

OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

Oregon's virus message misses mark

As Gov. Kate Brown announced her latest COVID-19 restrictions on businesses and social gatherings, one of the state's top doctors offered this advice: Learn how to cook your grandmother's stuffing recipe through using Zoom instead of looking over her shoulder.

It was a rare moment of humanity, underscoring how Thanksgiving 2020 will be very different so Oregon can thwart the spread of the coronavirus.



DICK HUGHES

COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have shot up recently. In response, Brown ordered Oregonians — at least until Dec. 2 — to stay away from gyms and fitness centers, only patronize eateries though take-

out or delivery, up their usage of face coverings, gather with only a handful of other folks at Thanksgiving, and more. The governor slightly tempered those restrictions by subsequently offering \$55 million in aid for hard-hit businesses.

But Oregonians can handle only so many reiterations of, "We're all in this together," "I know Oregonians already have made tremendous sacrifices," "The virus sets the timeline" and "Masks save lives" before those statements lose their impact. Oregonians passed that point months ago.

State-sponsored surveys conducted at the end of summer confirmed the obvious: Oregonians' concerns about coronavirus, and their willingness to follow the health protocols, vary by such factors as their political affiliation and where they live. But you wouldn't know that from the state's communications strategy.

This downfall is not unique to Oregon. The Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues shared this insight from the work of two public health professors at the University of Arkansas: "Poorly tailored public health messaging could play a role in lower rural mask-wearing rates."

The institute noted: "The coronavirus pandemic is disproportionately hitting rural America, where the population is older, sicker and at a greater risk of poor outcomes from the infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends wearing a face mask to reduce disease transmission, but rural residents are less likely than the general populace

DON'T BRING COVID HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

MASKS SAVE LIVES.

Oregon has launched an ad campaign to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

to do it."

A mantra of any marketing campaign — remember, public health awareness is marketing — is to know your target audience and understand what moves that audience. Yet Oregon continues to fall for the one-size-fits-all approach.

The public awareness campaign that Brown announced Thursday offers more of the same. Developed by the Portland-based ad agency Wieden+Kennedy, the statewide campaign apparently will repeat the strategy of hitting people over the head instead of connecting with them. A sample ad: "Don't Bring COVID home for the holidays. Masks save lives."

State officials seemingly have done little to customize their messaging so it resonates with people of all beliefs and backgrounds. Along with those ad campaigns, they have employed media availabilities where Brown, doctors and others read prepared statements in which they A) stress the need to follow the coronavirus protocols and B) say they recognize Oregonians' pain.

Such presentations do not inspire. They have value in getting the word out to news media. However, they do nothing to sway people who have little faith in the governor or state government. From their standpoint, Brown has offered

words but not evidence that she empathizes. After all, she and her compatriots have not lost their jobs due to COVID-19 restrictions. She lives in state-provided housing and need not worry about where she'll find shelter once the eviction moratoriums end. Neither does her livelihood depend on collecting rent from those tenants unable to pay. Nor does she operate a business that's barely hanging on — if that — because of the coronavirus restrictions.

The people living those lives are the ones who can influence others. They are the E.F. Huttons of today. People listen to them. They are the ones to enlist in helping change behavior. (For anyone who is unfamiliar with this cultural reference, the old brokerage firm was famed for its tagline, "When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen.")

Trust in traditional institutions has long been waning. Once the pandemic came to Oregon, the state needed to work much more closely with communities to identify the local influencers — the individuals and organizations whom residents respect and trust, the people to whom others would listen. These might or might not be elected officials, school officials, prominent civic leaders, etc. They more often might be people less in the limelight — clergy, youth leaders,

coaches, revered volunteers or owners of neighborhood gathering spots. Such individuals have their own connections and followings, whether through formal organizations or informal conversations, emails, social media and the like.

They are the ones to carry the coronavirus-safety campaign where the governor and her colleagues cannot.

Such influencers are not a new phenomenon. Long before social media was a thing, I knew a guy who had amassed an email list exceeding 3,000 names, to whom he sent his recommendations on political candidates and elections. He operated out of the public eye, yet had amassed substantial influence.

This is a corollary to grassroots politics. The late U.S. Sen. Mark O. Hatfield understood that. The grassroots organizations he built and maintained in all 36 counties were essential to his election victories. That concept remains intact though its strategies have evolved. People today are more inclined to heed an endorsement from someone they know personally than a political elite they don't.

In short, COVID-19 in Oregon is a public health crisis made worse by a communications crisis.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Coexist

The Gearhart elk herd has Gearhart Golf Course owner Tim Boyle demanding local government do something about them, because they leave hoof marks and dung on his greens and fairways.

Elk have roamed this area since long before we showed up. Yes, they are big. If you're dumb enough to approach them, they could view you as a threat. Your pooch will get trampled if you let it run free through the herd.

Boyle ominously warns of the elks' potential threat to people and pets, while concurrently spreading herbicides and pesticides to create an artificial environment — chemicals linked to bee and other pollinator declines, and proven to cause cancer in humans. Cognitive dissonance, anyone?

Catch and relocate? How, and to where? Even if you can move them far, far away (otherwise they will simply return), who will pay for this? Boyle? Or does he think all Clatsop taxpayers have deep pockets, like him?

The herd has passed through and bedded down on my property. I am impacted. We maintain a respectful distance and they leave us alone.

Culling the herd is clearly necessary. But even if we remove every last one, more will eventually move in. It will be an ongoing issue, and we must find a way to live with it.

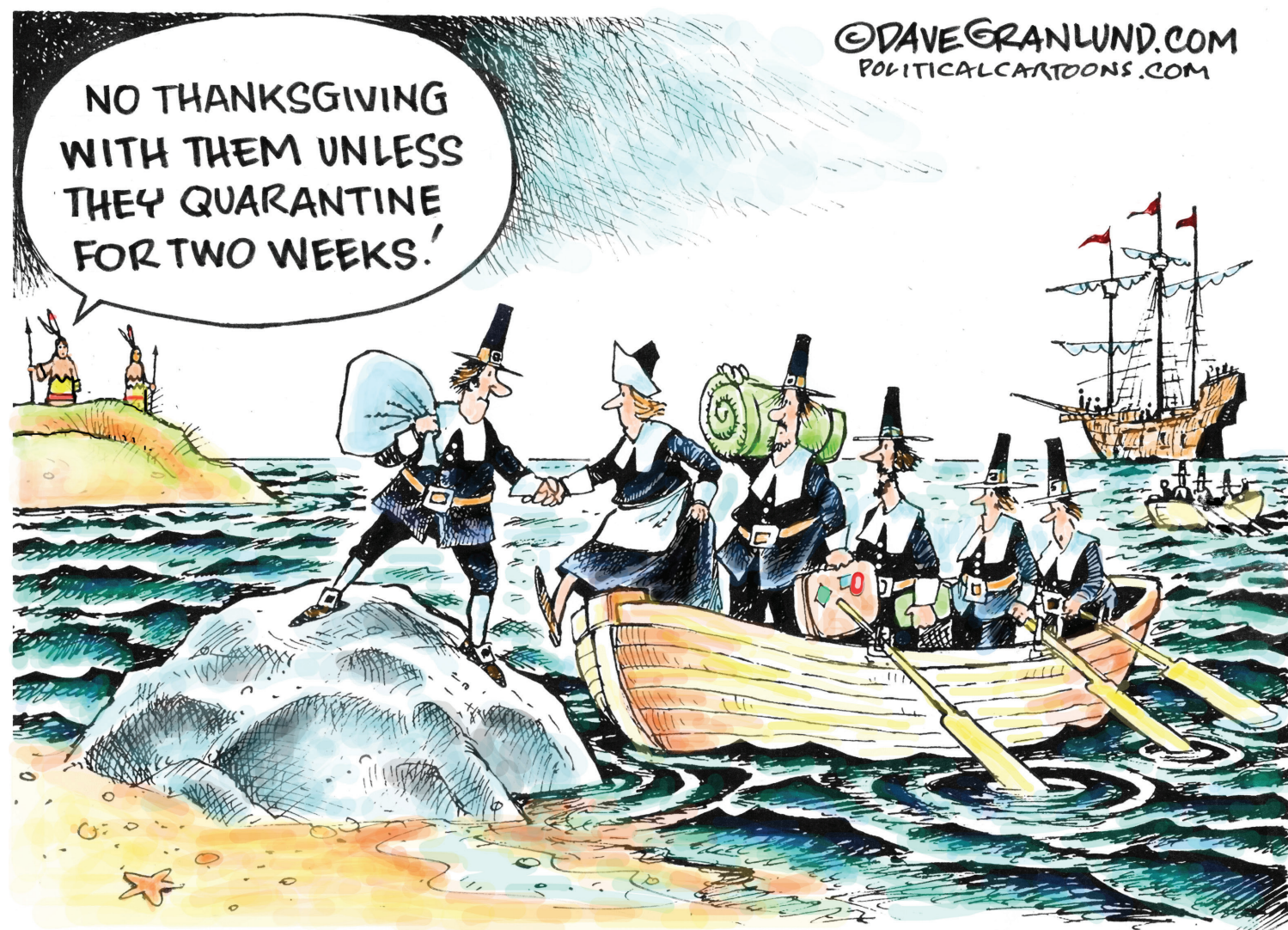
We disrespect and destroy nature at our own peril. We cannot make nature go away. We must find a way to coexist — and in the meantime, Boyle can build net fencing around his overpriced golf course.

BILL GRAFFIUS
Gearhart

Extraordinary sacrifices

From the mid-1970s, our military has been a 100% volunteer force. Some enlist due to lack of employment. Some join for the sense of adventure.

But all who sign their name and swear an oath are doing what most Americans don't do. They are earning their citizenship. Just like all those amazing first responders, these true Americans are lit-



erally standing the wall so you may have the freedoms the rest of the world is envious of.

Most of the people would agree verbally with the statement above, but don't really understand. The sacrifices of not just the soldier or sailor, but also the mother of that young person.

The sleepless nights of a spouse. The younger sister still in school, waiting impatiently for that maybe or maybe not weekly call home. How about that 8-year-old ball-player needing his catching partner to help him learn?

These are only some examples of the extraordinary sacrifices our Americans in uniform and their families must endure for our freedoms.

So, stop talking and start acting. Call your senators and state representatives.

Why is the Wounded Warrior Project not funded by the government? Let's put our money where our mouths say to.

Way too many of our veterans will need lifelong care. Some sacrificed body parts. I know it's a volunteer thing, but how many of you are standing for what most of us believe?

They have earned their freedoms. Have you?

TROY J. HASKELL
Astoria

Cheers to you

In the Nov. 14 article in The Astorian, "Students debate change to mascot," I saw a young woman put her feet forward with a thought, an idea and an opinion.

Oppression can be strong or subtle in its mannerism, but the message will always be the same. In this time of strife, confusion and lack of civility, maybe we should turn and grasp the spirit of our young people.

Maybe we should celebrate a fresh thought, a fresh idea and admit change is inevitable. God said we were created in his image, the U.S. Constitution says we are all equal; maybe we should practice what our forefathers and our creator set out for us to follow.

Constance Rouda, cheers to you, and the courage it takes to bring forth a new idea, and no matter what the mascot name is, you will still carry integrity within yourself. Isn't that what we all want in all of our children?

DAVID HARPER
Astoria