

OUR VIEW

Should Oregon block enrollment in online schools?

Education for children shouldn't be another sacrifice made because of the COVID-19 pandemic. And all around Eastern Oregon parents and teachers are doing their best to ensure it doesn't happen.

Mom and Dad can, in many cases, do wonders teaching their children any number of subjects. But teachers are the pros.

Public online schools are in a perfect position to help. They are already set up to educate children with a curriculum tailored to a computer connection. It's what they do.

But could politics be getting in the way?

With Gov. Kate Brown's school closure order, the schools can't accept new students. Try to enroll your student in the Oregon Connections Academy — one of the state's largest online schools — and you see this: "Due to Governor Brown's Executive Order 20-08, as of March 27, 2020, the Oregon Department of Education has advised that no students are able to withdraw or enroll in any schools during the school closure. This closure lasts through April 28, 2020,



Students, parents and volunteers crowd a bus dropping off school supplies to students of the Umatilla School District on April 3, 2020.

and this timeline could potentially be extended. We recognize the confusion and burden this may put on your family. Thank you for your patience as we all navigate the impacts of COVID-19 and the regulations stemming from the Executive Order."

Of course, if a flood of students leave traditional public schools and move to online education, it would

dramatically reshape K-12 education in Oregon. When the students virtually move to online education, the real dollars go with them. Funding formulas are based on attendance. Traditional schools could be gutted. Teachers and other employees at conventional brick-and-mortar schools could lose their jobs. Can that be allowed to happen? Does Oregon need

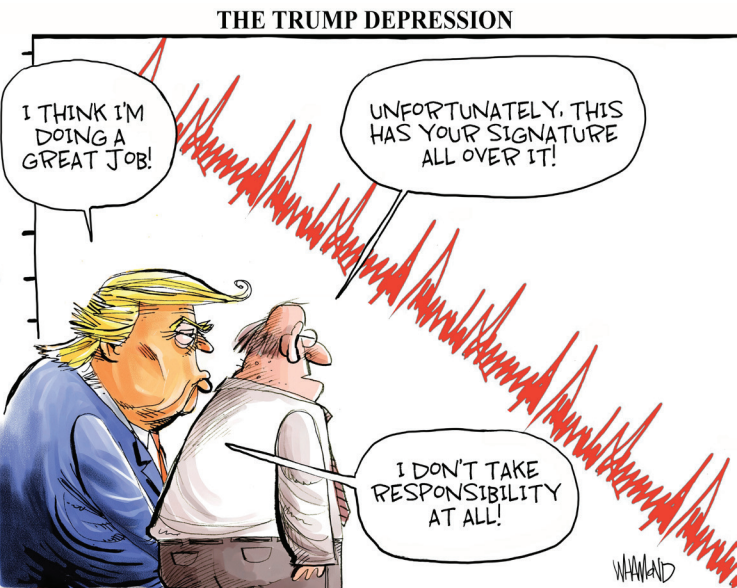
more economic disruption from the coronavirus?

The state's public schools may already be in line to take an economic hit.

It was anticipated that the state's new corporate activity tax would bring in \$1 billion more a year for education. Will that still happen? Will the Legislature take action in the special session to try to ease this new burden on business?

Gov. Brown and the Oregon Education Association — representing some 48,000 school employees — have had their differences recently over changes to the state pension system. They are generally, though, in alignment on education issues. Was it the OEA's influence that led to the enrollment ban for public online schools?

The answer is not really the most important issue. The real issue is to ensure students continue to get the best education they can. Traditional schools are doing their best to adapt. And we believe they will. But if parents decide it's best for their children to attend an online public school, at what point should the state stop them — if any?



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Deadline for political letters

With the world seemingly at a standstill and the news cycle consumed with everything COVID-19, it's sometimes easy to lose sight that we are in the middle of an election season here in Oregon.

In the next several weeks, it is our intention to cover elections in our pages, focusing on local races — such as the five-person race for Umatilla County Commissioner Position 3 — and providing some general information about regional and national races. We understand that our role is to wade through the noise and provide relative information so that you can make an informed decision when ballots go out in the mail on April 29.

And since we are in election season, it means it's time for a reminder about letters to the editor, especially ones that aim to influence the outcome of an election.

A few weeks ago, I wrote a column about letters to the editor and their importance to the health and well-being of our opinion page. And to that point, political letters also

play a role in a robust editorial page. I believe that political letters — if written properly — provide readers with a mixture of different views that can be useful once ballots arrive in the mail. American elections are all about input from voters and votes declaring their support — or nonsupport — for a specific candidate or issue.

An opinion page should be a vibrant place where voters — readers — can furnish a viewpoint in a balanced, well-thought-out way that resembles a giant community bulletin board. We won't publish letters that are diatribes or add little to the larger political dialogue, but we do welcome reasoned, precise viewpoints.

We will continue to run endorsement letters as we receive them. All political letters must be received by noon April 22 and the final day we will run them in print is Saturday, April 25. Any letters received after the deadline will not run.

Andrew Cutler is the editor of the East Oregonian.



ANDREW CUTLER
COMMENT

OTHER VIEWS

An ardent appeal for U.S. global leadership

Editor's note: Do you have a point you'd like to make or an issue you feel strongly about? Submit a letter to the editor or a guest column.

In my lifetime, I've been accustomed to the United States government's leadership in a time of global crisis. The whole of humanity is today threatened by the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, yet where is our leadership to inspire, innovate, organize and help finance a coordinated global response, as the U.S. did in the 2014 Ebola epidemic?

The Chinese are eager to persuade the world that authoritarianism wins over democracy in handling this crisis. We need to prove them wrong.

Virus deadlines: Viruses are constantly arising out of genetic mutations. When they start expanding exponentially, initially no immunity, vaccinations nor drugs exist to stop them. What makes today's coronavirus fast spreading since last December is that it has an incubation period that may not show symptoms, or only mild ones suggesting a cold or flu. This creates a lag in the appearance of an outbreak. It hides the true extent of infection. This is why testing is essential.

Past pandemics: There is good news. Philosopher and historian Yuval Noah Harari points out that global solidarity and shared reliable scientific information have thwarted innumerable past pandemics. Think of the progress made in addressing Spanish flu, smallpox, measles and many other communicable diseases prevalent into the 20th century and then AIDS, Ebola and polio in more recent years. Global solidarity and shared scientific data are what we need today.

Flattening the curve: Two small Asian countries, Taiwan and Singapore, have acted the quickest to contain COVID-19. Their secret is that they learned from the 2003 SARS epidemic and had emergency plans and materials in place. They

did testing and strong contact tracing immediately. Two other Asian countries were caught off guard — China and South Korea — but have rallied to stem the initial outbreaks on their soil.

China: It has airbrushed away its initial failures to heed the outbreak, even punishing the whistleblowers. It did a blitz of hospital building, testing, mass quarantines, drastic population and media control and a shutdown of most daily life to bring the virus under control. Then it galvanized its state-owned companies to make needed medical equipment, now extra to its needs. So China is loudly trumpeting its authoritarian model in a stream of propaganda and proffering assistance abroad.

South Korea: This democracy has successfully used swift action, widespread testing and contact tracing to flatten the curve of new infections. It quickly established 600 testing centers and 50 drive-thru stations. Test results were back within hours. Panic was low and there was scant hoarding.

Europe and America: Alas, our democracies in Europe and America have been hampered in flattening the curve by factors, such as denial, political polarization, late starts in testing, suspicion of experts, false social media information and hugely unprepared medical facilities. The development of immunity and properly tested vaccinations and drug treatment are in progress but take more time than an understandably scared public wishes.

Cooperation: Pandemics are so threatening to the whole world that one would expect prompt international action. Normally, the U.S. leads the way. Last week there were teleconferences in which we participated, one of the G-7 and one of the G-20. The former was initiated by the French, the latter by the Saudi Arabians. Neither produced an international plan. There has been no U.S. push for Security Council action, nor strong endorse-

ment of the U.N. Secretary General's calls for cease fires in war zones and urgent help to vulnerable poor countries.

Sour diplomacy: The principle U.S. response to date has been the blame game.

This is not a time for overheated rhetoric toward China, Iran and others. "When humans squabble, viruses double", as Harari says. With some imagination, this might even be an opportunity for diplomatic initiatives to lessen enmity and promote humanitarian policies. In any case, an international effort is required to prevent the coronavirus lodging in pockets around the world and spurring new waves of infection. And trade still counts as evident by planeloads of Chinese medical equipment landing this week in New York.

Suez Moment? For over a century, we have enjoyed world confidence in our extraordinary power and leadership. Challenges have mounted in the 21st century in economic and military competition, as well as from resurgent nationalism, isolationism and authoritarianism. Autocrats are taking advantage of the pandemic to take more power, as just happened in Hungary and the Philippines.

Sadly, we have tended in recent years to let our own institutions, infrastructure, research, emergency preparations, social trust — and world leadership role — erode. Analysts are wondering if indeed this latest failure of leadership means the U.S. has reached its "Suez Moment," the 1956 crisis that spelled the end of Britain's role as a global player. It is heartbreaking to even be contemplating a Suez Moment.

What to do? It's time for the U.S. to offer its time honored vision, outreach and assistance on the world stage, not just for tackling the pandemic but the aftermath of restoring social and economic foundations — and saving democracy.

Harriet Isom, a former U.S. ambassador and career diplomat who served in Asia and Africa from 1961-96, grew up in Pendleton and has retired to the family ranch.



HARRIET ISOM
COMMENT