

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

It's time to review what worked and what didn't

The mask mandate sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic for K-12 schools is set to expire at the end of March, marking a turning point of sorts. But while lifting the restriction will be welcome, the world, and the nation probably will not see the end of the infection for a long time.

Yet there is no doubt with cases from the latest omicron variant surge declining, a slight amount of breathing space now is evident regarding the pandemic.

Now is the time for state elected leaders and health officials to examine how the pandemic was handled and how to respond the next time there is such a malady or another surge.

Let's face it, since the pandemic began the state and the nation has been in a reactive mode. The COVID-19 virus has dictated how elected and appointed leaders responded. The restrictions developed at the state level have been on and off and while there seemed to be an overall plan it was often marred by conflicting information.

What needs to happen now is a full-fledged after-action review with public involvement at the state level. A process where all the decisions that were made to face the pandemic are evaluated. That includes an in-depth review of the effectiveness of the various COVID-19 restrictions that were enacted and whether they proved to wise.

The review — perhaps completed by a bipartisan Oregon House or Senate committee — could collect as much information as possible in an even-handed way to answer any lingering questions about the impact of the pandemic.

This committee should not conduct a witch hunt to find fault but a methodical, precise exercise. More importantly, such a committee can develop best practices that can and should be used the next time the state faces such a horrific challenge as the pandemic.

Because the future isn't going to wait, and we will face another pandemic in the future. We need, as a state, to have a good understanding of what worked and what did not so the next time such a crisis appears on our shores we can face it with the know-how developed from hard-earned experience.

Such a task won't be easy, and it would surely create some controversy just because of the political age we live in now, but it is absolutely necessary for the future. The state faced some difficult challenges during the pandemic, and we must learn from them and apply them the next time.

EDITORIALS

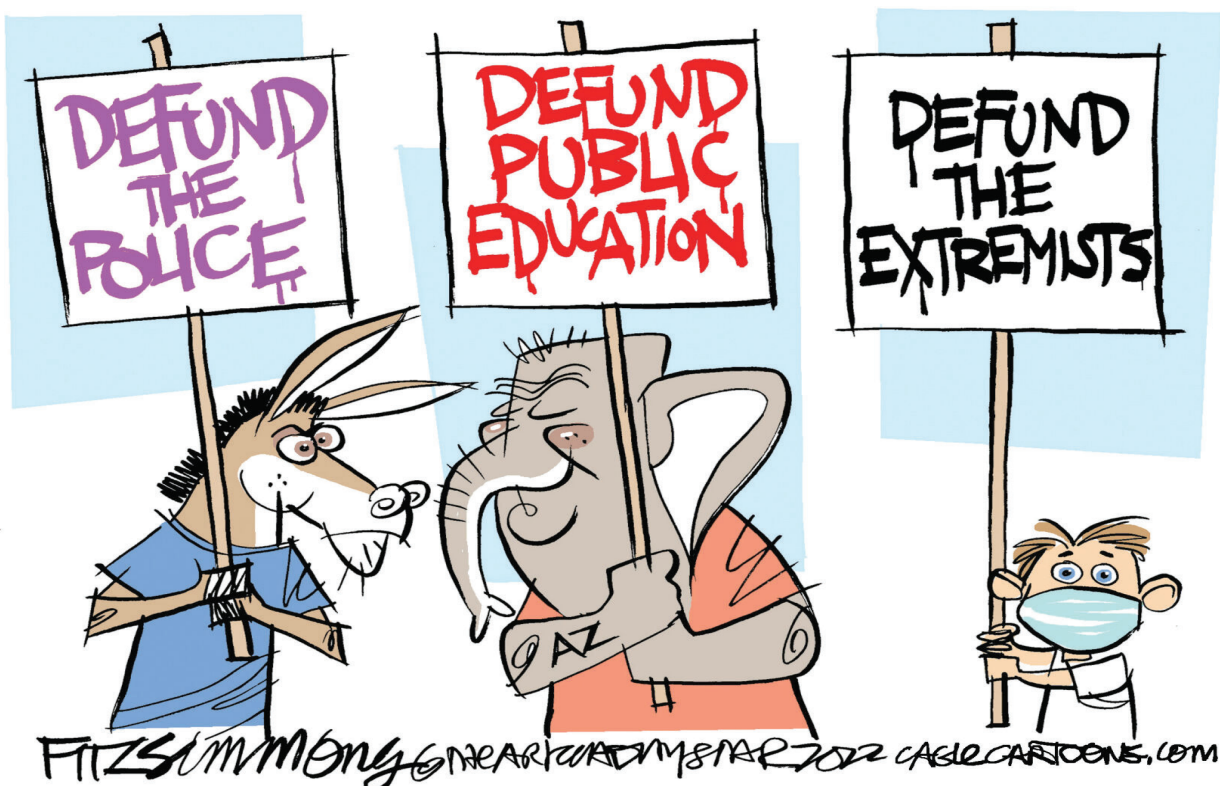
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Waiting at the bus stop



REGINA
BRAKER
ANOTHER MILE

The phone rang. My brother and I were together visiting our mother in her assisted living residence. He recognized his ring tone and answered. It was his daughter, calling to check on how her grandmother (Oma) was doing.

"Still asleep in spite of all efforts by the nurse to wake her up," he reported, and added that we weren't sure if she had eaten any breakfast. A nurse had stopped in to administer medications. He filled his daughter in on all the details he had just shared with me, and ended by telling her that Oma was waiting at the bus stop for the bus that would take her away from us.

I've thought about that metaphor since then. Throughout the last several weeks, all of us who spent time with our mother, grandmother, great- and even great-great-grandmother spent time waiting with her at that bus stop. At first there were stories she told us, some at great length, and there were songs we sang with her.

After a week, the conversation was up to us to carry on, with only a word or phrase from her now and then, and often only in German, her first language.

A week later she no longer spoke any words to us. By then we texted status reports to one another while she slept or someone stopped in to care for her, as we stayed as much as possible in her presence to tell the stories we would share again at her funeral yesterday.

A month ago, a diagnosis of a mortal condition if untreated led to hospice intake for a woman who lived a long and rich life, and was not shy about telling most people she knew that she was ready to go home. She set me straight once in a restaurant when I misunderstood where "home" was, assuring her we would go as soon as we paid the bill.

Knowing her wishes allowed us to be supportive of her and one another as we scheduled our visits. And these became even more meaningful when staff members at intervals stopped to talk with us and share some story we didn't know. People around her seemed in tune with her needs, sensing the urgency for a last time to speak in a loud voice to her or converse with us to draw out our stories, so that she could hear them one last time.

It was still morning when the hospice chaplain came by, a woman who had only met my mother 18 days before. Chaplain Jennifer had heard about some of the life experiences of this woman who had come to this country a refugee from her home during World War II, gaining some idea of what our mother valued. She addressed her first, then

talked with me, and then offered a blessing that brought a sense of calm to us both.

Within a span of three hours that day, my sisters joined me as we reminisced, a nun came by to offer a prayer, and staff sent us from the room to make comfort adjustments. When we returned, our beloved mother had gone.

The end of life does not offer us all an easy journey, but it is one we all will make. This one brought so much to cherish: a time to claim last moments, to respond to one another's needs, to be open to the love of strangers, and just be in the moment. Many of us in our communities are experiencing this kind of loss.

And yet, for a greater number, the loss is complicated, unexpected, far too early for those left behind. For far too many, the support systems are not fully in place to help us in this journey. These, our neighbors, need whatever solace we can offer.

To those who have had to step up to fill some gap in the past few years, and to those who have long worked in this overstressed field, I am grateful and wish them replenishment of their inner strengths for this work. They too deserve our support in kindness and love.

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

YOUR VIEWS

COVID-19 vaccine: Follow the money to see who wants what

I am glad to see more people are having the courage to question our government's reaction to the virus and what they are asking, or mandating, us to do. Is any of this really necessary?

Why is a shot that won't prevent you from getting, transmitting or dying from the virus called a vaccine? I understand that it might reduce a person's symptoms, but is that what a vaccine is for?

Why are people we called heroes for nearly two years all of a sudden a danger to society and selfish people? What changed?

Why isn't the importance of things like nutrition, supplements and building one's immune system being more widely encouraged to lessen the severity of the virus if contracted?

Since early on there have been doctors who have been successfully treating people with the virus, yet this information seems to be hidden from the public. These doctors and their treatments are vilified and/or ridiculed by the media, the pharmaceutical companies and many of those in our government. The so-called "fact checkers" on social media dispute anything that doesn't fit the proper narrative. Facts don't matter as long as they fit the proper agenda.

Personally I have a lot more faith in people who are actually treating and healing people than I do in corporations and people who have an agenda. Are they more interested in pushing a shot or in actually treating people with

the virus? Follow the money to see who wants what.

So I ask, is this vaccine even necessary when we have any number of effective treatments for the virus?

Mark Barber
La Grande

State should share wolf attack records

The recent possible attack on livestock by wolves in the Izee area has, justifiably or otherwise, confirmed the suspicions of many Grant County producers that they are unlikely to receive equitable treatment when government decides predator depredations on livestock. Those decisions determine whether the property owner is entitled to the minimal compensation available and whether action can be taken against repeat-offending predators.

The Grant County Farm Bureau was among the first to receive the news of the reported attack, and we are diligently conducting our own inquiry into the protocols used to investigate and determine livestock depredations.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has requested we ask for detailed information on its investigation through Oregon's public records law; we assert that every investigation report should be automatically filed with the respective county Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee and made readily available to all landowners.

Regardless, ODFW's published summary of the Izee incident raises serious questions with what appears to be

significant differences between counties as to who participates in these inquests, such as independent parties, including local veterinarians and county sheriffs, as well as possible deficiencies in the state's evidentiary standards. The Izee case summary contains no record that the eyewitnesses to the wolves seen feeding on the cow were ever interviewed.

Until we are able to review the complete case report, we recommend all Grant County landowners remain extra vigilant against what is sure to be additional destruction of your private property and be fully aware of what your rights and responsibilities are when wolves enter your private lands and attack your livestock. We also ask that you seriously consider who is allowed to enter your property and for what purpose.

Grant County landowners and grazing permittees own and manage much of the critical habitats vital for both the wolves' survival and the big game upon which they depend, at little to no risk or cost to the state or wolf advocates. Our high-quality stewardship deserves and demands that deference be given to the private landowner when there is any purported uncertainty in mortality determinations — regardless of predator species.

Anything less than that, or any deviation from objectivity and fairness in these investigations, will all but guarantee the end of voluntary landowner cooperation with all state wildlife programs.

Shaun W. Robertson, president
Grant County Farm Bureau