

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

### Commissioners make the right decision

The decision the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners made last week to reinstate mask requirements for county employees, and for residents visiting county buildings, was the right one.

The decision was unfortunate, at least in the sense it was probably inevitable, judging by the way the COVID-19 cases are surging in the county.

The county decision means all its employees put on facemasks anywhere outside their workspace and when someone visits their desk. Also, people who attempt to enter the county courthouse without wearing masks will be denied access.

At first glance the decision may seem almost routine in this age of COVID-19, but it also should show just how critical the surge is. That's because a county courthouse is one of the most visible and relevant structures of democracy in America. Residents should expect to be able to have access to a place where the people's business is conducted.

But the COVID-19 outbreak is extremely serious and, so far, apparently out of control. Cases in the county are climbing at an alarming rate. The situation is made even more frustrating because there are ample supplies of COVID-19 vaccines available. In short, there now exists a tool that is safe and effective that can protect residents from the infection, yet the county is in the middle of an outbreak with no end in sight.

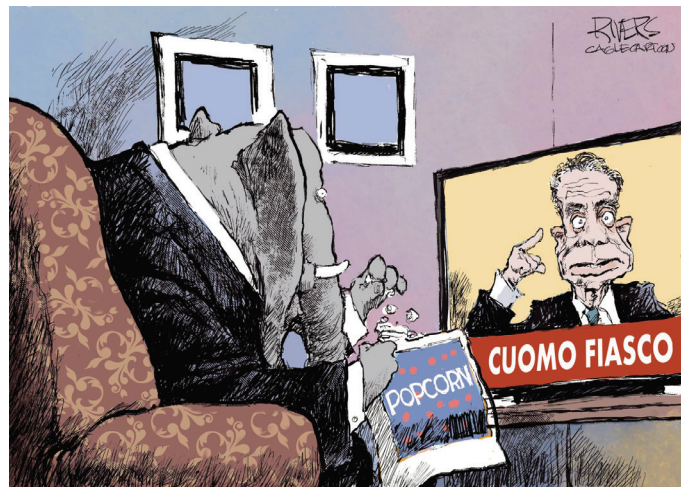
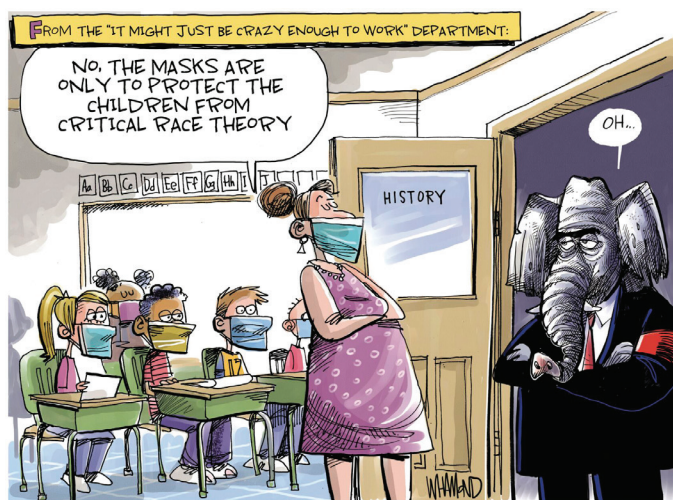
Of course, the government can't — and should not — be in the business of forcing people to get a vaccine. However, when cases of COVID-19 surge — as they are now — that means there will be consequences, such as new mandates for county employees and new rules on access to the courthouse.

The commissioners made the right decision. In fact, they made really the only decision they could in a situation we now face as a county.

While the new surge in COVID-19 cases may seem to be surprising to many, the fact is the virus never really disappeared. The lifting of state restrictions at the end of June did not signal a victory over the virus. What it did mean was the threat level — because of the availability of vaccines — was lower than in the past.

No one wants to go back to restrictions or to the constant donning of masks, but until the virus case load diminishes, that may be the only way to try to stop the spread.

The commissioners made a good decision. We just hope such decisions don't become the norm in the future.



## YOUR VIEWS

### Both parties have problems

I find it increasingly difficult to understand how anyone can call themselves a proud Republican, or proud Democrat. For the last several years, each succeeding administration seems more partisan and dysfunctional.

The Republican Party is feckless and seems unable to develop legislation to benefit the American people; think health care.

The Democratic Party has moved so far left as to be unrecognizable. It has created insecure borders allowing thousands to enter illegally, promote amnesty for those let in, piling up endless debt and facilitating major crime waves in major cities by defunding police and failing to prosecute criminals.

Worst of all is that truth has become a casualty in both our political system and mainstream media, which is now controlled by a few major corporations. Some media outlets — like Fox or CNN — favor one party or the other, so they report information that favors their party.

Even “fact checkers” disagree with other “fact checkers.” This is to say nothing of misinformation on social media. Individuals need to expose themselves to a variety of media sources in order to obtain balance in reporting.

Americans need to demand truth from our politicians and the media. Fox News reported that when a reporter was asked why some prominent politicians lie, the answer was “because they can.” Politicians who have become too parti-

san to maintain good judgment need to be replaced, along with those who have forgotten who they represent.

Larry Nelson  
Bend

### EOU has responsibility to safeguard health of students, staff

Tom Herrmann is a retired professor of physics at Eastern Oregon University. I was therefore surprised to read his decidedly unscientific letter regarding COVID-19 vaccination of students at EOU (“EOU should reevaluate requiring vaccination,” July 24, 2021).

He claimed: “There is no significant threat of death from COVID to healthy young people.”

Not true. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Monthly Mortality and Morbidity Report showed 2.9 million cases in those younger than 24 between March 1 and Dec. 12, 2020, and 57% of these were in the college-age group. Among those for whom data on hospitalization and death was available, there was a 2.5% rate of hospitalization (30,229), a 0.8% rate of ICU admission (1,973), and a 0.1% mortality (death) rate (654). I would call 654 deaths a significant threat — wouldn’t you?

He claimed: “Treatments have been developed that greatly reduce symptom severity and death.”

Only partially true. Monoclonal antibody and convalescent serum therapies are not universally available. This is still a dangerous disease with a high death

rate.

He claimed: “There is no benefit to vaccination after COVID infection.”

Not true. While it is unclear how long a COVID-19 infection grants you immunity, reinfection is known to happen. Vaccination is the surest route to long-lasting immunity, even if boosters are needed down the pike.

Regarding myocarditis: Cases are rare and there are no fatalities. There is a risk of 40 cases of myocarditis for every million second doses of mRNA vaccine in males aged 12-29. And no deaths. That same million doses will prevent 560 hospitalizations, 138 ICU admits and six deaths. (Most cases of myocarditis occurred among males).

Regarding vaccination and pregnancy: I know of no conclusive data on this issue. It would be reasonable (though not necessary) to delay vaccination if pregnant.

Professor Herrmann cites a “poll” of EOU students as showing 65% are against mandatory vaccination. We know nothing about this poll’s methodology and cannot draw any conclusions from it. We do know that a 2021 study of college campuses that reopened to in-person learning showed infection peaks in their student bodies that immediately preceded and were apparently linked to infection peaks in their surrounding communities.

EOU and its administration have a responsibility to safeguard the health of its students and staff and the La Grande community at large. Failure to vaccinate the student body (and staff) clearly abdicates this responsibility.

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### LETTERS

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