

OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

The unvaccinated prolong the pain

One of the small comforts of the coronavirus pandemic is knowing most people in Clatsop County did the right thing and got vaccinated.

The county's 62% vaccination rate places us in the top half of Oregon counties and above the national mark.

We should try to keep that progress in mind as we watch with frustration while the unvaccinated prolong the pain.

Over the summer, the county recorded the highest number of new virus cases, hospitalizations and deaths than at any point during the pandemic.

Several of the virus deaths were at care homes — places we knew were the most vulnerable 18 months ago.

The surge of virus cases driven by the delta variant was mostly among the unvaccinated, but it left a strain across our health care system.

Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria canceled elective surgeries. The hospital's CEO said several patients who did not have the virus died because they could not be transferred to other hospitals for specialized care.

We are certain our community will look back at this summer with regret.

Vaccines against COVID-19 have been available to anyone who wants one for months. Data show that people who are vaccinated are far less likely to get seriously ill or die from the virus.

We are skeptical of government mandates and believe people should vigorously question authority. But we also recognize expertise. The overwhelming consensus among public health and medical experts is that the vaccines are safe and effective and harmful side effects are rare.

In a country as large and diverse as the United States, where individual liberty is cherished, we accept that a sliver of our population is unable to get vaccinated because of



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A new survey found that 1 in 5 Oregonians don't plan on getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

VACCINE MANDATES ARE EXTRAORDINARY INTRUSIONS ON INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY, BUT WITH THE UNVACCINATED DRIVING A DEATH TOLL THAT HAS SURPASSED 650,000 IN THE UNITED STATES, THE GOVERNMENT HAS AN OBLIGATION TO CONFRONT THE PUBLIC HEALTH RISKS TO EVERYONE.

medical reasons or unwilling to get vaccinated because of sincerely held religious beliefs.

But too many people have made vaccine resistance an extension of their political identities. A new survey by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center found that 1 in 5 Oregonians don't plan to get vaccinated.

Like our politics, the dividing lines over vaccines are often urban and rural, blue and red, income and education. At root, though, is a disturbing assault on expertise.

Pushed to the edge of the cliff by political opportunists who have undermined trust in our institutions, many jumped into the darkness of

misinformation and conspiracy.

As the virus spread on the North Coast over the past several weeks, we learned of loved ones, friends, co-workers and familiar faces in our neighborhoods who got sick. Some were hospitalized. Some have died.

Our hearts tell us to absolve — to understand that good people can be led to bad water. Our heads tell us absolutism is not enough.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, ruled in 1905 that states can enact compulsory vaccination laws to protect public health. Cambridge had required vaccination against smallpox during an epidemic, but was challenged by

a minister who claimed his rights were violated after he was fined for refusing the vaccine. The court held that individual liberty is not absolute and does not outweigh the authority of the state.

While we prefer that people choose to get vaccinated against COVID-19 — like most in our county already have done — we reluctantly agree with Gov. Kate Brown and President Joe Biden that vaccine mandates are necessary. Brown's order applies to health care workers and teachers and staff at K-12 schools. Biden's directive covers businesses with 100 or more workers, but allows workers to choose weekly testing for the virus over vaccination.

Vaccine mandates are extraordinary intrusions on individual liberty, but with the unvaccinated driving a death toll that has surpassed 650,000 in the United States, the government has an obligation to confront the public health risks to everyone.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unmentioned

Unmentioned in Mark Mix's guest column (*The Astorian*, Sept. 7) were union details:

- higher pay
- 40-hour work week
- five-day work week
- holiday and sick leave pay
- overtime pay (1.5 regular pay after 40 hours per week)
- health care benefits
- Pension, retirement, life insurance structures
- appropriate termination protections
- negotiators to address management structure

Then Mix breathlessly declares: Oh dear, union dues!

R.D. SMITH
Gearhart

Compare

During World War II, the U.S. civilian population supported the war effort by reducing consumption of materials needed by the military. This effort was conducted through rationing: ration coupon books were issued to families to conserve on food, shoes, metals, paper, tires, cars and nylon.

Some personal freedom was postponed to ensure the freedom of our nation.

Compare that support effort to the current war effort against COVID-19. Anti-mask and anti-vaccination fixations — based on misinformation and fear — give the enemy time and victims to transmogrify into perhaps a more lethal and even more contagious variant.

Are you waiting for a COVID variant that produces 50% mortality in the host species?

DAVID FITCH
Astoria



Protect yourselves

I'm certain that many of us have received unwanted phone calls over the past nine months. Whether they be spam, spoofing, sales or charity, please continue to ignore these calls by not picking up and engaging the caller.

If you do not recognize the number, let it go to voicemail. More often than not, there will be no message left. This is a nationwide scam network that has stolen millions of dollars from unsuspecting citizens.

Be diligent and screen your calls. I have received over 240 of these calls since last January. Protect yourselves!

ROBERT POTTER
Astoria

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.