

OUR VIEW

Time for methodical lifting of state restrictions

No one with a clear-eyed perspective wants the state to lift its COVID-19 virus restrictions too soon, but it is past time to start seriously considering a limited reopening in some counties in the eastern part of the state.

A key fact driving that sentiment is that in some places — such as Baker and Harney counties — there are no COVID-19 virus cases. In others, there are very few cases. The same, obviously, can't be said of other places in Oregon where the virus is firmly entrenched and spreading. Those counties, just as obviously, are a long way away from lifting COVID-19 restrictions.

Businesses are suffering throughout Eastern Oregon because of the state's restrictions, but most can see the wisdom of the clamp down. Yet, in places where the virus is nonexistent, there should be a quick, methodical and prudent lifting of state restrictions.

One key solution to the problem is more COVID-19 testing, and while the governor has previously conceded



A sign at Pendleton High School advises that school will not resume until April 28, 2020, more than a month after Gov. Kate Brown mandated the closure of Oregon schools in response to the COVID-19 virus.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

such a fix is necessary to move forward, the state apparently still does not have enough tests.

If correct, that is a troubling issue that goes to the very heart of the COVID-19 response in the state. In some ways it is a Catch-22. To

reopen, we need more tests, but many tests are not available. So, we stay closed.

The good news is the governor said last week that she is aware some counties are disease-free. Beyond that, though, her stance remains

one where the solution to the issue revolves around more testing.

If testing is at the crux of the matter, then why doesn't the state have more tests available? If not, where can the state acquire more? Is there a plan in place — if enough testing kits are found — to distribute them throughout the state? What does that plan entail?

While personal protective equipment for first responders and hospitals has been — rightly — a high priority, if we cannot get the state open again without more tests, then shouldn't that be the No. 1 priority of state officials?

Simply saying there are not enough isn't a good enough answer. Our elected leaders may already be way ahead of us. There may already be intensive efforts to gather more tests. We hope so. Because for counties on the eastern side of the state, going much longer with businesses closed is going to evolve into an economic disaster.

OUR VIEW



EO file photo

Janice Alden was a former East Oregonian employee, working in the production department for more than 30 years. She retired at the age of 76.

Janice Alden was one of a kind

Janice Alden was one of the hardest working people I have ever known. She died on April 5 at age 79.

I first met Janice in 1986, when I spent a summer working at the *East Oregonian* during college. She was a newspaper carrier in her younger days, then started working in the *East Oregonian's* mailroom in 1983, where she inserted advertising preprints into newspapers by hand at lightning speed. Her husband, Dan, and brother-in-law, Tim, worked here too. She continued in this role for more than three decades, adapting to new processes, equipment and schedules over the years. It was hard, physical work, but it suited her.

If our machinery failed in the mailroom, you wanted Janice around. She could insert preprints, hand faster than anyone I've ever seen, and slap on adhesive address labels by hand so fast her hands were a blur.

She was wild in her younger days, she told me, and I heard some stories over the years. With her long, bleached blond hair, dramatic eyeliner, tattoos and outgoing personality, she was a memorable figure.

Janice's work ethic and dedication to the *East Oregonian* are legendary around here. The older she got, the deeper was her affection for the newspaper. She had lit-



KATHRYN B. BROWN
COMMENT

tle patience for co-workers who didn't take their jobs as seriously as she did.

She knew both my mother and grandmother from back when they were alive and working at the *EO*. It was Janice who first told me about my grandmother setting the papers on her desk on fire with an unattended cigarette — back in the days when smoking in the office was a thing.

In 2013, after nearly 30 years at the *EO*, Janice decided it was time to retire. However, it wasn't long before she decided that retirement wasn't for her, so she returned to work. A few years later, another retirement party. But that didn't stick either. Finally, in late 2017, she retired once and for all.

But, she still came into the *EO's* Pendleton office regularly to pay for her subscription and say hello. As the years went on, Janice's hearing diminished and her voice got louder, so everyone knew when she was in the building.

Janice was always a generous donor to the United Way, loved her animals and read the *EO* every day. She was one of a kind.

Kathryn B. Brown is an owner of EO Media Group and serves on the editorial board of the East Oregonian.

ANOTHER MILE

Doing unto others

It was a Thursday morning in January that I remembered to join up with the quilters at church to see how I could help out. Impressed by their donation last year of 131 quilts for needy folks in our region or beyond, and knowing how to use a sewing machine, I wanted to check in with them.

All handmade by a weekly group of about a dozen women and men who gathered to team up and fill in wherever needed to get another quilt laid out, pinned and tied, fabric ironed, and edges stitched and finished, these quilts are about extending warmth to those who lack it, rather than following an intricate design pattern. Still, there were efforts to combine pattern and color into a visually pleasing combination, communicating love and care to the stranger who would receive this gift.

As other obligations took me away from a regular commitment, I intended to return later to be involved. Unfortunately, that collaborative team approach is currently not possible during this time of physical distancing. And so, many of them are making masks, some to be sent out to hospitals or given to anyone who might need them.

Many folks find that their leisure interests and faith commitments meld in charitable action through the religious congregations they attend. In the past, those I know of have met during the week to serve meals at the homeless shelter, offer support to children and families under stress, provide personal care and school kits to those in need, offer music for services, or replenish and share donations from food pantries.

When flooding displaced our neighbors, those religiously committed stepped up along with others to support those most in need around us. We followed that activity in social media and in the news and were inspired to follow their example. That relief work continues, and in partnership with secular counterparts, congregation members continue to be available as the contact on the ground, with leaders available to those who might fall through the cracks in gaining aid through large agencies.



REGINA BRAKER
COMMENT

It's a challenge to reconsider our charitable activity or a find a new approach to the needs surrounding us. This kind of action remains an important lifeline, a mutual give and take of care and concern, supplying concrete assistance where there is need, the warm support of human connection, even when we remain physically distanced. And at this time there are so many within those pathways of support who may find their local faith community to be a conduit to that assistance, whether on the giving or receiving end.

The pastor of the quilting group reported that the church continues to offer pre-filled bags of food to pantry clients, and that those in need are expanding to include people who have never needed it before. Congregation members, including a CPA, are available to bring their expertise informally to those needing it in strange and challenging times. Whether just noticing and filling a new gap where it exists, connecting with county and state agencies, advocating for housing and food needs, or just letting people know what facts and sources of information are reliable, faith leaders along with their congregants are responding to a heightened sense of service to others.

It has not been that long since we gathered to follow our interests with those who share them, whether it's to sing, knit or sew, garden, landscape, cook or bake. In do-it-yourself projects at home and beyond our walls, we make ourselves available to others and communicate our care for them. We do so also in our support of local businesses in whatever ways we still can. As we feel gratitude to those performing essential services in their occupations, we can also ask ourselves if there is possibility to pay forward our thankfulness in meaningful ways.

We may find that a faith community is a place to connect with the efforts of secular entities who are working hard to fill the gaps.

Regina Braker, a retired educator with journeys through many places and experiences, enjoys getting to know people along the way.