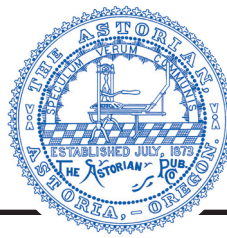


OPINION



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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Extend the lives of good people

Who hasn't fantasized about getting to travel back in time, even if only for five minutes, to nudge the future in a different direction? For me, one that comes to mind is a quick trip to 1928 to beg my teenage dad not to start smoking.

By now, he'd be long dead anyway. Everyone has to die of something. So what real difference would it make?

Apart from wishing for a kinder end for

a good man who spent his last year drowning every moment with corrupted lungs, his living even another 10 years would have kept my mother beside him in a home she loved, might have kept my nephew out of prison, and would have positively influenced dozens of other lives, including mine.



MATT WINTERS

Extending the lives of good people is intrinsically worthwhile.

Right now, it's sad seeing people cut down by COVID-19, in addition to many others who face debilitating after-effects and punishing hospital bills. Like choosing not to smoke, there's a very simple way to probably avoid these tragedies. Get vaccinated.

This month my family lost a treasured elder. My mother's cousin, Mary, an unofficial aunt to me, was cherished by many for her humor, generosity and warm hospitality. Profound kindness radiated like a beacon from her hillside home.

Living in a small Wyoming town surrounded by neighbors whose first reflex is to reject government advice, her COVID death was avoidable. It makes me smile to remember the time she tricked me into riding the roller coaster, and endless summer days picnicking with her in the high desert. It's wrenching to consider that she might have enjoyed another good decade of kindly jokes and fruitful walks with her loving husband, Bob.

This winter, my cousin, Karla, from Michigan, took an untimely vacation to Florida and died there after swiftly taking ill with severe COVID. Her loss leaves a permanent rip in the fabric of



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine is one of three being used in the United States against the coronavirus.

our family.

I can't post a COVID-related story to our Facebook page without some ridiculous jackass posting a laughing emoji, dismissing the awful reality of a horrible infection that continues to kill Americans every day. Although it's obviously just done in a juvenile effort to be snarky, sometimes it's hard to avoid wishing they get a personal taste of what they're ridiculing.

Aside from those who have been tricked into thinking COVID is some wicked liberal thought-control experiment, there are many who worry that the vaccine itself will eventually be discovered to have serious negative consequences. Wouldn't be the first time. But so far there's no sign of such blowback.

The issues that have emerged — possibly including extremely rare blood

clotting from the Johnson & Johnson vaccine — pale in comparison to the risk of coming down with COVID. A slightly sore arm was the worst I experienced after each of two Moderna doses. My 25-year-old daughter made the right risk-benefit calculation by getting the J&J shot. And my wife, despite legitimate worries about allergic reactions to almost everything, is set to get the J&J shot in the next week. Even bearing in mind that we may all eventually need boosters as new virus variants emerge, we feel incredible relief.

Some hold off on getting the shot because they figure enough others will eventually be immune, and that COVID will soon fade into something more like a chronic nuisance. Unfortunately, too many "free riders" mean the bus grinds to a stop — the dream of achiev-

ing "herd immunity" has already died because of vaccination reluctance, a factor that also plays into the virus having an opportunity to mutate in dangerous new directions.

Don't get the vaccine because Anthony Fauci says so. Don't get it because I think it's a good idea. Don't even get it to help America get back to normal or to avoid the chance of spreading the virus to others.

But imagine suddenly disappearing from your family for no good reason. You are more important than you can possibly know. Don't make your son or daughter wish they had a time machine so they could travel back to today and implore you to get safe and free protection from this calamity.

Matt Winters is editor of the *Chinook Observer*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tough conversations

From last year's record-breaking fire season, to bad ocean conditions, hotter summers and reduced snowpack, it's obvious that the Pacific Northwest and coastal climates are changing.

Earlier this year, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries projected that climate change could cause already low survival rates for Snake River spring Chinook to plummet.

We need urgent actions to counteract the fish-killing effects of warming oceans and reduced river flows. We need to make bold actions and significant investments where we have management control: Hydropower and habitat.

The Snake River basin represents the coldest, most undisturbed habitat in the lower 48 states: 30,000 miles of incredibly important high-elevation, cold-water spawning refuge in a warmer, drier future.

Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of the fish spawned in this pristine habitat are able to return because of the devastating impacts of the four lower Snake River dams.

We are at the crossroads of a climate and extinction crisis. Our salmon do not have any more time to wait. Do we want to tell our grandchildren we let salmon go extinct? Or do we want a future with abundant, fishable salmon runs that support businesses and unforgettable experiences?

It is time to remove the four dams. U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., and U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, are ready to have tough conversations to find comprehensive solutions for this complex, pervasive issue. Other regional elected officials need to get involved in crafting a legislative solution that doubles wild salmon returns, and provides stability to river-dependent communities.

NORM RITCHIE
Rockaway Beach

A privilege

My experiences have proven to me that being an American citizen is a privilege. Being taught what the role of a citizen is supposed to do in school is just a start.

Without the parents of these sponges of learning actually being an example to follow, these ideals are lost. It has been proven many times that humans become

what they are fed, whether or not that feed is for the body or the brain.

A good citizen tries their best to be respectful of others, no matter what flag they might fly. Citizens do much more than vote. They are the rocks all communities are built upon, not brick and mortar. Their participation in building the future of any community is the key to whether that society thrives or dies.

We all know that if you are not part of any decision-making process, you get what others assume you may need. Even to survive, let alone your wants. And most Americans believe their wants are their needs. Just like animals in the slaughter line, waiting for the others ahead to make sounds of impending doom, these non-participants of this privilege are behaving the same.

Like any tool, the more you use it, the better you become at using that tool to do your work. Democracy is no different.

Please get involved in your child's future. A little more effort on your part today will make a difference in their tomorrow. United we stand, divided we fall.

TROY HASKELL
Astoria

Political gesture

I have noted that our political leaders have passed a new gun law intended more as a political gesture rather than an effective deterrent to unnecessary gun violence. As usual, this was passed with Democratic votes and no Republican ones.

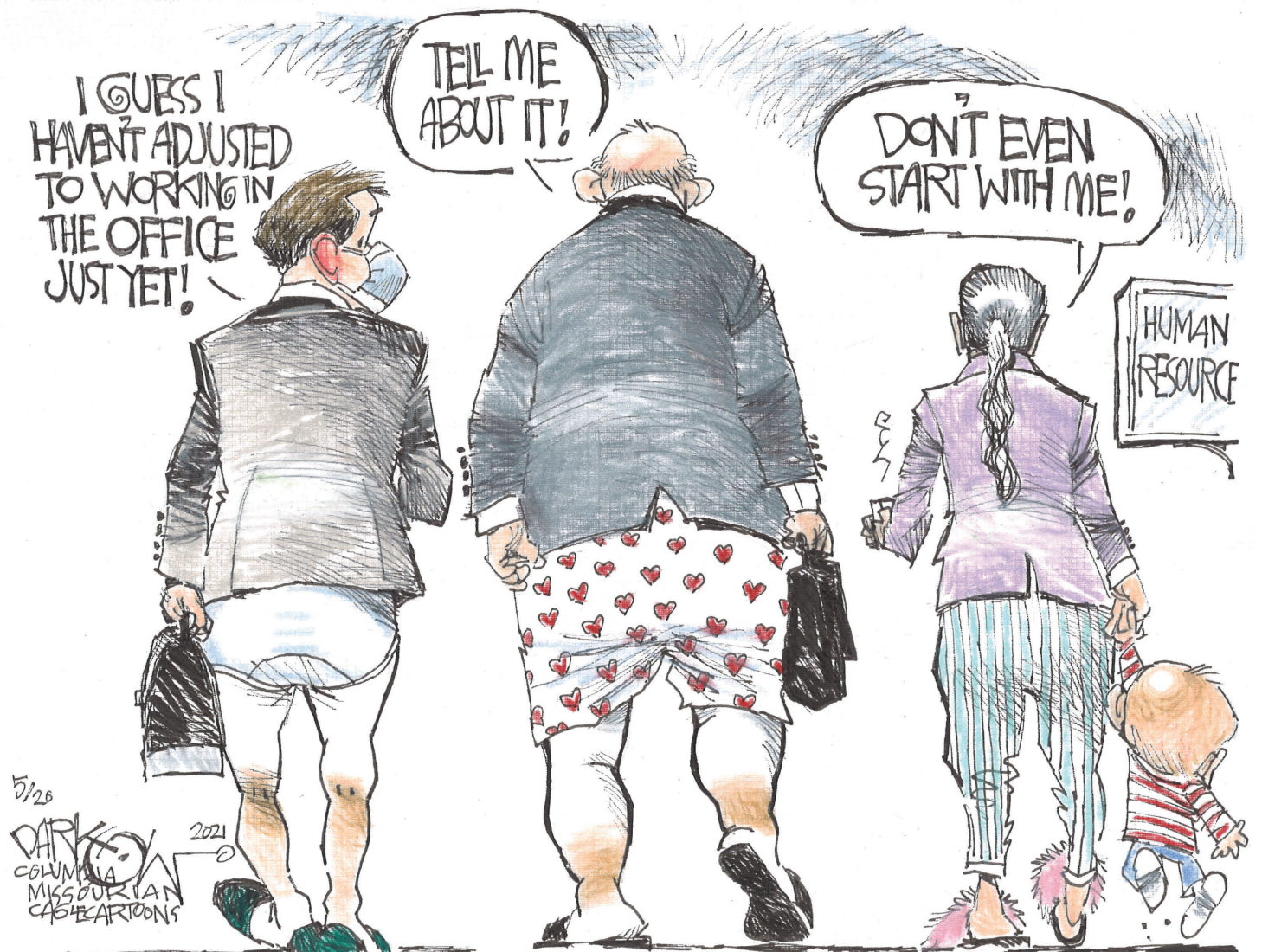
I am strongly in favor of requiring gun locks in homes that have children or immature, unstable young adults. The current culture with the media hype displays to unqualified people that there is power and public exposure if they give in to their desires to punish people they do not like.

Having said the above, I absolutely object to requiring fully mature adults, living in their own homes, being required to have gun locks on their weapons. I have possessed weapons for almost 60 years, and I have never used one except during my seven years of military service, where it was required to survive in Vietnam.

I think it will be interesting for local law enforcement people to seek probable cause search warrants to search my home for any weapons without gun locks on them. I assume this law is going to be enforceable "after the fact," as there is no reasonable way it can be enforced when it needs to be if children or young adults live in the home.

I will retain an unlocked weapon in my home to counter any uninvited person coming into my home when I have no advanced warning.

SCOTT WIDDICOMBE
Warrenton



5/26
DARK COLUMBA
MISSOURI
CARTOONS