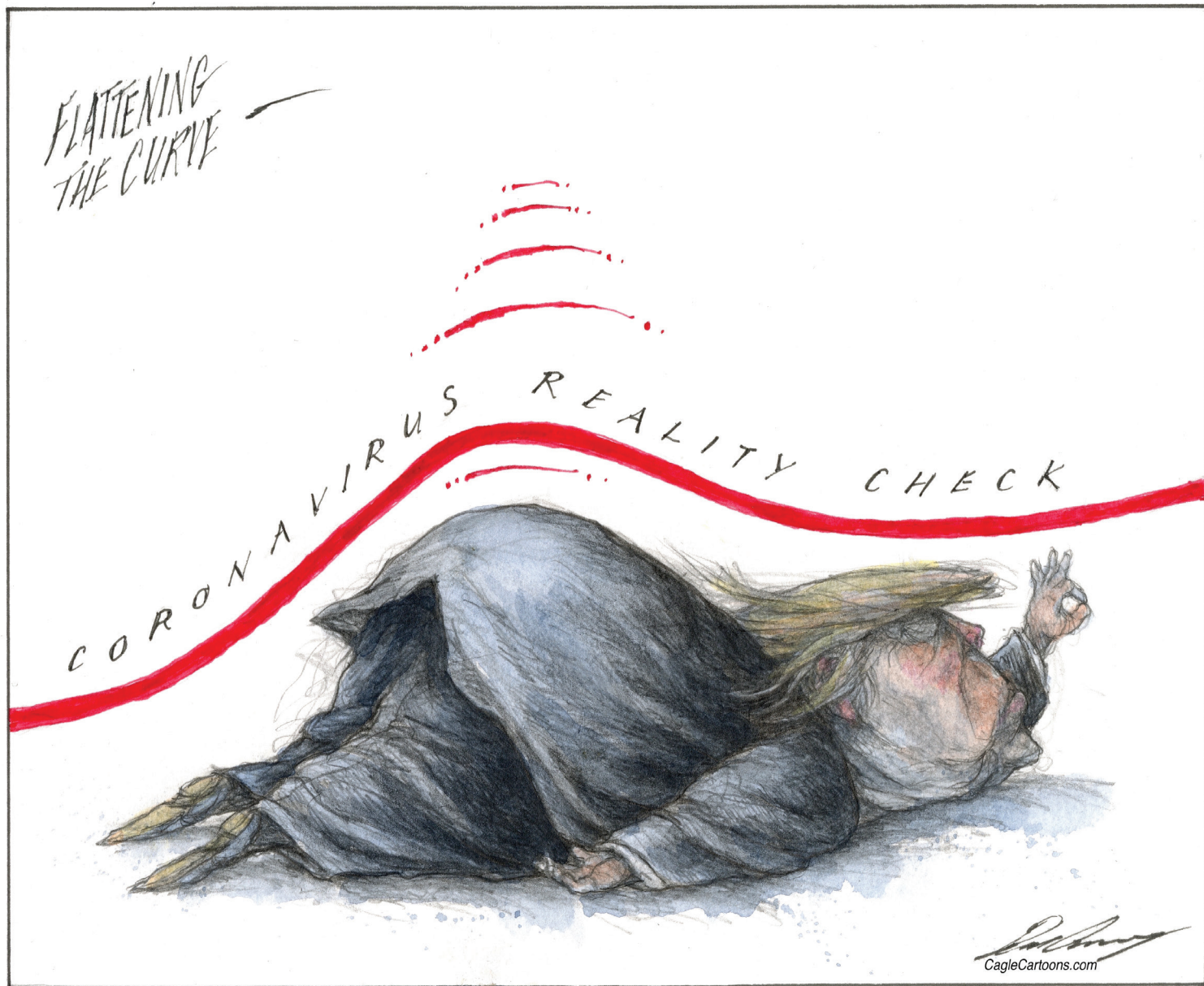
After years of decrying "socialism," conservatives are now desperately turning to it to save their failing capitalist system. Sadly, just as they don't understand what democratic socialism is, or means, they're doing it wrong, taking from the poor to give to the rich.

The GOP's worship of mammon, and their blind reverence for a proven con artist, will destroy us all. The only foreseeable way out of this morass for President Donald Trump will be to wag the dog, and that will surely end in fire of biblical proportions.

Farmers and ranchers tend to be independent thinkers. They are also self-reliant, an asset in the world of agriculture.

But sometimes a problem arises that can overwhelm even the most independent person or family. When that happens, it's OK to talk about it with a neighbor, or a friend, or a counselor.

It's OK to seek help.



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BILL GRAFFIUS  
Gearhart