

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Rhetoric over the vaccine needs to stop

The people getting vaccinated against COVID-19 are called sheep. The people not getting vaccinated against COVID-19 are called anti-vaxxers.

Here's an idea: quit with the rhetoric — on both sides.

It's likely that neither statement in the first sentence of this piece is entirely true. Are there some individuals getting vaccinated who are doing it simply because they always do what they are told? Perhaps. Are there some who aren't getting the vaccine who are full-on anti-vaxxers who have never gotten a shot in their life? Perhaps.

But labeling the entire group on one side or the other as a sheep, anti-vaxxer, or any other of your favorite terms does not help. It's, in fact, dangerous and just further widens the divide in this already split nation.

Many people who have gotten the vaccine, in fact, are not sheep. They are people who have looked at the science behind the vaccine or behind mRNA data from the last decade or so and concluded it was the best option for them.

For the older demographic of the population, it makes a lot of sense to take the jab. After all, in Oregon, COVID-19 pre-vaccine had a mortality rate of more than 20% in confirmed cases among those 80 and older.

With the vaccine in place, the overall mortality rate in that group has dropped to less than 17%. Even in instances of a breakthrough case, where individuals get COVID-19 despite being vaccinated, the mortality rate in those 80 and above is just over 6%.

For the immunocompromised, those who want that layer of protection, or those who have talked to their doctor and believe it's the right move for them, it also makes sense.

They should not be chided and called sheep for doing so.

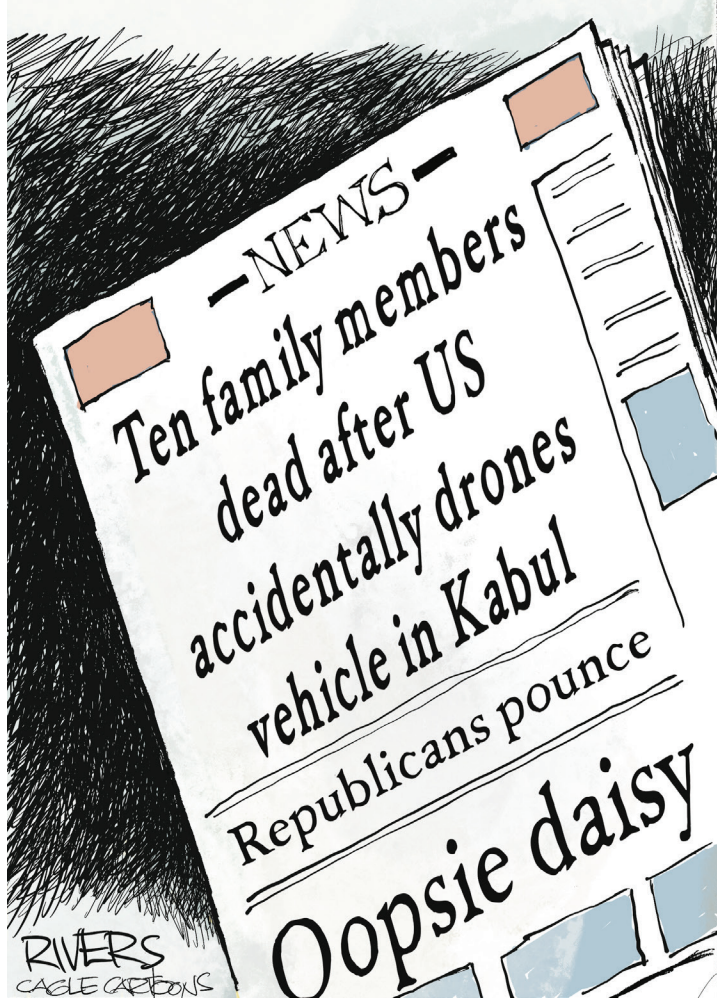
But in the same breath, neither should those who have not yet received the vaccine. They have concerns about vaccine side effects (including long term), and may want to research it more to see if those concerns can be eased. Perhaps they are on the fence and may get it in the coming weeks, and believe they have the freedom to make that decision in their time. Perhaps they are younger, and see a survival rate in their age range of 99.966% (as it currently stands for those 20-29 in Oregon) and figure they will be fine.

If you want to encourage those in that group to receive the shot, do so, but don't bash them over the head with terms like anti-vaxxer that likely are not true, especially of those who are on the fence.

We've held, and continue to hold, the position of encouraging you to do your research, talk to a doctor, pray if you need to, and then make a decision that is best for you as it pertains to the vaccine.

We will get through this pandemic, but not as country united if the rhetoric and blame game continues.

MAINSTREAM MEDIA WITH BIDEN



SAME STORY WITH TRUMP...



LETTERS to the EDITOR

I am in charge of my own health

This is America ... land of the free. I have a right to vaccinate or not, wear a mask or not. Because I don't put on a mask or won't subject myself to an unproven vaccine does not mean that I'm a bad person, nor am I guilty of any wrongdoing.

If someone is concerned about getting COVID or is compromised in any way, they should wear a mask (if masks work), social distance, get vaccinated. Take care of yourself as necessary for you. Don't stipulate what I should do.

I'm not responsible for the general public's health, nor are they responsible for mine.

Yes, the hospitals get crowded. It's not necessarily the available beds, but the fact that there's not enough staff. Once the vaccine mandate is enforced, there is a good possibility of a huge shortage of hospital care staff. I stand behind those that choose that route. No one should be forced to take a vaccine as a requirement for employment.

Our local economy has been devastated with this mask mandate and social distancing. Let the individual decide. They can go into that business or not. It is their choice. Don't punish the businesses because they don't mandate mask wearing in their store: they should not be "mask police."

All we hear on the news is COVID, COVID, COVID, supported by advertising to get the vaccine. It's odd to be so inundated with "vaccine rah-rah-rah advertising" when America's COVID death toll is actually smaller than that of heart disease or cancer deaths.

According to news reports, COVID has claimed approximately 600,000-plus American lives. Of course, we need to consider "presumed and confirmed" COVID deaths. (cdc.gov)

"About 655,000 Americans die from heart disease each year." (aha.org)

"In 2020 there was 606,520 cancer deaths in the United States." In 2021 the estimated cancer deaths are 608,570. (cancer.org)

Drug overdose deaths in the U.S. in 2020 was an estimated 93,331, including 69,710 involving opioids, according to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Am I supposed to interfere with people's lives to keep them from getting heart disease? How about cancer? Should I run roughshod over drug dealers?

Nope. Everyone should take care of themselves.

Regarding masking and the COVID vaccine ... I am in charge of my health — it's my choice.

Lesley Neuman
Lostine

'Please think of those you care about, not just yourself'

Protesters demand freedom from mask and vaccine mandates, claiming personal choice. For most medical decisions, I would agree.

However, the coronavirus is highly contagious and the anti-vax community chooses to ignore this fact. When you become infected, OK fine, that resulted from a personal choice not to protect yourself. But then you will likely infect a few more people — who will it be? Someone you live with? A child? Your co-worker? Someone you sit behind in church? Someone in line with you at the grocery?

I am mystified by your version of choice, which could rob others of their choice to remain healthy. Please think of those you care about, not just yourself.

By the way, Oregon and Washington have consistently been in the top 10 states for lowest incidences of coronavirus cases as a percentage of population. Oregon is currently fifth best. Our governors and their expert advisers deserve credit.

Diane Alexander
Walla Walla, Washington

Sen. Wyden deserves thanks for promoting River Democracy Act

Sen. Ron Wyden deserves a big thank you for initiating and guiding the River Democracy Act through the winding channels towards congressional approval.

As this drought and fire year has made so clear, protecting our watersheds is fundamental to countering the effects of climate change and preserving and enhancing the capacity of our landscapes to absorb, hold and release water and resist fire.

Several streams I (and others) nominated are included in the act. I had hoped even more watersheds would be protected, but from tiny acorns mighty oaks grow, hey? As drought and fire persist into the future and the indispensability of even small waterways becomes ever more evident and protections ever more

prevalent, perhaps more private landowners will see the advantages to themselves and their neighbors.

The act, however, leaves too much scope for irresponsible logging by accommodating commercial sales under the aegis of fire prevention. Too often the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management reveal their bias toward commercial harvest over ecological recovery by cutting large trees and fire-resistant stands that have more environmental than commercial value. Long-term ecological values are subordinated to short-term local economic gain. This needs to change.

The same concern applies to overgrazing livestock in riparian zones. Many small- and medium-sized streams are severely degraded by 125 years of cattle grazing. That's why more and more streams are being enclosed by barbed wire, to keep cows out. It would help if the act recognized this fact and made some practical gesture to address this particular issue.

Despite the criticisms above, I, like so many Oregonians, am thankful to Sen. Wyden for the River Democracy Act.

Wally Sykes
Joseph

Be aware of charges on Hancock land

People who camp and hunt on Hancock land need to be aware of the changes. Camping on their land is no longer free. You will be charged \$35 to \$300 per night. They will be patrolling the area to see where people are and what they are doing. You will be told to pay or leave. If you do not, they will call the police and charge you with trespassing. If this happens you will be banned from Hancock land for life.

Day use is still free. If people abuse their new regulations they will close their land to everyone.

My partner, Bill, has been camping and hunting on Boise Cascade land for over 50 years. I have been hunting and camping with him for 10 years. Hancock clear cuts the land and this makes the game move farther away.

Go to Hipcamp.com and search "Sled Springs" on your computer, or call Eric at 541-786-1119. People need to know this.

Hazel Ortega
Wallowa

Editor's note: A story explaining the program referred to in this letter is on Page A15.

EDITORIALS: Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Wallowa County Chieftain editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Wallowa County Chieftain.

LETTERS: The Wallowa County Chieftain welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that

infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

SEND LETTERS TO: editor@wallowa.com, or via mail to Wallowa County Chieftain, 209 NW 1st St. Enterprise, OR 97828