

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Two truths and a lie

### TOPIC: Vaccinations

Strangely, some of the most celebrated achievements of the 20th century have become some of the most derided and suspect ones of the 21st.

The exponential growth of life expectancy in the last 100 years is due mostly to advances in sanitation and medicine, among the most important of which were vaccines that combated diseases that had long afflicted humanity. Albert Sabin and Jonas Salk's polio vaccines in 1950s were possibly the most celebrated but smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid, cholera, plague, measles and mumps were all combated by vaccines with remarkable success.

But we are now in a new era where trust in science, government and media are at an all-time low. The prevalence of rumor and conjecture on the Internet and a lack of good quality science journalism has allowed a lot of misinformation about vaccines to fester. More than 70 people are already infected with the highly contagious and potentially fatal disease measles after a recent outbreak at Disneyland — the largest such outbreak in the U.S. in years.

So what's the deal with vaccines? Let's get a shot of facts into the bloodstream in this week's Two Truths and a Lie.

### TRUTH: Vaccines have done a lot of good.

There's no need to make long-winded arguments here because the numbers speak for themselves.

According to figures provided by the Journal of the American Medicine Association (JAMA) and the Centers for Disease Control, check out the number of people who contracted certain diseases before a vaccine was discovered and then after. Many of those who died from these common and painful diseases were infants and children.

The average number of people who contracted small pox annually in the century was roughly 29,005. In 2010 there were 0 cases. Smallpox has been totally eradicated from the Earth — the only human disease to have been totally wiped out — thanks to a vaccine dating back to 1796.

Diphtheria: 21,053 contracted cases per year pre-vaccine. In 2010: 0.

Pertussis: 200,752 cases per year. In 2010: 21,291.

Tetanus: 580 cases per year. In 2010: 8

Polio: 16,316 cases per year. In 2010: 0

Measles: 530,217 cases per year. In 2010: 61

Mumps: 162,344 cases per year. In 2010: 2,528

Rubella: 47,745 cases per year. In 2010: 6.

Since the pre-vaccine era, deaths from Hepatitis A are down 91 percent, Hepatitis B are down 83 percent, rotavirus is down 88 percent and varicella is down 89 percent.

### TRUTH: The study that linked vaccines to autism has since been totally discredited.

Much of the backlash to vaccines is fueled by mother's groups who cite a 1998 study by Andrew Wakefield that links the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (M.M.R.) with autism.

Numerous studies have since refuted Wakefield's claims and the man was later stripped of his medical license. In 2010, the British medical journal that published the findings officially retracted the study.

A medical panel concluded that Wakefield had been dishonest, violated basic research ethics rules and showed a "callous disregard" for the suffering of children involved in his research. Not known at the time, Wakefield's research was paid for by lawyers seeking to sue vaccine makers. A year before the study was released, Wakefield patented a measles vaccine that could succeed only if the M.M.R. vaccine was discredited.

Recent research provides evidence that autism develops in utero, well before a baby receives vaccinations, although the root causes of the disorder remain undiscovered.

Simply, vaccines do not cause autism, do not poison children, are not a money-making scheme and are not a way for the government to control our minds.

### LIE: Vaccines do more harm than good and are no longer necessary.

If you get medical advice from celebrities, former Playboy playmates or the dampest, darkest corners of the Internet you might be under the impression that vaccines are harmful and should be avoided.

With the information you have in front of you right now you should declare that a lie.

Just check out those numbers above. Adding in other diseases, vaccines have been estimated to have saved about 9 million lives per year over at least the last five decades.

According to publichealth.org, "there has never been a single credible study linking vaccines to long term health conditions." There has also never been a modern example of a vaccine infecting a child with the disease it is trying to prevent.

Yet we still need to vaccinate our children even though infection rates are so low in the United States. If too many people don't vaccinate themselves or their children, "herd immunity" is punctured and dangerous infectious viruses like measles can begin to spread anew.

We've eradicated smallpox and nearly eradicated polio, but there is still lots of work to do to rid the world of measles and pertussis. Until then, it's much safer for you, your children and the rest of the world is be vaccinated against some of the world's most dangerous diseases.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

## Tea Party attack ad shows all that's wrong with GOP

The recent full-page ad in the *East Oregonian* scolding Bill Hansell is a sad example of the stubbornness and ignorance of the fringe right. Jeff Kropf and the Capitol Watch PAC basically condemned Sen. Hansell for thoughtfully considering an issue and then voting his conscience.

Alas, Tea Party minions have no place or patience for reasoned thought, considerate debate or honest disagreement. Either toe the line, stick to the rigid ideology to the letter or you are a traitor.

Kropf and his PAC represent the darkest side of the GOP — the part that prides itself on ignoring scientific facts on climate change, brags about "shutting down" the government and grinding the legislative process to a halt, gleefully passes laws to help the rich get richer while making it harder for the poor and minorities to vote, bullies women by fighting to deny them control over their own bodies and then can't help but vocalize some bizarre tripe about rape for good measure.

I can't believe this is the kind of mindless

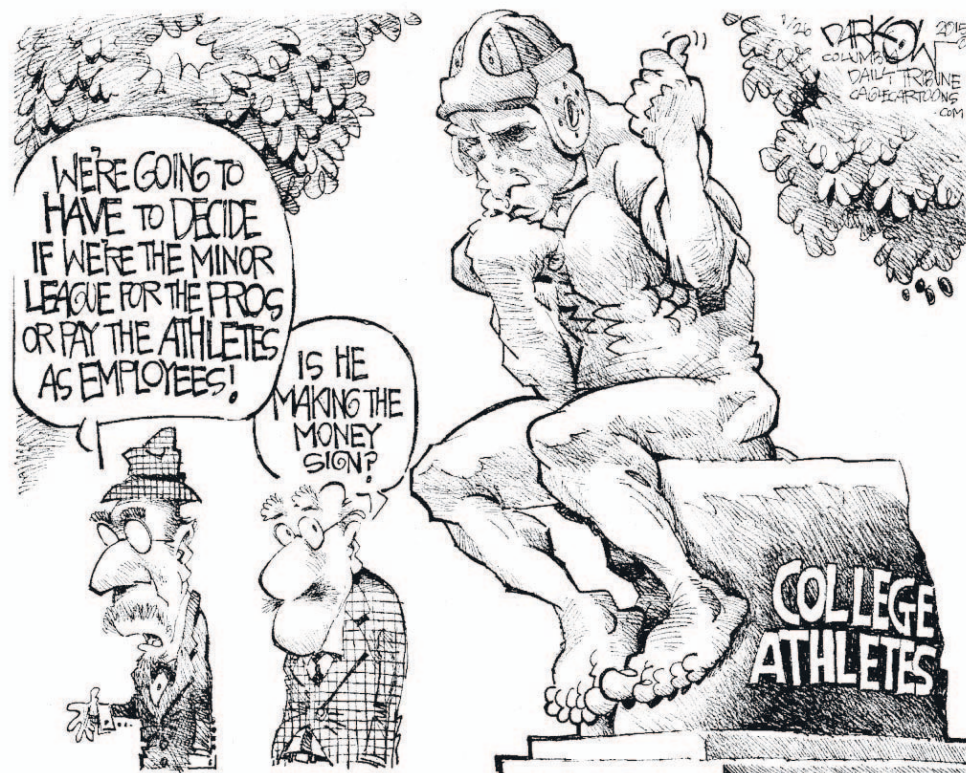
allegiance Umatilla County voters want from their representatives. With the national political scene poisoned by partisanship, Oregon has shown, on occasion, that our best hope for positively confronting our biggest challenges is working together — and a willingness to compromise.

Bill Hansell has shown he has the fortitude and integrity to follow the examples of admirable GOP leaders from Oregon's past (like Mark Hatfield and Tom McCall) who worked with those across the aisle for the good of all citizens. Neither Sen. Hansell, nor the rest of us, should be dissuaded by the hissing and whining from the fringe.

**Hal McCune**  
Pendleton

## Right wing lies fuel culture that doesn't allow compromise

Many thanks to the *East Oregonian* editors for firing your big guns at the right-wing idiots for their massive attack on State Sen. Bill Hansell. What I appreciate most about Hansell — as I did about his predecessor, Sen. David Nelson — is that he does take the pulse of his district, and



## OTHER VIEWS

# Is vaping worse than smoking?

So I suppose you heard about the latest e-cigarette study, the one that said that the vapors e-cigarette users inhale contain multiple forms of formaldehyde. It was much in the news last week, after its authors, five cancer-causing Agent Researchers Just Found in Electronic Cigarettes? asked The Motley Fool. "E-Cigarettes Not Safer Than Ordinary Cigarettes," claimed the online publication Tech Times. The New England Journal of Medicine chimed in with a tweet of its own: "Chemical analysis of e-cigs' vapor show high levels of formaldehyde," it read. "Authors project higher cancer risk than smoking."

The study focused on a device known as a premium vaporizer that heats a flavored liquid containing nicotine. The heat causes the liquid to turn into vapor, which the user inhales. Most of these devices also allow the user to control the voltage. These devices have become increasingly popular as a way to ingest nicotine without smoking.

In the study, the Portland State scientists ran the device at both a low voltage and a high voltage. At the low voltage, they did not detect formaldehyde. But at the high voltage, they found some. Formaldehyde is, indeed, a known carcinogen, which also exists, among hundreds of other toxic chemicals and dozens of cancer-causing agents, in combustible cigarettes. The authors concluded that someone who was a heavy user of a vaporizer at the high voltage was five to 15 times more likely to get cancer than a longtime smoker. Or so they seemed to say.

There is not much doubt that studies like this have an impact on the public perception of e-cigarettes. Even though cigarettes result in 480,000 American deaths each year — and even though it is the tobacco, not the nicotine, that kills them — many in the public health community treat e-cigarettes as every bit as evil.

Every dollop of news suggesting that vaping is bad for your health, much of which has been overblown, is irrationally embraced by anti-tobacco activists. One result is that, whereas 84 percent of current smokers thought e-cigarettes were safer than ordinary cigarettes in 2010, that number had dropped to 65 percent by 2013.

Worse, close to a third of the people who had abandoned e-cigarettes and returned to smoking did so because they were worried



**JOE NOCERA**  
Comment

about the health effects of vaping, according to a study published last year in the journal *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*.

The Portland State study fits right into this dynamic. It is, on the one hand, factually true that vaping at an extremely high voltage will cause formaldehyde-releasing agents to develop.

But this conclusion is highly misleading. People don't vape at a high voltage because it causes a horrible taste — "a burning taste that occurs from overheating the liquid," wrote Konstantinos Farsalinos, a Greek scientist and vaping expert, in an email to me. Farsalinos has done human studies of vaping and discovered that above a certain voltage — lower than the high voltage test on the Portland State study — people simply couldn't inhale; the taste was unbearable.

Indeed, the study actually conveys good news. When used at normal voltage, vaping does not produce formaldehyde! "Rather than scaring people about the dangers of vaping and alarming them to the 'fact' that vaping raises their cancer risk above that of smoking, we should instead be regulating the voltage and temperature conditions of electronic

## Conclusions from the Portland State study are highly misleading.

cigarettes so that the problem of formaldehyde contamination is completely avoided," wrote Michael Siegel, a professor of public health at Boston University, on his blog. But given the way the Portland State authors characterized their research, it's no surprise that headline writers took away a different message.

When I spoke to David Peyton, one of the study's authors, he insisted that the study had been mischaracterized. All it was meant to do, he said, was compare the levels of formaldehyde in e-cigarettes versus cigarettes. "It is exceedingly frustrating to me that we are being associated with saying that e-cigarettes are more dangerous than cigarettes," he added. "That is a fact not in evidence." Well, maybe.

When I read him the tweet from the New England Journal of Medicine — "Authors project higher cancer risk than smoking" — he sounded horrified. "I didn't see the tweet," he said. "I regret that. That is not my opinion."

"There is a lot we don't yet know about e-cigarettes," said Peyton toward the end of our conversation. He is right about that; e-cigarettes are still so new that they need to be studied carefully. And he and his co-authors are planning further studies. Perhaps the next time, they will produce something that doesn't serve mainly as a scare tactic to keep smokers away from e-cigarettes.

Joe Nocera is an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times*.

## LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

## YOUR VIEWS

he does not hesitate to compromise with Democrats if that compromise will help the people of his district.

I grew up hearing, both in school and at home, that politics was the art of compromise. Without it, you generally get nothing. But the idiot right wing, which now pretty much dominates our national House of Representatives, is all or nothing at all; so they generally get the latter, if not in the House then in the Senate or on the President's veto desk. But then they go home and crow about how they maintained the cause and did not waver in their positions, and their constituents who share their opinions cheer and vote for them again, in great numbers.

We'll never get rid of the right wing; we have Fox News constantly stirring them up with its lies (you know, Obama is a Muslim Communist — not possible; the Affordable Care Act contains a requirement for death panels — no, just end-of-life counseling with your physician; English people can't even go to Birmingham — wrong, and the Brits and the French have really been ridiculing Fox as a result of that one). But we need to keep pointing out how irrational the right-wing

agenda and its inflammatory rhetoric are.

Maybe someday the Republican Party will return to the days of Dwight Eisenhower, of Gerald Ford, of Mark Hatfield, and of Tom McCall. I should live so long.

And did you read about the tweet that one British citizen of Birmingham sent? He said that they had had to change the name of the city to simply Birming because Muslims don't eat ham.

**Jack T. Sanders**  
Pendleton

## Hansell needs to repent, vote with U.S. Constitution

We can expect a politician to vote the way Mr. Hansell did, but not a governing statesman giving a Gideon spiel at Grace Baptist Church. For we the people, your voting record is very disappointing.

We the people pray you repent and rechart your course with the faithful compass of the U.S. Constitution to be the public servant you pledged you would be.

**Jack and Judi Beers**  
Adams