

# Pulling together when things are falling apart

By now, even before the disease begins to peak in Oregon and rural America, we are all very tired of hearing about coronavirus, COVID-19, social distancing, and cancellations of seemingly everything. But we are in this for the long haul. Easter will bring no miraculous resurrection from the pandemic that now has the interior rural west, including us, in its sights. President Trump acknowledged this on Sunday stating that “social distancing” will be in effect through the end of April—and possibly until June.

In Wallowa County, “social distancing” seems to be the norm. “It’s why I live here. I really don’t like to be around a lot of people,” is a comment oft repeated when the subject comes up. Our commissioners have declared an emergency and placed a very polite, but telling, sign at Minam which alternately displays “Save Lives” and “Stay Home.” Main Street, Joseph, which normally is getting diffi-

## VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Editorial opinion

cult to cross this time of year, looks more like a ghost town. We are kind of on our own out here, with a hospital still low in supplies and possibly short of beds and ventilators, despite a two-trillion dollar aid bill. Should the coronavirus gang ride into town with guns blazing we will be in trouble. As many as 200,000 Americans, including loved ones and Wallowa County residents, will die before this is over, according to the CDC.

This last week, as restaurants transformed into takeout emporiums, clothing and bookstores closed, 3.3 million people applied for unemployment nationwide, and all the world seemed to fall into itself, only 16 people filed for unemployment in Wallowa County according to state figures. Many others who lost their jobs worked part-time, or are self-employed and

do not qualify for benefits. It will be a very long haul for them, and for all of us.

This is the time for us who live here to buy locally and step up to support Wallowa County’s economy and businesses, and also support one another. April is the time when, after enduring a winter with minimal sales, visitors begin arriving like flocks of retiring birds, and income picks up. But not this year.

Restaurants are trying to squeak by, offering takeout. (See listing of the restraints offering this service and their contact info on page A16.) At The Dog Spot in Joseph, their Thai takeout menu drew attention on Thursday and Friday last week, but Saturday and Sunday were pretty much a disaster. With no beer or wine sales, and flagging merchandise sales, they weren’t sure how long they could hold out. This week, it’s on to (East) Indian cuisine. In Enterprise, Heavenly’s was struggling mightily. Down the road in Lostine, M Crow was offering take-out hot pizza as whole pie or slices, and also had their regular,

tomato sauce-based pizzas available frozen, for just \$10! They had laid off 6 part-time employees. And customers were hard to come by. In Wallowa, Katrina Frei at the Main Street Grill said she was able to pay the rent for March, but was not so sure how April would pan out. This is just a sample. Every one of our businesses could use your help. If you can afford it, one or two or more takeout meals per week from each of us would help tide restaurants over until our lives and community open up again. Plus you won’t have to cook! Pizza! Thai food! Mexican! Elk burgers! Every night a new culinary exploration.

It seems that we face new challenges from coronavirus, new stresses, and new fears, on a daily basis. When things seem to be falling apart, pulling together is more important than ever. So please support local businesses as much as you can. June is a very, very long time away.

Oh, and let the Chieftain know what your favorite take-out meal was. We’ll publish the reviews.

## LETTERS to the EDITOR

### Sheriff Rogers was great help to Harney Co. law enforcement

Dear Citizens of Wallowa County,

It has recently been brought to my attention that there has been some confusion or misinformation presented as to the reasons Sheriff Steve Rogers travelled to Harney County Oregon in January of 2016. I would like to help clear up any questions on the topic.

Sheriff Rogers travelled to Harney County to assist the sheriff of Harney County on several occasions in dealing with a critical incident in that community.

Each sheriff in the state of Oregon is a member of the Oregon Sheriffs Association. The sheriffs association is a wonderful asset for the citizens of this state, in which our sheriffs work together to assist each other in providing the best services possible to our citizens in times of crisis.

Following the armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016, Sheriff Rogers was one of the Oregon sheriffs who traveled to Harney County to assist me in responding to that incident within our community.

As a new sheriff facing a large scale incident in my community, guidance and assistance from seasoned sheriffs like Sheriff Rogers helped tremendously in attempting to find the best solutions possible, providing day to day services while my own agency was drastically undermanned, as well as meeting with other government agencies, and at times, meeting with leadership involved with the armed takeover of the refuge to assist me in negotiations.

In every instance, Sheriff Rogers was of great assistance to me. His help, guidance, and mentorship helped me through what at the time seemed like an insurmountable task.

In my eyes, Sheriff Rogers has shown himself to possess all of the qualities to face down any critical incident in a community, as well as a loyal and treasured friend.

Thank You,  
Dave Ward  
Harney County Sheriff  
retired

# It’s time for America to imitate Oregon

By Steve Forrester  
EO Media Group

Norma Paulus would be proud. And she would be amazed. As secretary of state from 1977 until 1985, Paulus was the prime mover of Oregon’s voting by mail. Other states have been slow to follow Oregon’s lead. But — in the way that sudden events provoke unexpected change — the coronavirus makes voting by mail a timely solution.

Oregon’s U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, of Minnesota, have authored legislation to make the mail ballot more prevalent.

For Wyden, this has been a long slog. He first introduced this legislation in 2002. “I’ve never had the interest that we have now,” he said during a Monday interview. “During the most recent slate of presidential primary elections, three states opted to postpone voting because of the coronavirus.”

In this climate, Wyden argues that the pandemic offers a stark choice. “Either people are not going to be able to vote or they vote by mail. If those are the two choices for America this fall, that is not a close

## OTHER VOICES

call.”

Like the bottle bill, public beaches and statewide land use planning, voting by mail is one of Oregon’s emblematic, pioneering achievements. Initially, it was a Republican proposal, opposed by labor unions that influenced the Democratic Party. Then it became a Democratic party cause, led by Secretary of State Phil Keisling, who served in the 1990s.

Under Paulus, counties were allowed to use the mail ballot for nonprimary or nongeneral elections. When counties took advantage of the new mode of voting, turnout increased by factors of three and five, Keisling said.

In 1995, the Oregon Legislature enacted Keisling’s bill to allow voting by mail, but Gov. John Kitzhaber vetoed it.

Months later, a surprise allowed Keisling to make history. When Bob Packwood resigned from the U.S. Senate in 1995, county clerks across Oregon urged Keisling to conduct the sudden, special Senate election by mail ballot. He could do that, because existing statute prohib-

ited mail ballots only in the primary and general elections.

The special primary in 1995 and the general election in early 1996 became the first federal elections in America to be conducted by mail. Turnout was high — 58% in the special primary and 66% in the general. Wyden became Oregon’s new U.S. senator.

In 1998, Oregon voters by a margin of 2-to-1 approved a ballot measure mandating voting by mail in all Oregon elections.

Keisling has continued his advocacy within the National Vote At Home Institute, of which he is founder and a board member. His 2016 article in the Washington Monthly (“Vote From Home, Save Your Country”) is an extensive history of the national discussion of mail balloting.

In the most recent development, Wyden’s biggest opponent is the voting machine lobby. Of digital voting, the Oregon Democrat says: “A voting machine with remote access software is the equivalent of putting an American ballot box in the Kremlin.” He disparages the voting machine lobby, saying: “They lied to me, to the New York Times. They stonewalled

Congress.”

Wyden measures his progress by how many Republican senators who now say they are thinking about his proposal.

The emergency package in Congress in response to the coronavirus includes \$400 million to help states with elections, but Wyden and Klobuchar believe more help is needed.

“In times of crisis, the American people cannot be forced to choose between their health and exercising their right to vote,” the senators said in a statement. “While this funding is a step in the right direction, we must enact election reforms across the country as well as secure more resources to guarantee safe and secure elections. We will continue to fight to pass the Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act of 2020 to ensure every eligible American can safely and lawfully cast their ballot.”

This newspaper’s editorial page has argued in favor of the mail ballot from the year that Secretary Paulus launched the idea. An adverse moment in history reinforces the case that voting by mail makes abundant sense.

It’s time for America to imitate Oregon.

# We’re in new territory—but we’re in it together

## GUEST COLUMN

Rich Wandschneider

there. He too was the oldest, and grabbed work where he could to supplement his dad’s wrestling with hard times.

They made it through that Depression and for the rest of their lives remembered the good of it more than the things they had missed. They remembered struggles and friendships, neighbors pitching in, and forever had extra canned goods stored against the next hard time. Their missed college opportunities were lived in the lives of me and my three siblings.

The next chapter in their lives was World War II. Mom’s youngest brother was the only one who didn’t come back alive. The families picked up from that one too, and our nuclear pod and mom’s remaining siblings all moved west. The War introduced us to the West, and the cold chased us there in 1952. We returned to Minnesota frequently to check in with the farms, grocery stores, and government jobs that got and still get dad’s siblings’ families through Minnesota winters, but we

were Westerners.

I guess what all of this says is that life in this country over my 76 years has had its gyrations, and that we naturally look to the past to try to make sense of what is going on today. But it’s never really the same, and we only make sense of it when we’re on to the next chapter in our lives. My parents and their cohort looked back on the 30s with some fondness; it was a hard time for most families, and people pitched in to help where and how they could. They buoyed up their own and helped the neighbors. They acknowledged the War’s role in sending them West, and although they’d lost important family connections, they passed on what they’d gained to us, the next generation.

I didn’t go to Vietnam, but the Vietnam War, my time in the Peace Corps, and that whole family legacy are what’s kept me in Wallowa County for almost 50 years. Too long a story to tell here, but let’s have a beer or a long cup of coffee when the restaurants open up again and I’ll tell you about it.

Which brings us to today, when we’re all trying to figure out how to live in our own hard times. Two

things come to my mind. First, remember the lessons of those other hard times and be neighborly.

Second, wealth doesn’t matter. Like the Depression—or the polio outbreak of the 40s, or all the wars since WW II—disease, death, and hard times fall on all. Wealth can and does make it easier for some to escape the cold and the military, get better health care; allows some to live easier in hard times. But Franklin Roosevelt suffered with polio, John Kennedy’s brother was killed in WW II, and Kenneth Lay and Enron were laid low by their own greed in the dot com scramble for wealth of 2001.

Coronavirus too will hit the wealthy as well as the poor. Sure, they’ll have more avenues of escape, but age and ill health hits them too, and makes them more vulnerable than the young paupers scrambling to make their livings. My hope is that we work our way through this time and come out knowing that we are all in this world together. We all need health care; we all love our children; we all breathe the same air. And a race to wealth doesn’t get us health, educate our young, or clean the water and air.

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