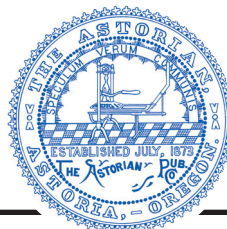


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## BEHIND THE NEWS

# ‘When asked to do so, we step up’

Over the winter, as coronavirus cases surged, Clatsop County turned to the private sector for help with the vaccine rollout.

Chris Laman, the director of pharmacy and cancer center services at Columbia Memorial Hospital, was assigned to lead a vaccine task force in collaboration with the county, the Astoria hospital and Providence Seaside Hospital.

The target? Vaccinate 27,533 people — 70% of the county’s population — to try to achieve herd immunity against the virus.

“I think what we heard from Mike (McNickle) and Don (Bohn) was that our Public Health Department had been incredibly taxed since the beginning of the pandemic, and didn’t necessarily have the capacity at that time to really put on huge mass vaccination events,” Laman said of the county public health director and county manager. “And they could use some help — not taking over, certainly — just help, to really have a combined effort.”

Laman will step back from his role as the mass vaccination events wind down. Margo Lalich, the county’s interim public health director, will take the lead on the vaccine task force in June and try to inch closer to the goal. As of Friday, 16,411 people had been fully vaccinated.

In an interview, Laman discussed the importance of getting vaccinated, the resistance to the vaccines and what the federal and state governments could have done differently to improve the vaccine rollout.

**Q: We’re at the point now where everyone who wants a vaccine against the coronavirus can get one. What’s your message to people who don’t want a vaccine?**

**A:** The science out there really supports getting vaccinated.

I think consistent research that’s being published shows that people who are vaccinated are much, much less likely to get the coronavirus. The few breakthrough cases that there have been, those patients aren’t being hospitalized, those patients are not dying from the coronavirus.

So I would say that even though there are — or can be — side effects from the vaccine, the side effects from COVID are much worse than the side effects from the vaccine.

In order to get us back to sort of the America that we all know and love, that we had before this pandemic happened, we’ve got to get at least — at least — 70% of our population vaccinated.

So I would highly encourage them to get the vaccine.

**Q: There has long been a vocal anti-vaccine community in the United States. But the resistance to the coronavirus vaccines appears woven into political identity. Many of the same people who downplayed the risk from the virus and objected to masks and other precautions are against vaccina-**



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**Chris Laman, the director of pharmacy and cancer center services at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, leads Clatsop County’s vaccine task force.**

*CLATSOP COUNTY IS AN AMAZING PLACE. I MEAN, 350 NOW VOLUNTEERS HAVE STEPPED UP TO MAKE THESE EVENTS POSSIBLE. WE’VE ADMINISTERED MORE THAN 30,000 DOSES OF VACCINE.*

**tion. Are you concerned this could do longer-term damage to trust in public health?**

**A:** I’m not a political figure. I feel like I’m a public health figure. But I think the polarization that we have in the United States has definitely played a role in our ability to get people vaccinated.

I do have some concerns over things like the governor giving a million-dollar — a lottery (for vaccination) — and the way that is going to be perceived, and the sort of long-term effects that that’s going to have on public health just in general. So I do have some concerns about that.

I guess I hadn’t thought about this particular question. But, certainly, it’s a big worry. And I think it’s playing a role in many different parts of our lives, sort of the polarization that is in the country right now.

**Q: Looking back, what could the federal and state governments have done differently to improve the vaccine rollout?**

**A:** I think just consistent messaging — is something that I think has really lacked since the beginning.

It seems at times like different groups are saying different things. I understand that things are changing really, really quickly all the time, and have been for the last year. But I think sort of taking a moment or two to make sure that the states are all aware of information before the federal government puts it out and can get on the same page.

So that, in this day of technology and information getting shared so quickly, it felt at times like the state didn’t know what the federal government was doing. And

then us, at the county level — especially at the task force level — we hadn’t heard from the state or the federal government.

We were kind of learning about these things at the same time that the rest of the country was learning about them. So we would get questions — commonly — like, ‘What do you guys think about this?’ And I was hearing about it for the first time from the person in the general public who was asking me the question.

So just not having a sort of consistent message that was sort of shared with the key players — or key stakeholders — before it became public knowledge. I get that we want transparency and we want it to be open communication. But I think having a bit more — even if it’s just a day or a few hours — notice before the governor was saying something would have been really nice.

**Q: Our sense was the county wanted the hospital to take the lead on the vaccine task force. A more traditional model would have had the Public Health Department or Emergency Management take the lead, at least for accountability reasons. How did you navigate the public and private aspects of the outreach?**

**A:** While the hospitals have played a major role — and I think a very important role in this vaccination program — it was very collaborative from the early, earliest stages.

In December, when we were first starting to have these discussions, Mike McNickle, who was the public health director then, and Don Bohn, who is the county manager, and Erik Thorsen (the CEO of Columbia Memorial Hospital)

and Don Lemmon at Providence (Seaside Hospital) and myself were having sort of regular calls just to check in and talk about the way the vaccination program was going.

I think what we heard from Mike and Don was that our Public Health Department had been incredibly taxed since the beginning of the pandemic, and didn’t necessarily have the capacity at that time to really put on huge mass vaccination events. And they could use some help — not taking over, certainly — just help, to really have a combined effort.

So that was when we started the task force calls. And, at that point, there wasn’t an incident commander or anything like that. It was more of us all getting together on a regular basis to be ready for when the vaccines did start to become more widely available.

How we were going to get — the goal at that point was 27,000 people in the county that we wanted to get vaccinated to get us to that 70% number. How we would be able to do that.

And then it kind of progressed and became what is the vaccine task force today.

But it has been very collaborative the whole time and, I think, a great testament to what a community can do when you come together with a shared purpose.

**Q: What lessons have you learned from the experience?**

**A:** That piece that I said about taking a beat as all of this information is coming in, and really trying to be as thoughtful as possible before you’re putting things out, especially around guidelines or standards and things like that.

That has been, I think, something that we have learned, because there have been so many changes and so many things that we’ve struggled with. That I think is really important.

Another thing, I don’t know if it’s a lesson, but it’s something that I’ve learned, is that Clatsop County is an amazing place. I mean, 350 now volunteers have stepped up to make these events possible. We’ve administered more than 30,000 doses of vaccine.

That would not be possible without the incredible retired nurses, retired physicians, retired pharmacists and current nurses and physicians and veterinarians and dentists — there’s so many different people.

And not only health care professionals, we’ve got data analysts and other people who have stepped up and volunteered to help us in so many different ways. It’s been incredible — all of the community support that we’ve got.

... That’s a lesson for all of us as a community, really. That even in these polarized, crazy times where you don’t know what people are thinking, we’re all still Americans, and when asked to do so, we step up, man, and do amazing things.

It gives me goosebumps just thinking about the fact that we came together as a community to accomplish that.

*Derrick DePledge is editor of The Astorian.*

## GUEST COLUMN

# Stop the Pebble Mine forever

Every summer, thousands of commercial and sport fishermen, seafood processors and sport fishing guides — many of them Oregonians — migrate to western Alaska for the remarkable annual return of tens of millions of wild sockeye salmon to Bristol Bay.

Bristol Bay’s salmon have sustained the Indigenous people of Bristol Bay for millennia, and today they remain the backbone of the bay’s local communities. These salmon also support a thriving, renewable industry that feeds Alaska’s economy and provides income for families like ours in the Pacific Northwest.

In recent years, Bristol Bay’s salmon generated 15,000 American jobs and created \$2.2 billion in renewable annual revenue. Half of all the sockeye salmon sold in global markets comes from Bristol Bay.

And yet, since the late 1980s, Bristol Bay’s rare and sustainable fishery has been threatened by plans for a colossal open-pit gold and copper mine — the Pebble Mine — that a Canadian mining company would blast out of the bay’s pristine headwaters, irreparably disrupting the watershed and leaving behind significant toxic mining waste that must be stored in perpetuity.

In response, a diverse coalition of sport

and commercial fishermen, Alaska Native tribes, conservation groups, grocers, restaurateurs and jewelers rallied to the defense of Bristol Bay’s salmon and have long stood united against the Pebble Mine.

In 2014, after years of scientific review, the Obama administration began establishing protections for Bristol Bay under the Clean Water Act to ensure a sustainable future for salmon and the people who make their livings from them. However, those protections were subsequently rolled back during the Trump administration, creating a path forward for the Pebble Mine.

Until recently, ultimate approval for the mine has sometimes seemed inevitable, its opponents’ objections ignored. Yet, thanks, in part, to congressional oversight from champions such as Oregon’s U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, the Trump administration agreed last November to deny the Pebble Mine permit. However, it also left the door open for a future proposal to be submitted.

The forces behind the Pebble Mine are wealthy and influential. The Pebble Mine’s current permit denial is not a durable fix. By resuming the pursuit of protections authorized by Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act and completing the work the Obama administration started in 2014, the Biden administration can secure the long-



Corey Arnold

**Fishermen have fought to protect Bristol Bay from the proposed Pebble Mine.**

term health of the Bristol Bay watershed, its salmon runs and its remarkable sustainable fishery.

Many thousands would benefit for decades to come, among them Oregon fishing and salmon-dependent families like our own.

This summer, as we migrate north to Bristol Bay, we urge our Oregon congressional delegation and the Biden adminis-

tration to stop the Pebble Mine, forever.

*Jon Broderick, of Cannon Beach, is a founder of the FisherPoets Gathering in Astoria. He and his family have fished salmon commercially in Bristol Bay for more than 30 years. Kate Crump and her husband own Frigate Adventure Travel in Rockaway Beach. They spend half the year in Bristol Bay and the other half in Oregon guiding guests.*



**JON BRODERICK**



**KATE CRUMP**