

OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

A special obligation to the most vulnerable

On Tuesday, the Astoria City Council considered at length, and then unanimously approved, a requirement for city employees to be vaccinated for COVID-19.

I'd like to share the reasoning that went into what was a difficult decision ultimately focused on prioritizing the health of our community and our local health care system.



BRUCE JONES

The No. 1 purpose of vaccinations has always been to prevent the health care system from being overwhelmed, by slowing the spread of the virus and by reducing the number of hospitalizations occurring among those who do get sick.

Unfortunately, although infections were at the lowest point in 2021 only two months ago, Oregon hospitals are now overwhelmed.

Our own Columbia Memorial Hospital and its caregivers have had to cancel elective surgeries until hospital capacity is restored. The ability to transfer critical patients with other conditions to other hospitals throughout our region is severely constrained as well, and in fact, some patients have died because they could not be transferred from Columbia Memorial for specialized care.

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our caregivers. The best way to repay this debt is to reduce the burden of the pandemic on them. Now that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved a COVID-19 vaccine, I ask all unvaccinated persons to consider helping our health care providers by getting vaccinated now. Unless, of course, your doctor recommends against it due to a medical condition.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Many government agencies and businesses are requiring workers to get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

We have a special obligation to the most vulnerable among us, who cannot get the vaccine, to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The city operates a prekindergarten child care and we have a responsibility to ensure we are doing everything reasonable to protect the health of the children in our care. When one of our child care providers recently tested positive for COVID-19, we had to close our child care for two weeks, taking away a vitally needed resource for working parents.

The most recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show

that vaccine effectiveness has dropped from 91% to 66% with the delta variant. So, yes, vaccinated people can still get infected, but at a much lower rate than unvaccinated people. Most importantly, vaccinated people are exponentially less likely to require hospitalization.

And, the fewer people are vaccinated, the more the virus circulates and the more opportunity it has to continue to transform into new variants, whose effect we don't know, and which could extend the pandemic further.

Increasing the vaccination rate, along with mask wearing when in close proximity to others, are the keys to con-

trolling the pandemic, protecting the capacity of our health care system to care for the sick and enabling economic recovery.

The decision to mandate vaccines for city employees — with religious and medical exemptions — was not an easy one. It required balancing rights and responsibilities. I've always believed much of what makes America great is the pact we make with our community that in exchange for enjoying certain rights, we also have responsibilities to take reasonable steps to avoid inflicting harm on others.

A constituent challenged me that mandates are unconstitutional. I first swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution in October 1983. Shortly thereafter, a military corpsman gave me an armful of needles for every kind of vaccination imaginable. So I've never had a problem reconciling being a patriot ready to defend the Constitution, with vaccine mandates, or, a requirement to register my automobile, surrender my driver's license on demand, get my kids vaccinated before starting public school or show proof of taking a hunter safety course prior to obtaining a hunting license.

Thank you all for the sacrifices you have made and hardships you have endured over the past year and a half of the pandemic. Like you, I wish it were over, but unfortunately we cannot wish the virus away. Vaccinating more of our population, together with following the other public health guidelines, will reduce the virus spread, reduce the burden on our health care community and help us all get back to normal sooner.

Please stay safe, and thank you for your patience, your kindness to others and your understanding.

Bruce Jones is mayor of Astoria and deputy director of the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trust the science

Humans are at the top of the food chain. We have no natural predators, except microscopic ones, like COVID-19. Viruses are the ultimate parasite. They are smaller than a human cell. Their simplicity allows them to easily mutate and change to continue their existence, as evidenced by the delta variant. But they rely on a host — humans — to live and replicate. Viruses cannot live independent of their hosts.

We have found a way to conquer this predator, it is called a vaccine. A vaccine builds up the host's defense so the virus cannot effectively live and multiply within a vaccinated host. This results in the virus eventually dying off when it has no hosts left. That is what is referred to as herd immunity.

If everyone works together and gets vaccinated, we can eliminate COVID-19. Trust the science.

DIANE WELLS
Seaside

Searching for a word

Searching for a word to describe the folks who've been deluded by far-right leaders into believing COVID-19 is a hoax, that vaccines don't work — and are more dangerous than the virus — and that masks are all part of a left-wing plot to establish a left-wing dictatorship.

First thing that came to mind: "dupes." But with more thought, more accurate: "victims."

But what word to describe the political leaders who peddle the delusions, putting their victims in the hospital and the mortuary?

How about "murderers?"

R.P. JOE SMITH
Portland

Unprecedented challenges

The new COVID-19 surge driven by the delta variant is presenting unprecedented challenges to Clatsop County.

The official tally of new confirmed and presumptive local cases is now averaging more than two dozen per day, and this number likely represents only part of



LETTERS WELCOME

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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.

the virus' true spread through our communities. Local hospitals are seeing more COVID-19 patients than at any other time.

Our Public Health Department continues to work tirelessly to provide information and services in response to the pandemic. The department, with cooperation from other county offices and local part-

ners, is working to expand COVID-19 testing opportunities and to help arrange for vaccine booster shots once they are approved.

But with case counts growing rapidly, Public Health is increasingly focusing its resources on the most vulnerable in our county, including residents of nursing homes and other congregate

care facilities.

In the face of the recent surge, the state has reintroduced masking requirements for certain settings, and vaccine mandates have been issued for select professions. But for most of us, how we face the challenges of the pandemic will come down to the personal decisions we make — whether to wear masks indoors and outdoors in crowded settings, whether to isolate after possible contact with a COVID-positive person, whether to get vaccinated.

Clatsop County and our partners are dedicated to this mission, but we can't do it alone. It will take each one of us, and the choices we make, to help us through this challenging time.

Please do your part.

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