

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# An unprecedented opportunity

Clatsop County's elected leaders have an unprecedented opportunity to model responsibility and civic sacrifice with the vaccine rollout.

In January, The Astorian noted a county spokesperson as saying that some county commissioners were vaccinated because they make up the county's governing body — an integral part of keeping the county functioning and directing services and programs.



JEN  
MUNSON

By contrast, state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, quipped in a January piece, "I can sure as hell tell you I'm not going to get a vaccination before every person in an assisted living facility gets one."

Sen. Johnson is on the right track.

Those of us in positions of privilege and influence may assess our relative utility to the community while at the same time working to ensure the most marginalized individuals receive vaccinations first.

Inexplicably, the federal government does not mandate vaccines be distributed or administered equitably. Local entities are therefore left to their own devices, which naturally tend toward upholding systems of inequity — and even racial injustice.

Indeed, a February piece from National Public Radio stated a fact most of us are now well aware of: Even though communities of color are far more likely to face higher rates of mortality due to COVID, they continue to receive less access to the vaccines.

Following the seafood processing plant outbreaks last spring, Michael McNickle,



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Optics can be important during the coronavirus vaccine rollout.

*THOSE OF US IN POSITIONS OF PRIVILEGE AND INFLUENCE MAY ASSESS OUR RELATIVE UTILITY TO THE COMMUNITY WHILE AT THE SAME TIME WORKING TO ENSURE THE MOST MARGINALIZED INDIVIDUALS RECEIVE VACCINATIONS FIRST.*

the county's public health director, wrote to the Oregon Health Authority, "Unfortunately, COVID-19 has disproportionately affected our Latinx community; especially those working in jobs labeled 'essential worker' ... Clatsop County desires balanced protections for the most vulnerable while supporting the operational needs of essential businesses."

McNickle emphasizes county government's commitment to serve the public first. Nowhere is that commitment more imperative than in addressing racial disparities.

Those of us holding white privilege, as most of our local elected officials do, have an opportunity to both step aside from our place in line for the vaccine as well as to

call attention to the issue of racial inequity in vaccine distribution.

Unlike front-line essential workers, who, according to NPR, disproportionately represent people of color, county commissioners need not work directly with the public. Meetings are now conducted online, communiques can be exchanged by phone, email or otherwise.

What exactly was the necessity for some commissioners to receive the vaccine before more vulnerable members of our community? With one exception, these are not front-line health staff, teachers, bus drivers nor essential food production workers. The county spokesperson notes the move to vaccinate county commissioners was a way to reassure the public that the vaccine is safe. But if this was the intention, why did we not hear commissioners shout this messaging from the rooftops? Where is the coordinated campaign to use their privilege as early vaccine recipients — and their pulpit as elected officials — to tout vaccine safety?

Finally, on a very basic note of human curiosity, was no one evaluating the optics of such a move?

Still, the year is yet young. We have plenty of time to look for our local elected representatives to address racial inequity in purposeful ways. The revelation that some elected officials saw fit to vaccinate themselves before their most vulnerable constituents also serves as a reminder that we, the electorate, have an opportunity to consider our own complicity in upholding inequality in our everyday lives.

Our silence on these matters amounts to complicity. On the contrary, let's get loud.

Jen Munson is a disability rights advocate and social worker.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Reinstate

Many of Oregon's small towns are cash-strapped and struggling. Some blame this on a decline in revenue from logging, due to environmental protections. But despite conservation efforts, timber harvests on state and federal land have remained about the same for the past 25 years. So why aren't communities benefiting?

The answer is that timber companies have finagled outrageously preferential tax treatment for themselves, allowing them to wring money from our forests without putting much back into the communities where they operate.

In the 1990s, logging industry representatives successfully lobbied Oregon politicians to eliminate the severance tax. This tax was a major funding source for schools and local governments.

Washington state, California and Idaho still have this tax, and the money it generates helps fund schools, sheriff's offices and public libraries. The tax breaks we've doled out to timber companies have cost counties approximately \$3 billion over the past 30 years.

Communities are suffering another blow, as logging practices contaminate their drinking water, damage their water systems and threaten their water sources altogether, leading to tax and water rate increases for residents and small businesses.

Some claim that bringing back the severance tax would lead to job losses. But the timber industry has been slashing jobs for decades, replacing workers with machines and closing mills to export logs overseas.

Why should Oregonians subsidize an industry that exploits our land and cripples our communities? It's time for lawmakers to put small towns ahead of corporate interests and reinstate the severance tax.

REGAN FISHER  
Portland

### Comparisons

Early in his presidency, some people foresaw that Donald Trump was gradually turning into a dictator like Adolf Hitler. Such a comparison was then premature.

When Hitler wanted to get rid of his critics, he had them beaten, interned or murdered. The victims ranged from his early supporters (Röehm Putsch, 1934), to leading generals such as Field Marshal Johannes Erwin Rommel, to whom he sent cyanide pills in 1944 to force suicide.

Trump merely disparaged allies, the FBI, Russia probe's Robert Mueller and select other "irritating" entities. He time and again fired close associates. The press, he declared, was the enemy of the people.

When Hitler found the established judiciary not compliant enough, he established the extra-legal Volksgerichtshof (Peo-

ple's Court) in 1934 in order to expedite the silencing of critics — nearly 90% of its cases ended in death sentences.

Trump attempted to pack the federal courts with people whom he expected to uphold his designs. But Trump's lawsuits to nullify elections were rejected, even by judges Trump himself had appointed.

With mesmerizing rhetorical skill, Hitler led a dispirited German people toward Nazism. Trump was a bumbling speaker, who lost millions of voters during his term in the White House.

Hitler was a megalomaniac who created laws for his own purposes. Trump considered himself above the American Constitution, and incited his goons to storm the U.S. Capitol.

Trump was decidedly more repugnant, and a bigger liar in public than Hitler, but a strong democratic tradition kept him from becoming as bad as Hitler.

ERHARD GROSS  
Astoria

### Commend

As the school superintendents in Clatsop County, who collectively serve approximately 5,000 students, we want to commend the Clatsop County Public Health Department for their partnership with us and the community in these challenging times.

The health department team, since well before school started, has been instrumental in helping us plan for a safe opening of schools.

They consult with every district weekly to discuss multiple health logistics related to serving our communities' students and staff. They have assisted and advised on contact tracing when we needed help. They also have coordinated the vaccine process for school employees so that 95% of school employees in our county have been offered their first vaccination. The second doses are coming soon.

They have been available by telephone day and night to address questions and their expertise has allowed for a safe and steady reopening process for schools, which, to date, has resulted in no case transmission between people in any of our county's schools.

We want to publicly express our appreciation for the health department, and especially Vincent Aarts, for their support. We are all fortunate to live in a community where the health department is so dedicated to the safety of our young people and our schools.

CRAIG HOPPES  
Astoria School District  
SUSAN PENROD  
Seaside School District  
BILL FRITZ  
Knappa School District  
STEPHEN W. PHILLIPS  
Jewell School District  
TOM ROGOZINSKI  
Warrenton-Hammond School District  
DAN GOLDMAN  
Northwest Regional Educational  
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## LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

### Sea change

Salmon and steelhead fishing within the slower Columbia River and coastal rivers is at risk.

Every year, fewer fish return, Buoy 10 quotas fill within days and the opportunities to catch salmon and steelhead farther inland get smaller.

There is a stark contrast between the abundance we once had before the lower Snake River dams were built on the Columbia's largest tributary, and the scarcity we now experience. The recreational angling community, and the vast economy fishing supports, is at risk unless we take bold action now. Our salmon do not have any more time to wait.

U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson's recent announcement for comprehensive basin-wide recovery is the innovative, collaborative problem-solving approach we have been calling for. His expansive \$33.5 billion Columbia Basin Fund will support restoring a free-flowing lower Snake River, improving wild salmon returns to the Columbia River each year.

In addition to providing security, stability and certainty to the angling community and fishing industry, it invests in a clean energy future and modernizes our transportation and irrigation infrastructure. This is the moment we've been fighting for 48 years for: A chance for a sea change and a lasting solution to the salmon wars.

However, the details of Simpson's pro-

posal need to be fleshed out. We hope the Northwest congressional delegation gets involved to shape Simpson's concept into a legislative package that the entire region can support.

CHRIS HAGER  
Portland

### Better sense

I am very grateful to have received my first vaccination shot today, being a health care practitioner. However, the vaccination site could very well have been a superspreader event.

In the line outside the building no social distancing was being observed, and once we entered the building, it got even worse. The coordinator agreed with me that the setting did not feel safe.

Way too many people were crammed together in a small space, and she said that had been the case previously, also, when it was being the case and raining outside. I haven't been in as crowded a setting since the beginning of the pandemic.

Once we got further inside, the social distancing got better, but really was not great in a small hallway. And to my dismay, one of the screeners had her mask down below her nose. This is simply not acceptable. I would hope that in future events, there is better sense exhibited.

DEBORAH ALBRECHT  
Gearhart