

## OPINION

### VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

# Draft a wish list for your state legislators

**W**e'd like you to draft a multi-million-dollar wish list and send it off to your Oregon state senator and state representative.

Each of Oregon's 30 senators can spend \$4 million in federal funding — almost as they please. And each of the 60 members of the House has command of \$2 million.

Who knows better than you where it should be spent? Or at least, they should listen to your suggestions and thank you for them.

The total \$240 million comes courtesy of the federal American Rescue Plan Act. This deal for spreading around the money was struck to keep Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature focused on passing legislation, not fighting. Lawmakers have until May 10 to come up with lists. All the lists submitted may well be rounded up into what they call a Christmas tree bill, so everybody's goodies are rolled into one. That way the bill surely will pass.

Now you could be a penny-pincher and tell your Oregon legislators not to spend a penny. You have to know, though, other legislators won't let the money sit around. They will spend it. Might as well take local control of the money. The overall state budget is in good shape. The early-session pandemic financial fretting melted away with the spring, because the total Oregon is expected to get from the federal rescue plan is some \$2.6 billion.

One-time spending of \$4 million or \$2 million can't fix wildfire risk in national forests. It won't build much for roads anywhere. Some targeted dollars, though, can change lives.

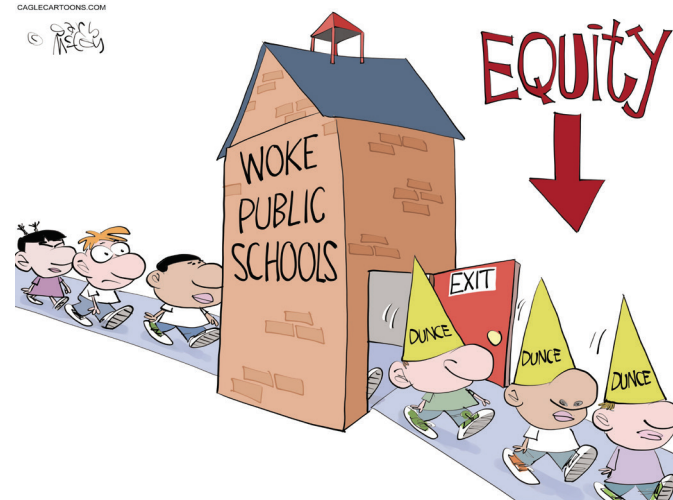
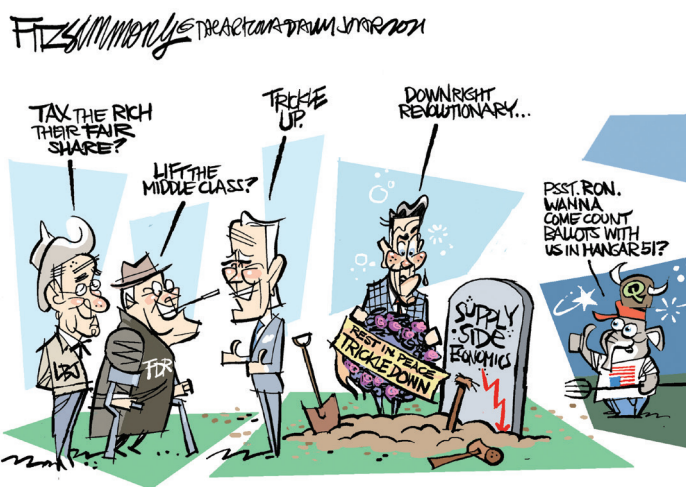
State Rep. Bobby Levy and Sen. Bill Hansell, our voices in the Legislature, have districts covering multiple counties so they will have plenty of folks asking for the dollars they can allocate.

It perhaps makes sense not to spend it on hiring people for new jobs or to start up new programs. How do you pay for them next year? That said, it might make sense to spend it on a pilot program if there's a good idea that needs testing out. Eastern Oregon University probably has some of those that could benefit from a financial boost.

There's such a big need for so many things it's not going to be easy to divvy up a few million. Are some needs more acute right now? Would it help to spend some more to encourage more people to get vaccinated? Is there a program in the schools that could make a real difference for students who lost learning because of the pandemic? Could something be done to help keep businesses operating? Is there anything needed for public safety training? Affordable housing, fighting child abuse, homelessness and so many more ideas that we have not mentioning also are deserving.

It's not going to be so easy for legislators to pick. You may have a good idea that your legislator never thought of. You may have a good idea that your legislator is on the fence about. Let them know.

To find your legislator, you can enter your address at [oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html](http://oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html) and it will tell you. Click on their name and their email address should pop up. Then plan your wish list.



### LETTER to the EDITOR

#### Stick to the basics in the battle against COVID

In "I Feel Lucky," Mary Chapin Carpenter sings, "Hey, the stars might lie, but the numbers never do."

Well, maybe. Since there are different ways of looking at numbers, let's look at the COVID data from a couple of different angles. First, what changes are taking place around the country? Looking at the time frame from April 10-24, 16 states are increasing in numbers of COVID cases. The highest? Oregon at 51% with average daily cases of 776 or 18 cases per 100,000 (100K) population.

The second thing to look at is spread since 18 per 100K is not spread evenly around the state. Hot spots are Klamath County with 66 per 100K and Grant County with 60. Baker County stands at 37, Deschutes (home to Bend) at 34 and Crook at 31. Multnomah with the largest population due to the city of Portland, may have the most cases, but stands at just 18 in 100K. Wallowa County with 176 (as of May 3) cases stands at six.

A third part of the picture comes into focus when looking at percentage of increase in cases in 14 days. Crook County may have had only eight new cases a day, but that's a 253% increase. Wasco was second highest with a 186% increase and Marion third at 120%. Overall, the U.S. rate of infection dropped 12%: one state remained the same, while 34 states and D.C. decreased their numbers: Oklahoma saw an astounding 54% drop, Vermont 42%, Idaho 28%, Michigan 26%. These are numbers we should all strive for.

And what of death rates? Due to better understanding of the needs of hospitalized patients, death rates are dropping around the country. The average daily death rate was 717.6 for a percentage of 0.22 per 100K. Oregon averages 3.4 deaths per day for 0.08 per 100K. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Wallowa County has had five deaths. With a population of approximately 7,200, that means a statis-

tically low number. But these deaths are not statistics, they are our loved ones, our friends, our neighbors. Let's work hard to get to zero infections and zero loss of life.

By going back to the basics, we can do it — by washing our hands frequently, keeping our distance, wearing a mask, getting the vaccine. The freedom of our family, friends, neighbors and fellow citizens to live a healthy, COVID-free life depends on the steps we all take to keep them safe.

Catherine Matthias Joseph

#### Individual freedom vs. public safety

"Your right to swing your arms ends just where the other man's nose begins."

From "Freedom of Speech in War Time" by Zechariah Chafee Jr., the Harvard Law Review, 1919, and other attributions

Recently, the subject of individual freedom vs. public health safety and the common good is making the rounds again, courtesy of the long-running coronavirus pandemic. The op-eds and protests abound. So far 11 states have even made it illegal to implement COVID passports on the premise that they inhibit the personal freedoms of the unvaccinated, although this also limits others' right to eat in a restaurant free of contagion. In other words, some would walk around freely swinging their unvaccinated arms.

Even the right to play professional tennis while unvaccinated is in play, since Novak Djokovic said this past week that he hopes COVID-19 vaccines will not be mandatory for players on tour.

"I don't think it'll come to that," Djokovic said. "I hope not, because I've always believed in freedom of choice."

Tennis tournaments aside, in the U.S. this argument was, surprisingly, legally settled by the Supreme Court way back in 1905, in a Massachusetts case. In that case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a state law requiring com-

pulsory vaccinations against smallpox. The court declared, "Upon the principle of self-defense, of paramount necessity, a community has the right to protect itself against an epidemic of disease which threatens the safety of its members." (from Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the UC Berkeley School of Law, in the LA Times, April 20, 2020)

I'll just let that sink in. In a more recent clash of security vs. freedom, the Patriot Act enacted after 9/11 by the Bush/Cheney administration was criticized by both Republicans and Democrats (as well as the ACLU and other organizations) for infringements on liberties, especially surveillance of U.S. citizens. Freedom pushed back, and the act has been revised a few times since, most recently just last year, although much of it is still in force.

Sure, we struggle to get the right balance sometimes. You can still have a spirited debate about the ethical and moral primacy of public safety vs. sacred freedoms, but we are still a nation of laws, and in our freedom-loving country the existential preservation of "we the people" sometimes trumps an individual's liberties, as in the freedom to potentially infect others.

Now, I am not a constitutional lawyer, but since the 1905 SCOTUS ruling, how U.S. law treats the COVID-19 pandemic looks legally pretty clear. But I suppose 11 strongly Republican states could press the currently conservative Supreme Court for a review and reversal. It didn't work for an election recount last year, but hey, they can ask.

In any case, it is well to remember the arm-swinging vs. nose principle: it is essentially the law of the land. If the court were ever to overturn the 1905 ruling and its spirit, some people might feel gleefully unfettered and vindicated, sure. But there could be a lot more bloody noses in this country. And more dead people from COVID-19.

Rob Kemp Joseph

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