

OUR VIEW

Education is the key to unlocking labor force

Break down poverty and unemployment by race and it is worrisome.

If you go back to 2019, Oregon's economy was zooming. But there still were large disparities in poverty rates by race.

- 10.2% for white, not Hispanic Oregonians.
- 11.8% for Asian Oregonians.
- 14.8% for Hispanic Oregonians.
- 25.2% for Black Oregonians.

The pattern isn't all that different for unemployment rates. And there are substantial gender inequities, too. Women are employed at lower rates than men, and earn lower wages as well.

What could or should Oregon do about it? It's lost potential for families and individuals to build wealth and for Oregon's labor force. Josh Lehner, Oregon's state economist, recently took a look at the issue.

"To really address this disparity, the availability and affordability of child care and extended care after school would really need to be addressed," Lehner wrote in his report. "The unemployment rate between women and men is not noticeably different, but that's largely due to many moms indicating they are not looking for work specifically because they are taking care of the home or family. Flexible schedules, working from home, and broader societal changes are also likely needed to help address the gender employment gap."

It's a complicated problem with no single policy solution. But what we do know is the value of a college degree in improving wages and in employment.

The median wage for college graduates is about 80% higher than for noncollege graduates.

"Therefore the biggest economic and societal boosts to raising educational attainment and addressing racial disparities will not be seen in the raw number of workers in Oregon," the report said. "Rather, the bigger boosts will be seen in the income, poverty, homeowner, and taxes paid data."

Of course, college is not for everyone. There will be gains from other post-high school professional training, too.

Getting more Oregonians on the path to college degrees or other post-high school training could slowly change those disparities. That's not a particularly new finding nor a surprising one. When we think about priorities for Oregon's children, it's worth remembering.

KIDS COULD START GETTING COVID VACCINES BY HALLOWEEN...



COVID-19 brings fear, tedium, relief



KATHY ANEY
FROM THE REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

The paper test strip steeping in blue liquid would soon reveal its secrets.

On the bathroom counter next to the test tube, my phone timer silently counted down from 10 minutes. I had swabbed my nose, swished the swab in the liquid and inserted the strip into the tube. Shortly, I would know if I had COVID-19.

A few days earlier, in a case of the worst timing ever, I had driven to Eugene to help my mom with a day surgery appointment the next day. Cruising along the freeway for five hours, I happily listened to an audio book and barely noticed a growing tickle in my lungs.

I arrived on my mom's doorstep with a smile. Both of us had been fully vaccinated for months, so we hugged and got busy catching up. Had dinner. Shared a glass of wine. We spent much of that night and the next day together as I ferried her back and forth from surgery. My asthma, a chronic respiratory condition I've had since childhood, started to bother me more.

That night lying in bed at my Airbnb, other symptoms arrived: sore throat, chills, a wheezy cough and a stuffy nose — along with a growing feeling of dread. Surely this was a garden variety cold. Just because we're in the middle of a deadly pandemic doesn't mean one should assume the worst. Right?

The next day, I bailed on breakfast

plans with mom and headed back to Pendleton. My husband, or Nurse Bill as I now call him, met me at the door wearing a mask. I set up the master bedroom for quarantine. A friend offered to give me a home COVID-19 test and Nurse Bill went to fetch it from her.

Now my phone alarm chirped, alerting us that the result was ready for viewing.

"I can't look," I told Bill. He bent close to inspect the strip. The info sheet in the home kit explained that a blue stripe indicated a negative result. A blue stripe accompanied by a pink, however, meant positive. Bill gave it a long look.

"Pink and blue," he finally said. I was stunned. "No! No, no, no, no."

It was Wednesday, exactly a week before the start of the Pendleton Round-Up, my busiest week of the year as an (albeit now semi-retired) East Oregonian photographer and reporter. Every day of Round-Up, I typically shoot between 1,300 and 1,500 photos of rodeo action. This. Was. Not. Happening.

But it was. My next thought was mom. Holy moly, I might have infected my octogenarian mom. That realization hit me with a supersized wave of guilt.

A PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test a few days later at St. Anthony Hospital confirmed the home test.

So where did I get COVID-19? Maybe on Sept. 4 when I photographed the outdoor Veterans Benefit and Music Festival at the Heritage Station Museum where few wore masks. I also had roamed the sidelines of several different football and soccer games with my camera and met with a couple

of individuals separately at restaurants' outdoor seating in the several days prior to getting sick. All seemed like well-ventilated, low-risk activities.

There are silver linings to getting sick. One is the knowledge that the two-dose vaccine I got last spring did its job in schooling my immune response. No longer naive, my system fought back like a special forces unit with advance intel. I am in a high-risk age group and I have an underlying condition. If not for those jabs, I might be among the one in 500 Americans killed by COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic.

Of course, getting vaccinated didn't guarantee I wouldn't get the virus. I know that firsthand now. But recent data suggests vaccinated people spread the virus for a shorter time and their cases are generally less severe even against the hyper contagious delta variant. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study recently reported that unvaccinated people were five times as likely to be infected from the virus, 10 times as likely to be hospitalized and 10 times more likely to die than fully vaccinated people.

Hunkering down in the back bedroom for more than a week brought tedium, but also a constant stream of texts, photos and emails from friends hoping to keep me entertained and encouraged. After 10 days in isolation, I breathed easy again and actually got to shoot a couple days of Round-Up.

As for my family, my mom tested negative twice. Nurse Bill, however, developed a fever and lost his sense of taste and smell. The case is mild.

Be safe out there.

Kathy Aney is a reporter/photographer for the East Oregonian.

YOUR VIEWS

Nothing good so far from Biden administration

After nine months of Biden and his administration, it's difficult to find an accomplishment that benefits our country.

He has further helped split our country along political and racial lines, caused unchecked inflation leading to higher fuel prices thus higher prices for everything moved by trucks, most everything from food and clothes.

Our continued open borders allows hundreds of thousands of unknown migrants from many countries to come to the United States during a time of COVID-19 restrictions for U.S. citizens, perhaps bringing other health problems as well. Many are not apprehended thus more drugs are entering, causing unknown deaths as a result.

These illegals are being sent all over our country with no vetting to help protect citizens from harm. We do know as a result that the cartels are making millions of dollars on human suffering. There is a huge amount of violence in large cities and small as well, leaving families wondering where to turn for protection.

More recently we have the sad Biden fiasco of leaving Afghanistan without a plan or purpose. He has left behind unknown numbers of American citizens (as well as 13 U.S. soldiers dead) at the mercy of a violent Taliban regime who are now well armed thanks to Biden's lack of planning and purpose.

We have always been the leader of the free world, but now even our allies have found us to be untrustworthy. They are having second thoughts as to whether they can rely on the U.S. Biden has managed in a short time to let the American people down and also the rest of the free world.

Ed Ater
La Grande

Keep vaccine opinions to yourself

Umatilla County residents should follow the old axiom of keeping our mouths shut and just let people think we're ignorant and not opening our mouths and removing all doubt.

It's embarrassing enough to have a multitude of people living here foolish enough to support a Trump presidency

despite his reputation for grift, endless lies and scandalous and inappropriate interactions with women. Now we have the resistance to vaccinations.

People are splitting themselves to prove a point. Not recalling that they themselves have been vaccinated already just so they could attend public schools. All of a sudden they want to treat their bodies like a temple that shouldn't be subjected to a vaccine that might contain ingredients they're unaware of.

All between bites of a gas station corn dog, an energy drink and a drag on a vaping device or a cigarette. I've seen the temples in this town. I'm not impressed.

Also, businesses have to take a neutral position when it comes to taking a public political stand. Cease with the assumption that everyone agrees with your political preferences. There are businesses that I don't agree with that I will still patronize as long as they keep their opinions to themselves.

Go on Facebook or other social media sites and whine about not getting your way and you've lost my business for good.

David Gracia
Hermiston

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