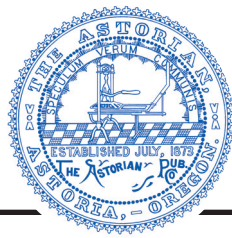


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## OUR VIEW

# Disclose workplace virus cases

While most people on the North Coast were preparing for the Fourth of July weekend, staff at the Clatsop County Public Health Department were scrambling to prevent another coronavirus outbreak at a seafood processing plant.

A worker from Moldova who just arrived at Pacific Seafood in Warrenton tested positive for the virus. While the company sent him to Portland to quarantine, other workers from Moldova who traveled with him under the federal H-2B visa program remained.

According to emails between the county and Pacific Seafood shared with The Astorian, the county wanted the workers to quarantine at a rental house where they were staying until an investigation into potential exposure to the virus was complete.

The workers, though, just got their first paychecks and wanted to go to Walmart for food and supplies. A company executive said ordering the workers to quarantine and miss work, even though they had no symptoms and had tested negative for the virus, was contrary to federal, state and county guidelines.

The dispute — similar to a standoff between the county and Pacific Seafood after an outbreak at the plant in May — reached the chief of staff at the Oregon Health Authority. Ultimately, the state took over contact tracing.



Associated Press

Public health officials have had to balance patient privacy with transparency during the coronavirus pandemic.

All of it could have been kept secret from the public.

In Oregon, suspected workplace disease outbreaks are required to be reported to public health agencies, which have discretion over what information to tell the public.

Clatsop County defers to businesses when it comes to publicly disclosing workplace coronavirus cases.

We're thankful that Pacific Seafood — twice now — has confirmed virus cases when contacted by the newspaper. The Georgia-Pacific Wauna Mill, the county's largest employer, also confirmed a virus case that involved a worker living outside the county.

But private interests answer to investors and shareholders. The county answers to the public.

We believe the Public Health Department should alert people about workplace virus cases that pose significant risk for outbreaks.

Fifty-nine percent of the county's 64 virus cases through Friday are tied to outbreaks at Pacific Seafood and Bornstein Seafoods. Across Oregon, workplace outbreaks have rippled through communities. An outbreak at Pacific Seafood plants in Newport, for example, is tied to 181 cases.

Recognizing the critical need for transparency during a pandemic, the Oregon Health Authority in late May started to publicly report workplace outbreaks that involve five or more cases. For patient privacy reasons, the state set the threshold at workplaces where there are at least 30 employees.

The weekly reports from the state provide some comfort that the public would eventually learn of a workplace outbreak in Clatsop County.

But we don't see any fundamental privacy protection in keeping secret one case, or two, or three, or four at a workplace that suddenly evaporates at five cases. County public health departments are the lead agencies responsible for investigating local outbreaks and have discretion over what details to release.

We understand the Public Health Department is under pressure to balance patient privacy and transparency.

Our view is that our county has been better than many others in Oregon at informing the public about coronavirus cases. But given the extraordinary disruption that government restrictions to contain the virus have had on people's lives, the possible threat to health and safety, and the knowledge that one or two serious outbreaks could overwhelm our hospitals, that standard isn't enough.

Everyone should know when there is the potential risk for a workplace outbreak that could lead to dozens or hundreds of new virus cases. We shouldn't have to rely on the openness of businesses. We shouldn't have to pry the information out through the state's public records law. We shouldn't have to hope someone might share emails.

The county should tell us.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Level playing field

Oregonians deserve a level playing field. Rural Oregonians need the same internet broadband that urban residents have. Broadband brings a world of resources to children, teens and adults. They benefit from increased knowledge, improved skills and essential connections with others.

As a retired teacher, school librarian and resident in east county, I've struggled with unstable internet connections, and know that without broadband, our students are at a disadvantage.

Thank you to the Democrats who voted to develop essential broadband infrastructure in rural Oregon. This new law will fund the development of broadband access in underserved, primarily rural areas, by reducing the existing surcharge on landlines and extending it to cellphones.

Shame on those GOP legislators and our Democratic state senator, Betsy Johnson, who voted against Senate Bill 1603. They put their anti-tax ideology over the needs of their constituents.

Oregonians have the lowest telephone taxes in the nation, according to the Tax Foundation. The surcharge will amount to about \$4 per year on a cellphone, while the surcharge on a landline will be reduced by approximately \$11 per year. Because most cellphones subject to the expanded surcharge are in urban areas, the net effect will be a subsidy for the development of rural broadband.

I fear that Republicans and Sen. Johnson will continue to vote against our needs. That's why I encourage everyone to vote for Democrat Debbie Booth-Schmidt as our next state representative. We can count on her to work for what Clatsop County residents need.

CHERYL JOHNSON  
Astoria

### Dismay

It was with dismay that I read of Warrenton Deep Sea's closure.

There was no better fish market on the West Coast. Yes, I have some knowledge of these things, and compare Warrenton Deep Sea to Seattle's Pike Place Market, San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf and Forty Thieves in San Pedro, California.

Absolutely fresh product, reliably available, handled with professional, no frills competence ... Warrenton Deep Sea was an unsung gem in the crown that declaims our lower Columbia quality of life.

Malcolm Cotte was known to personally deliver to the housebound, and others, who might not be able to shop in person.

KEVIN SIERS CHARLOTTE OBSERVER © 2020



The fillets were truly for us all.

Maybe I'm naive, but it seems that there just might be more to a responsible, successful business than the absolute bottom line. Wouldn't it have been great if the corporate line would have been:

"Even though it wasn't exactly penciling out, we recognize the importance of this business to the community, and welcome the chance to give back by keeping Warrenton Deep Sea's doors open."

Surely, after some bad publicity of late, Bornstein Seafoods would have benefited from some good will. Instead, we get this.

I wish the best to Malcolm Cotte in his new endeavor. We all have a stake in its success.

THRON RIGGS  
Astoria

### Fear factor

Fear seems to rule or dominate a lot of our behavior. The obvious No. 1 fear now is the coronavirus.

But let's not forget the myriad of other fears that prevail: Cancer, job loss, fear of heights, snakes, spiders, enclosed spaces, 666, failure, wrinkles, tooth decay, the dark, and of course, Friday the 13th

(friggatriskaidekaphobia).

Television, radio and print ads play upon our common fears. I'm not sure what to do. Scary.

ROBERT BRAKE  
Ocean Park, Washington

### On target

A comment from a pastor in Iowa about President Donald Trump is on target: "He's been all bully, no pulpit."

Just ponder the clearing away of legitimate protesters for a photo-op moment in front of St. John's Episcopal Church near the White House. To hold up a Bible, as a prop to suggest divine sanction for his authoritarian actions, is shameful. Perhaps, instead, he could quietly retreat to his closet, open it and actually read. If he dares.

JOHN WECKER  
Astoria

### Fearmongers

Here are some interesting statistics from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention that you will not see reported in the mass media — because it

does not fit the government narrative of "saving lives."

All deaths involving COVID-19, whether or not it was the cause of death, spiked in April with over 15,000 a week. Since then, it has been on steady decline. For the second week of July, it was 413. That is not meant to belittle these individual deaths. It is a statistic.

What you will now see reported is the rise in the number of COVID-19 infections. The CDC itself notes that this may be a reflection of the number of tests; more tests, more cases. But it does show COVID-19 is widespread.

So, what did the draconian edicts from the government achieve besides ruining a lot of small businesses and a perfectly good summer? The statistics say not much. Infections are up, deaths are down. Really?

Nevertheless the message continues, and is meant to intimidate: Be afraid, be very afraid. Do not touch. Do not breathe. Stay back. Stay home. Obey, or we will shut it down again. "Save lives."

Most people see the truth intuitively. It's time for the fearmongers to stand down.

ROBERT LIDDYCOAT  
Seaside