

OUR VIEW

Reviewing two years of COVID-19

On Saturday, March 12, the indoor mask mandates imposed by the governors of Oregon, Washington and California were lifted.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown also announced the state of emergency that was put in place on March 8, 2020, will expire April 1.

Huzzah!

Officially, the lifting of the mask requirement reflects declining COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in the West Coast states. Others suggest the announcements were coordinated with other Blue state governments to suggest a return to “normalcy” before President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address and in advance of the midterm election campaign.

Whatever the reason, we are nonetheless thankful for the reprieve — even if it later proves temporary.

Two years and change into the pandemic, it behooves us to take stock of where we have been and offer some observations.

- COVID-19 qualified as a clear and present danger as it unfolded in the early spring of 2020. Little was known about the disease when it arrived in the United States.

In that context, the “two-weeks-to-flatten-the-curve” shutdown made some sense. But as those “two weeks” dragged into more than three months, this seemed less like a thoughtful strategy and more like a desperate effort to outlast the virus.

- While government can quickly shut the economy down, starting it back up again isn’t that easy.

- State government was unprepared to deal with the impacts its measures inflicted on working people and their employers. Shuttering the economy left more than half a million people on the West Coast scrambling for a paycheck.

- We have been told to “follow the science.” Being strong believers of facts, we put a lot of stock in science.

But, the exhortation to “follow the science” has too often been used as a cudgel with which to beat critics.

Science is not religious dogma. It is an open question, not a declarative statement. We don’t say this to benefit crackpots and conspiracy theorists, but to encourage reasoned debate.

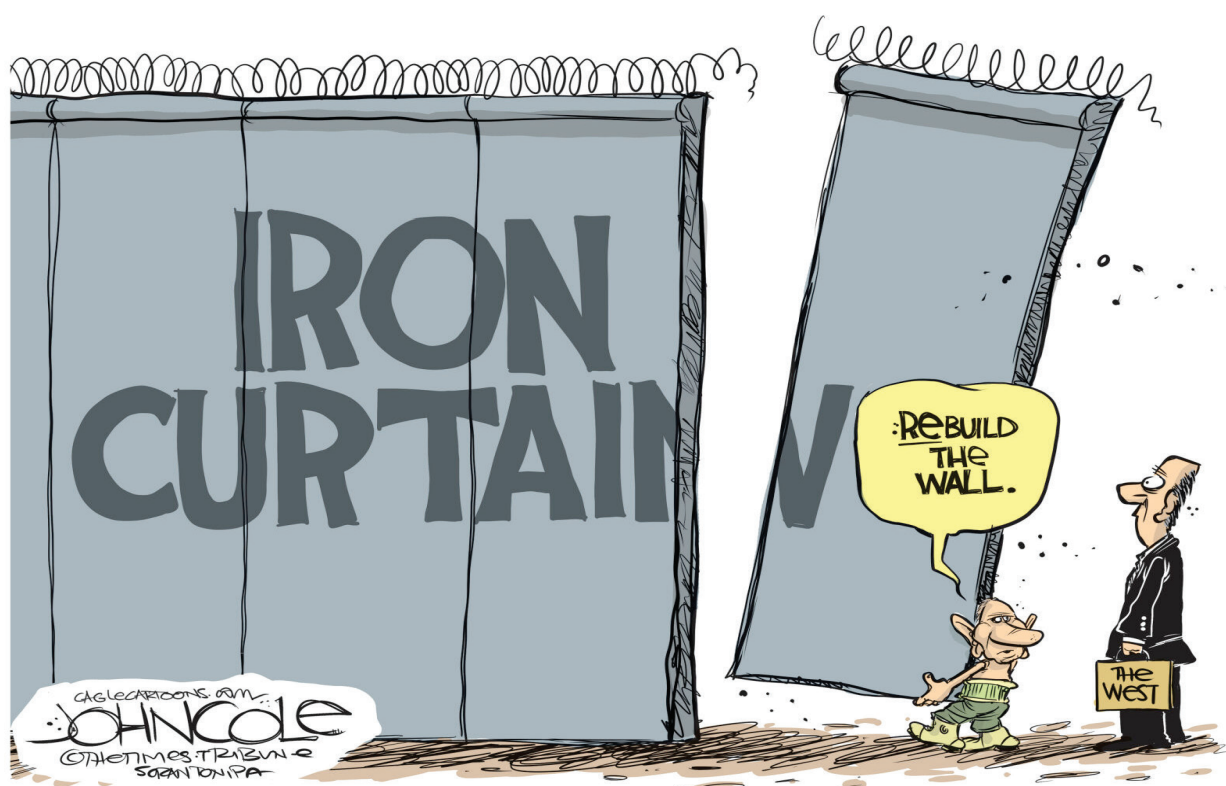
Officials conveying science too often have failed to concede the body of knowledge is ever changing.

We always have been strong advocates for vaccinations, and still are. Initially, we were told the vaccines would prevent infections and transmission in most cases. Then we were told that in most cases it would only keep people from getting really sick. That’s still a worthy outcome, but not what conveyors of science promised in the beginning.

Policy makers have been the strongest proponents of “the science,” but have been willing to forego the science for political expediency.

- No elected official should be allowed to rule indefinitely by decree. Emergency powers should be limited in duration and subject to mandatory legislative oversight. A benevolent dictatorship in all but name is nonetheless tyranny.

Most people learned to live with the virus months ago. We are happy that the governors are learning it, too. We hope in future emergencies that they put more trust in the instincts of their constituents.



Ukraine targeted mercilessly, without warrant



ALEX HOBBS
PASTURES OF PLENTY

This month I have vacillated back and forth between whether or not writing about Ukraine is a worthwhile endeavor. Whether or not I have anything to contribute to what (for good reason) is an ever expanding canon of geopolitical analysis.

What can I add that the horrific video footage and images coming from Kherson, Kyiv and Mariupol don’t already tell us?

Ultimately, however, my mind keeps drifting back to my own family; my grandmother who spoke only Ukrainian until she left for school, of her parents who left the Ternopil Oblast to escape centuries of serfdom. What it must have been like to finally leave a piece of earth where you, your parents and their parents going back generations were legally forbidden to depart from. After serfdom — the Holodomor. A genocide of ethnic Ukrainians. Intentional famine. An event that still, shamefully, is a source of much hand-wringing from the intelligentsia.

My paternal family, their country of origin, has always been shrouded in shadow. Like many Slavic immigrants, I imagine there was immense pressure — especially during the Cold War — to distance themselves from their language and culture that to most Americans had all the sounds and appearances of being Russian in the face of Russophobia.

So they toiled where they settled,

erecting churches and sod floor homes, keeping to themselves. Eventually the names they gave themselves softened: from Todeskas and Anastasias to Nicks and Steves. A Ukrainian diaspora blooming in the plains of North Dakota whose seeds then blew westward after a time.

The last vestiges of this culture still sit quietly in our family homes. It presents itself to us as Pysanky resting in cabinets, as a little jar of dill in a cupboard, as vyshyvanka that hang in closets, as varenyky rolled out on a countertop. Strands of embroidery whose fountainhead is now, at this current moment, being bombed into obliteration at the behest of a dictator. Those people are once again being targeted mercilessly and without warrant.

The story we are seeing unfold in Ukraine seems to write itself. The West will flood the country with munitions, proxies will develop, factions will form, mercenaries will be deployed. We have seen what Russia did to Chechnya, to Syria. Humanitarian corridors are being ignored. All of the pontificating and scolding regarding NATO expansion accomplishes nothing other than to excuse the actions of a single, irrational actor. One who poisons his political opponents, jails detractors and helms what can only be described as a police state.

Regardless of the route, the destabilization of Ukraine is already well and truly underway. A country that has historically been a feast for crows will continue to sacrifice itself, against its will, to imperialism and ethnic erasure. Ghosts of the Bush Doctrine will continue to haunt innocent people,

just as it did in Iraq. When phrases like “preemptive strikes” are bandied about by Belarus’ Lukashenko, you begin to understand that Ukraine, like other states before it, is being dragged into total war.

It will experience the push and pull of asymmetrical warfare and traditional interstate conflict. I am afraid of non-governmental actors (militias) taking advantage of power vacuums as the Ukrainian state scrambles to mobilize its populations against a Russia that understands the anarchic nature of international relations very well.

A Russia that understands Ukraine will be left to defend itself. That state sovereignty will win out against the responsibility to protect.

I am not Ukrainian. Nor am I Afghan, Yemeni, Congolese or Syrian. I watch these atrocities unfold from the comfort of my home an ocean or a continent away. I think of the tenacity of these people and the resilience I wish they did not have to foster. Human embodiments of Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s final lines in “Ulysses:” “Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.”

Please consider donating to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as they continue to provide basic necessities for so many displaced peoples. The ones caught between state actors, madmen and the fallout of war.

The ones who could have so very easily been my grandmother, my father, myself, my own children.

Alex Hobbs is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom. She has a degree in political science from Oregon State University.

YOUR VIEWS

Concerned about Highland Manor Apartments

In regards to a recent front page story (“Hermiston apartment complex offers buyouts to tenants willing to vacate,” Feb. 9, 2022), are there any citizens in Hermiston besides the tenants in The Highland Manor Apartments that are upset about the evictions taking place? Clover Housing Group/Atkinson Staffing is a supplier of migrant workers.

We need migrant workers for the food we put on our tables. There is no problem with migrant workers, but Atkinson Staffing is going to turn Highland Manor into migrant housing, which owner Mike Atkinson will get government subsidies for.

Atkinson has made a lot of money off hard working migrant workers over the years. My question is: why hasn’t he built housing for workers over the years instead of evicting people who have lived in Highland Manor for many years, now they have nowhere to go? He calls this an “inconvenience” and he “sympathizes,” those two words I don’t think fit the situation this man is putting on these tenants.

Highland Manor is one of the older apartment complexes in Hermiston, but it has been one of the best maintained places. They have been updated. There is very little if anything Atkinson will have to do to this complex. All it is, is a smoke screen to hide what he is really going to do.

The reporter should dig a little deeper and find out what this Atkinson is really doing. And how many other complexes in this town will this happen to? This should be against the law.

Nancy Patrick
Hermiston

Spend it while you got it

When it comes to government spending, be it federal, state or local, that phase is pretty common. Our recent legislative session in Salem bares that out when, come hell or high water, our representatives had to spend \$1.5 billion in a very short time.

Andrew Picken was able to convince State Sen. Bill Hansell, who recently complained about the frivolous spending in this most recent legislative session, to push for the approval of a \$1.5 million grant by our Legislature for the Rivoli Theater Restoration Coalition. Restoration of historical buildings is an admirable cause, but if you’ve seen their plan, this isn’t a restoration or preservation project as about the only thing being preserved is the Rivoli name.

When you continually listen to city management trying to justify our outrageous water rates and other public projects the city has neglected because they lack the funding, it’s really hard to justify such an expenditure. Is the senator that far out of touch with local city infrastructure issues? Where were our city officials?

In an emotional plea, Brittney Jackson, director of the nonprofit Pendleton Children’s Center, asked the Pendleton Development Commission to redraw the borders of the Urban Renewal District, making the center eligible for various urban renewal grants. The PDC would be missing a golden opportunity if their request was denied.

During the subsequent discussion, and although the PDC had previously stated nonprofit organizations would not be eligible for grants, it seemed amiable to the idea that an exception could be made since exceptions had been made in the past for the Horizon Project, the Underground Tours and the Rivoli Theater. The discussion continued with Kathryn Brown explaining that large donations already were pouring in and government grants would be available to support the staffing requirements. Government grants mean a lot more administrative red tape and complying with their standards. Changing the borders, however, was a whole different matter as there were state restrictions.

Additionally, two other businesses also were requesting the same treatment. Given the current job atmosphere, assembling a qualified staff to support an eventual 150 clients is simply unrealistic. Without additional support from local businesses, this program has the potential to morph into another giant welfare program.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton