

OUR VIEW

Oregon agency bosses get religion

In Oregon, the deadline for state workers to be fully vaccinated has passed. Gov. Kate Brown imposed the mandate in an attempt to increase the number of Oregonians who are fully vaccinated. Unvaccinated state workers faced being put on administrative leave — unless they received either a religious or medical exemption.

It appears state agencies applied the prerogative liberally. Oregon granted religious exemptions to at least 11% of state executive branch workers.

Our reporting shows that out of 40,056 total executive branch employees statewide, 203 workers, or 0.5% of the state government's workforce, were put on administrative leave due to not meeting the vaccination deadline.

According to the Oregon Department of Administrative Services, of the employees subject to the mandate, 4,514 received a religious exception, 323 received a medical exception and roughly 180 religious or medical exception requests are waiting to be processed.

Washington state, by contrast, lost 3% of its state employee workforce and offered far fewer exemptions. Officials say the contrast is likely because Oregon left the work of approving religious exemptions mainly up to agencies, while in Washington, exemption decisions were made at the state human resource office level.

We are not in a position, nor are we in any way qualified, to judge the sincerity of any individual's religious convictions when it comes to COVID-19 vaccinations or any other doctrinal questions. We take these declarations of faith at face value.

But, in the Northwest, there are at least two other ways of approaching the evaluation of employee declarations of faith.

Centralized bureaucrats in Washington who didn't know the employees and who didn't have to keep the trains running are pretty skeptical of the piety of state employees. But when push came to shove, Oregon state supervisors faced with putting their colleagues and critical workers on administrative leave, while maintaining services, saw the light.

We have said at the outset that people who are able should get vaccinated for the coronavirus. While we respect the right of informed adults to weigh their own options and decide what is right for themselves, we think the vaccine is the best way to reduce infections and serious illness.

At the same time, we think government vaccine mandates are wrongheaded and counterproductive.

While they probably wouldn't say it out loud, it looks as though the bosses at various state agencies in Oregon agree.



Making a place for predators



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

This year I had two opportunities to visit a remote location at the very western tip of the Aleutian Peninsula. The little village of Cold Bay, Alaska, is about 100 people surrounded by tribal, military and state and federal wildlife refuge lands. Among the nonhuman residents of this area is a healthy population of brown bears, and while there I was impressed by how humans and bears coexist in this environment.

Alaskans consistently teach brown bears to steer clear of people. These bears are hunted during the fall, and a portion of the Cold Bay economy is tied to guiding and outfitting bear hunters with some hunters paying up to \$40,000 for the opportunity. Bears that get into trouble in town are quickly hazed away or killed by residents, as allowed by Alaska law. We witnessed one young female brown bear killed in Cold Bay after she broke into an outbuilding holding game meat.

The humans of Cold Bay have also taken steps to coexist with bears. They clean all fish and game on the town dock, which is more than 600 yards down a long pier. Every resident is required to haul and immediately burn their household garbage in a town dump site. One doesn't go hiking or fishing without carrying some sort of bear deterrent, with the most common choice being a short-barreled shotgun loaded with slugs.

The philosophy seems to be that a

good brown bear is one that runs away at the sight of humans and avoids areas where people live.

In the Pacific Northwest, wildlife managers have a similar, but different, challenge in the way they manage wolves. This spring and summer the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife approved what they euphemistically call "lethal removal" of at least 13 wolves from mostly private pastures in Northeastern Oregon. These 13 wolves include eight of the 11 wolves in the Lookout Mountain Pack southeast of Baker City. Developing a taste for domestic livestock is a bad habit if you are a wolf that wants to survive in the Blue Mountains.

One of the primary developers of the Oregon wolf management plan told me once that if we want to have wolves, we must be committed to killing those individuals that habitually prey on livestock. This pragmatic approach recognizes the economic and social realities of living with predators. Just like a good brown bear is one that avoids humans, a good wolf (and pack) avoids livestock, as slow and tasty as they might be. I do want wolves in Northeastern Oregon, so I accept that problem wolves need to be killed.

Immediately to our east, the state of Idaho has taken a ruthless approach that goes too far. This year the state allocated \$200,000 from hunting and fishing license and tag fees to pay as much as \$2,500 bounties to hunters and trappers who kill a wolf. So, if you are an elk hunter deep in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness and you see a wolf, the state of Idaho will reward you with cold hard cash for killing the animal without any regard for whether the indi-

vidual has a history of eating livestock.

The state also removed a whole suite of restrictions on hunting and trapping methods for wolves including night-hunting, using bait and dogs, and hunting from motor vehicles.

The logic seems to be that wolves eat deer and elk; hunters want more deer and elk to hunt; so wolves should be killed at every opportunity to give us more deer and elk to hunt. I find this to be an extremely selfish and arrogant approach to managing our wildlife.

Last month I made the case that public lands are the best place for elk, and that by managing habitat on public land we can make these areas more attractive to elk — where they belong. I would extend that same logic to wolves; public lands, especially back country, are the best places for wolves. We should do all we can to encourage them to live as wolves were intended, eating rabbits, squirrels, and yes, deer and elk. I am a deer and elk hunter, and I am willing to give wolves their share first.

My personal ethic is informed both by my faith and by my profession as a biologist. Predators (and elk) are part of creation, and as good stewards of this creation we need to make a place for all native creatures. The place isn't in town, and probably not on private pastureland. But to kill predators wherever and whenever we can as part of some misguided mission to increase deer and elk numbers is selfish and ignores our stewardship responsibilities.

Wolves in the back country? Let them be.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

YOUR VIEWS

The Urban Renewal District blame game begins

The street replacement program in Pendleton's Urban Renewal District appears to be in complete disarray, and now the blame game begins. It wasn't all that long ago that Pendleton's public works director was boasting how costs for replacing streets in the URD were much lower than originally expected. To achieve those lower costs, it appears that timeline language allowed contractors to work at a pretty leisurely pace.

That pace has stretched the time frame of the project far beyond any reasonable length, leaving residents and businesses unable to use their streets, not for days, but weeks, and in some cases months.

Ultimately, as with any city project, success depends on adequate planning, planning for the very situations incurred that resulted in the delay's experienced. After all, despite appearances, this is not their first rodeo.

I submit that the blame rests directly

with city hall management. Will they accept responsibility? Will those inconvenienced be compensated? Will they once again be rewarded for a less than stellar performance?

**Rick Rhode
Pendleton**

Oregon leaders have failed to earn the public's trust

I would like to respond to a column in the Oct. 26 edition of the East Oregonian, titled "Vaccination falls prey to political beliefs." In essence, it alludes the reason that Eastern Oregon lags behind the rest of the state in vaccination rates is due to political affiliation and lack of trust in state government.

I don't think political affiliation plays as an important role as lack of trust in state government.

Gov. Kate Brown, House Speaker Tina Kotek, and Senate President Peter Courtney have proven time and time again a blatant disregard for the voters of

Oregon regardless of political affiliation.

The latest example was redistricting process. The House speaker originally suggested a bipartisan approach but later recanted under political pressure. There is a laundry list of initiatives approved by the voters only to be circumvented by the governor and the democratic controlled Legislature.

Everything from driver licenses for illegal aliens to the corporate activity tax. When the Oregon Legislature passed a bill granting driver licenses to illegal aliens it quickly overturned through the referendum process. Over 85% of the voters did not want to let illegal aliens have driver licenses in Oregon. Brown pushed the Legislature to pass another bill granting the licenses disregarding the will of the people. They attached the emergency clause to the bill so it could not be referred to the voters. Over 45% of all bills passed during the last session had the emergency clause attached.

Just my thoughts.

**Joe Mesteth
Hermiston**

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

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. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. 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