

OTHER VIEWS

Kevin Frazier



Younger, urban Oregonians believe they can make a bigger impact

A large percentage (43%) of Oregonians do not believe they can make their community a better place to live, according to a recent Oregon Values and Beliefs Center survey.

That figure becomes a majority among Oregonians ages 65 and over; just 62% do not believe they can have a big or moderate effect on their community. That percentage is also a majority among rural Oregonians (54%).

Comparatively, urban (64%) and younger (66%) Oregonians feel much more capable of having a positive effect.

What explains these differences?

There's no one answer. Instead a variety of factors have convinced some Oregonians that the system is just too stacked against them to be able to turn the gears in their favor.

One explanatory factor: access to information. Nearly six in 10 urban Oregonians have a high degree of trust in the people who publish the news about their community, whereas just four in 10 rural Oregonians share that view. There's also a 10 percentage point gap in how much Oregonians in the tri-county area trust broadcast news when compared to Oregonians in the rest of the state (57% versus 47%).

The connection between faith in local news and faith in capacity to incite change makes sense. If you feel confident that you know what's going on in your neck of the woods, then you likely feel capable of getting involved or at least staying informed about major changes in your community.

Another factor impacting the impact gap — personal security. Oregonians 65 and older seem to feel more in control over their personal well-being. A full 85% of these older Oregonians reported they feel able to control what is important in their lives on a majority of days. That number plummets to 65% for Oregonians between 18 and 29 years old. Perhaps insecurity about their own lives spurs younger Oregonians to feel as though it's only through communitywide changes that they can improve their own well-being.

One final factor and more evidence for the thesis: disparities in how much people feel as though community leaders care about their needs. Almost 60% of younger Oregonians agree that "(t)he people running my community don't really care much about what happens to me." On the opposite side of the spectrum, only 44% of older Oregonians doubt the responsiveness of their community leaders.

Why these gaps matter

Our democracy hinges on its perceived legitimacy. If people don't feel as though the levers of change are responsive to their efforts to make their community better, then faith and participation in our democracy understandably decreases. Consider that around half of Oregonians in the tri-county area are somewhat or very satisfied with the way our democracy works, but only 39% of Oregonians in the rest of the state share that level of satisfaction.

The aforementioned factors suggest that we've got a lot of work to do when it comes to giving Oregonians the information and leaders they deserve.

What are some ways to chip away at this impact gap?

First, address news deserts. Oregonians in every community deserve news that's well-funded and well-resourced so that they can keep local officials accountable and share opportunities about how and when to get involved.

Second, make our elected officials more accountable to voters, not special interests. One way this is happening is through campaign finance reform. This will help give all Oregonians a chance to impact an election, while also reducing the extreme wealthy individuals and organizations hold over candidates.

Third, we can end the idea of Oregon exceptionalism when it comes to good governance. This may sound harsh, but Oregon is not living up to its own standards when it comes to being a leader in democracy. Across the urban/rural divide and age spectrum, only one out of every four Oregonians think the state's democracy has gotten stronger in the past four years. That's abysmal.

To improve our democracy here in Oregon, we have to be more open about the fact that it's flawed and more intentional about instituting meaningful reforms.

Kevin Frazier was raised in Washington County. He is pursuing a law degree at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.

Tracking COVID-19 cases and deaths

OTHER VIEWS

Fred Brockman



Newsflash! Due to a worldwide kill-off of coffee plants and demand from the public for a replacement, a synthetic coffee is now on the market. Although studies to date have concluded the synthetic coffee is safe, the public is encouraged to report adverse reactions. A multidisciplinary team of experts will determine if reported adverse reactions involve causation, or were merely associations.

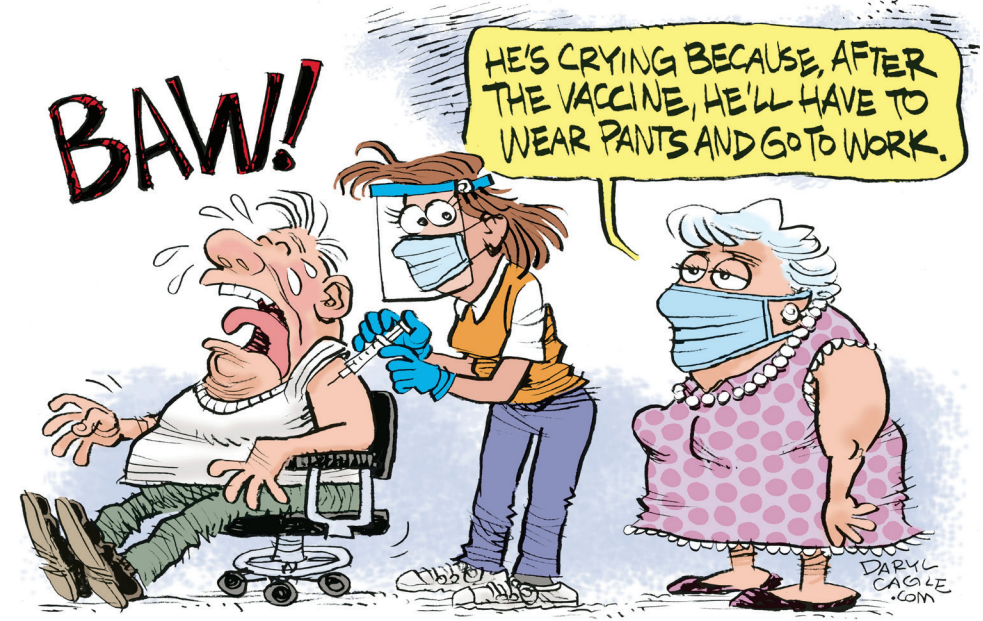
The newsflash is fiction. But it serves as an analogy for understanding the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System ([cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/pdf/vaers_factsheet1.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/pdf/vaers_factsheet1.pdf)) where 3,486 deaths among people who received a COVID vaccine have been reported ([cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html), April 20 update).

VAERS is an important safety monitoring program established in 1990 and managed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration. Safety monitoring occurs after a vaccine goes through clinical trials for effectiveness and an extensive benefit-risk analysis, and obtains either a FDA traditional approval or Emergency Use Authorization ([fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/vaccines/emergency-use-authorization-vaccines-explained](https://www.fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/vaccines/emergency-use-authorization-vaccines-explained)). VAERS is designed to gather information from the public and medical professionals on events associated with use of a vaccine, allowing the agencies to investigate reports and determine if a safety intervention is warranted.

The CDC cautions readers ([cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html), April 20 update) against concluding that reports of adverse events associated with use of a COVID vaccine is necessarily caused by the vaccine. They explicitly warn readers: "Reports of death to VAERS following vaccination do not necessarily mean the vaccine caused the death." They also state: "physicians review each case report of death as soon as notified and the CDC requests medical records to further assess reports." This process allows doctors to determine whether each death was a result of the vaccine, or due to something else.

In the second sentence after "3,486 reports of death" among people who received a COVID vaccine, the CDC states in bold type: "A review of available clinical information including death certificates, autopsy, and medical records revealed no evidence that vaccination contributed to patient deaths."

The key to understanding the VAERS reporting is the difference between association and causation, a foundational principle of statistics and science. An association refers only to a co-occurrence between two variables or events. Two events can be



associated without having a cause-effect relationship. For example, as sales of ice cream increase so do sales of sunglasses. But ice cream sales don't cause people to buy sunglasses or vice versa; hot weather is the cause. Causation, also known as a cause-effect relationship, requires scientific evidence that one variable or event is wholly or partially responsible for the other.

Numerous questions must be addressed to establish a cause-effect relationship between a vaccine and a serious adverse event. In addition to the review of each case report, experts evaluate VAERS data with a battery of epidemiological and statistical tests to determine if a cause-effect relationship exists.

For example, one question and test is whether a particular serious adverse event in the vaccinated population is statistically higher than in the corresponding non-vaccinated population; if not, then causation is refuted. If causation is refuted in nearly all questions, the vaccine is not responsible for the serious adverse event even though an association existed.

Can the CDC and FDA reach a different conclusion about COVID vaccines in the future? Yes, they can and will if a cause-effect relationship is established. When preliminary analysis suggests a possible cause-effect relationship, a pause on use of a vaccine can be implemented prior to a conclusion being reached.

Different people perceive risk differently, but quantifying the risks provides important perspective. Assume for a moment there were 10 U.S. deaths caused by COVID vaccines. As of April 24, 225 million doses have been administered in the U.S., fully vaccinating 93 million people (CDC data at [npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/01/28/960901166/how-is-the-covid-19-vaccination-campaign-going-in-your-state](https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/01/28/960901166/how-is-the-covid-19-vaccination-campaign-going-in-your-state)). Thus, the fatality rate for fully vaccinated people would be 0.011 per 100,000.

Oregon's COVID fatality rates per 100,000 people in the 30-39, 50-59 and 70-79 age groups are, respectively, 3.4, 30 and 174 ([page 19 in oregon.gov/oha/covid19/Documents/DataReports/Weekly-Data-COVID-19-Report.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/oha/covid19/Documents/DataReports/Weekly-Data-COVID-19-Report.pdf)

April 21 report, [censusreporter.org/profiles/04000US41-oregon/](https://www.censusreporter.org/profiles/04000US41-oregon/)). While Wallowa County's COVID case rate is about half that of Oregon's, the county's COVID fatality rate (71 per 100,000) is similar to Oregon's (59 per 100,000) (public.tableau.com/profile/oregon.health.authority.covid.19#1/vizhome/OregonCOVID-19TestingandOutcomesbyCounty-SummaryTable/CasesandTestingbyCountySummaryTable, [census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/wallowacountyoregon/PST045219](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/wallowacountyoregon/PST045219)).

The comparison reveals an Oregonian's and Wallowa County resident's risk of death from COVID would be approximately 315, 2,770, and 16,200 times higher — respectively for the average individual in the 30-39, 50-59 and 70-79 age groups — than the risk of death caused by COVID vaccines. And remember these values are based on a hypothetical — not actual — 10 deaths caused by COVID vaccines.

The occurrence rate for anaphylaxis is similar: approximately 2-5 people per million vaccinated in the U.S., equivalent to 0.2 to 0.5 per 100,000 ([cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html), April 20 update).

Moral and religious beliefs about vaccines are important to many people. After reading up on the topic to include authoritative medical sources (for example, [nebraskamed.com/COVID/you-asked-we-answered-do-the-covid-19-vaccines-contain-aborted-fetal-cells](https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/you-asked-we-answered-do-the-covid-19-vaccines-contain-aborted-fetal-cells)) consider having a personal conversation with your faith leader.

Risk is a fact of life. Mathematical analysis of data can help us make decisions to better manage risk and reduce the chance of harm to ourselves and others. Current data show the risk of death or serious illness from contracting COVID-19 is far greater than the risk of death or serious illness from vaccination.

As always, your local doctor or professional health care provider is available to discuss your and your family's specific COVID risk factors and answer other COVID-related medical questions.

Fred Brockman lives near Lostine and is a retired microbiologist.

Thank teachers for their dedication, sacrifice

OTHER VIEWS

Ann Bloom



The first week of May (May 2-8) is National Teacher Appreciation Week. Next to being a parent, teaching is the hardest job a person will ever love.

Teachers spend long hours grading papers, preparing lessons and setting up their classrooms so their students can have the best learning environment and educational experience possible. This is time spent away from their families. They spend their own money on supplies because school budgets, cut to the bone, cannot afford to pay for the "extras" that make learning fun, both for the student and the teacher. In most, if not all, cases they are not reimbursed for these purchases.

Not everyone can be a teacher. It takes five years of education, in most places, to start as a first-year teacher and then the teacher faces the looming prospect of years of college-loan repayment.

Teachers are fearless. It takes a certain caliber of person to not be overcome by the thundering silence that follows a question asked of a room full of seventh-graders, who look as though they have just heard an ancient language for the first time.

Teachers cannot be afraid of blood, either, or other bodily fluids; scraped knees are par for the course. They cannot be daunted when someone small stands in front of them and announces they feel sick, and then proceeds to prove it on the teacher's shoe.

Dedication, teacher it is your middle name. How many teachers have spent weekends, and late nights preparing their classrooms for the fall classes (raise your hands, now)? It is a myth, too, that teachers get three months of "vacation" in the summer. Summers are spent taking classes to main-

tain their certification and credentials. Again, this is at their own expense.

Teachers do more than teach. They help students learn to tie their shoes, put on mittens, remember homework (and, no, the dog can't eat it all the time), learn to read, write, understand math and learn to get along with others. And the list goes on and on.

A teacher must have a sense of humor. One teacher told his first-graders, on the first day of class, that they needed to get in a line. This request was met with dead silence. The first-graders all looked at each other. One of them had the courage to raise his little hand and ask the teacher, "What's a line?" Well, we all have to start someplace.

A teacher, in the absence of a parent, is also the comforter of life's heartbreaks and heartaches, from the first time they don't get picked for a team to the last broken heart when they don't get invited to the dance. They are the tender of skinned knees and other assorted "boo-boos" that go with growing up. And, no, it isn't just a part of "the job." Teaching is not a job, it is a calling, a passion. If you are a teacher you know this and understand it. If you are a teacher and someone asks you, "Why are you a teacher?" Do you find yourself thinking, "Well, I could try to tell you, but you probably wouldn't understand."

We are so very fortunate that we have not had to endure the heartbreak of a tragedy such as Columbine, Sandy Hook or Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School. Places where teachers paid the ultimate price protecting their students. Again, fearlessly and without thought to their own safety, they kept their students safe and out of harm's way.

If your child can read and write, play well with others, does not run with scissors and doesn't need all the toys in the toy box, you probably have a teacher to thank.

According to a recent National Public Radio report, stress is the No. 1 reason, even ahead of pay (which isn't the No. 1 reason one goes into teaching in the first place), why teachers leave their profession. This was true even before the pandemic. Between teaching in person (when they

can) and teaching virtually, some teachers are working 10-hour days, six days a week. Again, this is time they are away from their families.

Though there should be an appreciation week, and maybe someday there will be, for administrative staff, principals, custodial, para-professionals and cafeteria staff, and all the others who keep a school running, and they are greatly appreciated for their contributions, until such time as they have their own "week of appreciation," we will have to acknowledge them as a group, and thank them for their hard work. And, yes, there should be a parents' appreciation week, too. That goes without saying, of course.

I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with the finest teachers imaginable. I have learned from them, laughed with them and, yes, even cried with them. Wallowa County is a very lucky place, to have so many teachers of such a high caliber, who go above and beyond for their students every day. They love their jobs.

On a personal note, my best friend of more than 50 years is a teacher. At the start of the pandemic she was working 10-hour days, six days a week. That is dedication. She wasn't doing it for any recognition or accolades, she was doing it for her students. I sent flowers. Thank you, Helen, for all you do.

I have also been on the receiving end of education by some excellent teachers. I have one in particular, who taught me how to be a critical thinker, how important the First Amendment is, that a sentence is more than a capital letter and a period and that on time is late. Thank you, Dr. Tom Heuterman, for everything.

So, the next time you are out in the community and you see a teacher, thank him or her. They need to hear those words, they need to hear them often, and they need to hear them from us.

Ann Bloom lives in Enterprise and has worked for the OSU Extension Service for 15 years as a nutrition educator. She studied journalism and education at Washington State University.