

## OUR VIEW

# Bi-county COVID-19 response a wise move

The decision was somewhat of a muted one, but the move by the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners last week to unite its COVID-19 response with Morrow County was a good one.

In retrospect, the decision was an obvious one. The two counties are intricately linked and as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to gain ground locally, it was a wise judgment by elected leaders.

Going forward, the two counties will coordinate policies and resources regarding the pandemic, and that should be a piece of good news for area voters.

The bad news, though, continues unabated. More cases of COVID-19 are reported every day, and across the state hospitals are nearly out of capacity for patients who suffer serious complications from the infection.

The unfortunate aspect to the entire COVID-19 response is how it has become politicized on a truly epic scale.

Fueled by conspiracy theorists and blatantly false information on social media, many voters are unsure — or opposed — to vaccinations. No one can be, or should be, forced to be vaccinated. It should remain a personal choice or a decision reached between a patient and their health care provider.

Yet, when information is so distorted that it resembles fiction, it isn't difficult to see why so many are wary of the vaccine.

The controversy, though, over the vaccine isn't a new phenomenon. It is a product of our times. All one must do is look to the last two presidential elections to see how information was manipulated — by both major political parties — and crafted to tell a specific narrative. That kind of work on information isn't news or "spinning" a subject. It's propaganda.

The COVID-19 pandemic is burning like a wildfire across Umatilla County and misinformation isn't productive. In fact, it's downright dangerous.

Once Americans trusted their medical personnel, they trusted the scientists and listened carefully to the information available on a specific issue. Then they acted.

We've reached the point now, though, where those who are subject matter experts on the COVID-19 virus are just another special interest group.

It shouldn't be that way.

The final decision to be vaccinated is a personal one. But it is sad that one must spend hours searching for information to be able to decide whether it is the best choice.

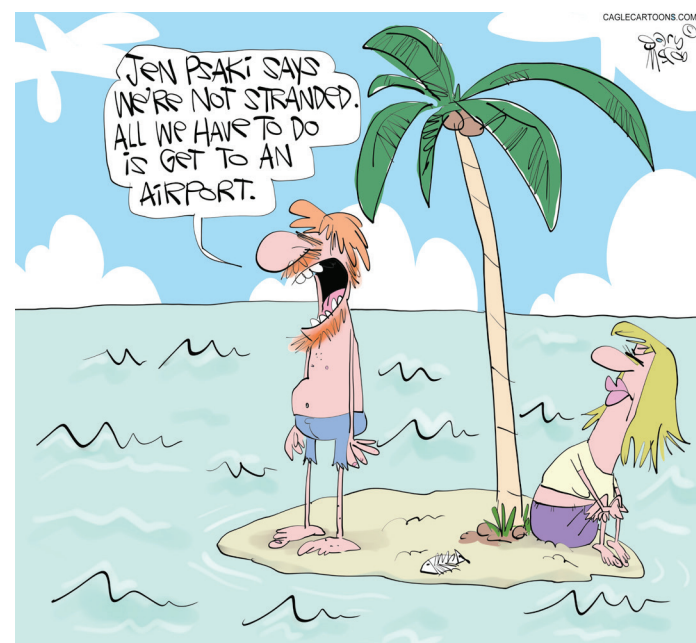
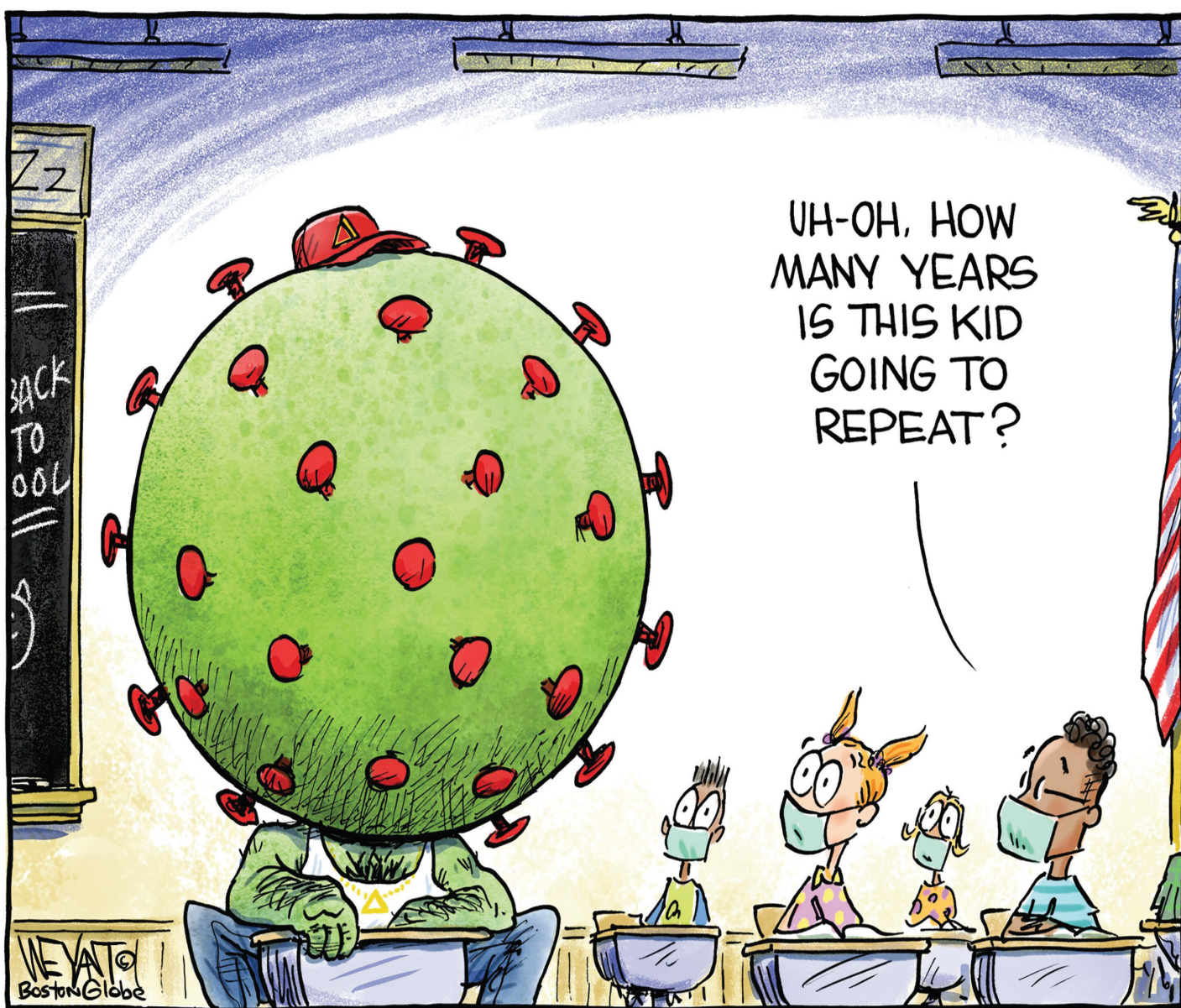
But that is where we are. We urge anyone who has doubt about COVID-19 vaccines to spend some time searching for correct, and reasonable, information. Not by clicking on the newest social media crackpot, but by carefully researching the science behind vaccines and what the nation's leading medical personnel report.

### LETTERS

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. 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:

editor@eastoregonian.com,  
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,  
211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801



## YOUR VIEWS

### EO editors should follow the science

The virus behind the COVID-19 pandemic is not political. It is neither liberal or conservative, rural or urban. It is a biological entity that opportunistically infects, mutates and replicates before infecting new hosts.

The delta variant is now the predominant strain in Oregon. One individual can on average infect up to seven people. As of Monday, the Pfizer vaccine has received full approval from the FDA. It is safe and effective. The Moderna vaccine will likely get full FDA approval shortly.

The Aug. 19, 2021, Our View titled "Vaccine skepticism isn't a rural urban issue" stated: "Our combining of state data shows more than half of unvaccinated adults — 56% — live in the state's most populous, and most liberal counties. That suggests to us that deciding not to get a COVID-19 shot is more of a matter of personal choice than an ideological statement."

The EO Editorial Board did not document their data source or their methodology in the above statement.

I went to the public data from the Oregon Health Authority to examine recent COVID-19 cases for the past seven days for each county as of Monday, Aug. 23: [public.tableau.com/app/profile/oregon.health.authority/covid.19/viz/OregonCOVID-19Update/DailyDataUpdate](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/oregon.health.authority/covid.19/viz/OregonCOVID-19Update/DailyDataUpdate).

Raw numbers and percentages are skewed by the population of each county. I chose the number of new cases in the past seven days for each county, standardized based on the population of the county. In other words, the number of new cases in the past week per county for 100,000 people.

For the five most populous counties, the average COVID-19 seven-day case rate per 100,000 people was 270.

For the six northeast counties (Baker, Grant, Morrow, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa) the average was 588 — more than twice the rate in the Willamette Valley.

Similarly, the positive test results for the two regions parallel the case rate trend with an average positive rate in the Willamette Valley of 11.4%, while the northeast counties were twice that at 26.53%.

Take the time to follow the science. COVID-19 is rapidly spreading, filling our intensive care unit beds, and can be deadly. The vaccine works. It may not completely block this variant, but it is effective in preventing hospitalization in most cases. Get the vaccine and mask up to protect yourself, your family and your neighbors.

Ron Fonger  
Pendleton

### Wearing a mask is a small price to pay for freedom

Local leaders have used freedom as an argument against mask mandates. While I agree that masks are unpleasant, I don't agree that they infringe on the freedoms granted to me in the U.S. Constitution. Using that terminology in opposition to a widely accepted public health recommendation is a disservice to our community.

As Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen knows, unchecked freedom is chaos. His job is to uphold law and order, and these are achieved by limiting freedom to a narrower band in which our lives are more predictable and safe. Laws, rules and mandates provide a protected space in which we can enjoy our rights to self-expression, community and enterprise. In this country, freedom has never been carte blanche to do anything we want. We accept this limited version of freedom because, for the most part, it gives

more than it takes away.

It is often said in times of war that "freedom isn't free" — freedom costs money, human life and constant vigilance to uphold. Here, in the war against a deadly and highly contagious virus, freedom is equally expensive. Either it will cost our community more lives, personal suffering, medical debt and stress to small business, or it will cost each of us the discomfort of wearing a mask. Either way, it won't be free.

In America, freedom is a set of mutually beneficial limitations, and it always has a price. I hope our leaders will acknowledge that masks are the cheaper way to uphold freedom in our COVID-19 world.

Sarah West  
Cove

### Opinions don't matter to a deadly virus

I am appalled by the conversations I am hearing in response to our current spike in coronavirus sicknesses and deaths. This virus has only one purpose: to replicate itself. And it's very good at that.

Our only weapons to stop that attack are to wear a mask, keep physically distant and be vaccinated to lessen the impact on our bodies. There is no valid opinion that changes these biological facts.

We have proven that shouting opinions only keeps us from being safe. Opinions don't matter to a virus, only replication. And so far the virus is winning by attacking everyone: young, old, compromised or healthy.

Our choices are clear. Talking it to death is having no effect. Mask, vaccinate, distance and sanitize. The goal is to stay alive.

Arlene Young  
La Grande