

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Something in OHA data does not add up

When you read the details of Josh Barnett's story on A1 about trying to right the record on his mother's apparent COVID-19-related death, something doesn't add up.

But not from him — from the Oregon Health Authority.

As far as we (and he) can tell, his mother, Theresa Malec, who died in mid-December, is the woman listed by the OHA as the 14th COVID-19-related death in Wallowa County.

His family is the first that we are aware of in the county to refute COVID-19 having a role in a loved one's death. The death certificate, and Barnett, both state the cause of Malec's death was liver cancer.

Barnett offered to share the certificate with the Chieftain. Following an interview, he gave us permission to publish the cause of death information and that portion of the document.

And after looking at what was provided by Barnett and speaking to him, and then looking at what OHA has given, Barnett's case is much more compelling than the state's.

For one, Malec's passing occurred more than four months after her positive COVID test in August, which, by Barnett's account, she had fully recovered from. Even OHA's own documents say for a passing to be counted as a COVID-related death, the time limit from an individual's first known positive test or symptom onset to their passing is 60 days.

OHA also counts a COVID-19-related death if the death certificate lists specific COVID-related codes. Yet the death certificate for Barnett's mother has no such code listed, and the only mention of her COVID history on the document states there were two negative tests.

(Interestingly, while it doesn't seem to apply here, the other criteria for a COVID-19-related death is "Death from any cause in a hospitalized person during their hospital stay or in the 60 days following discharge and a COVID-19-positive laboratory diagnostic test at any time since 14 days prior to hospitalization" (emphasis ours). Does that not strike anyone as odd?)

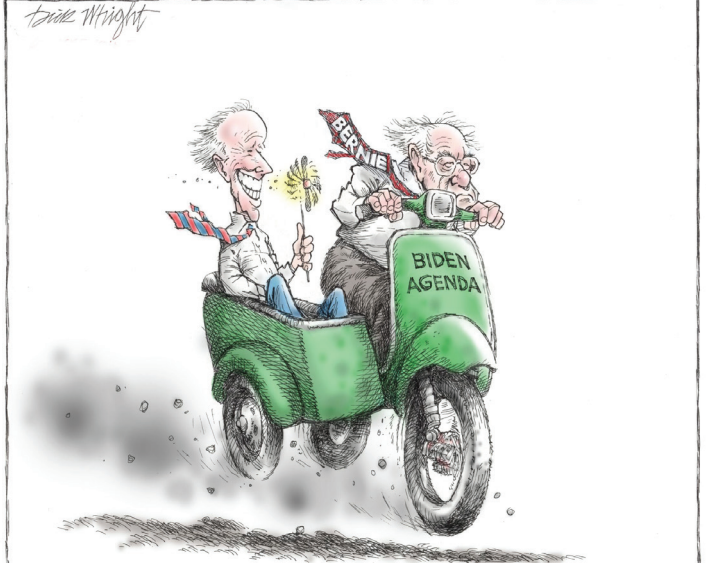
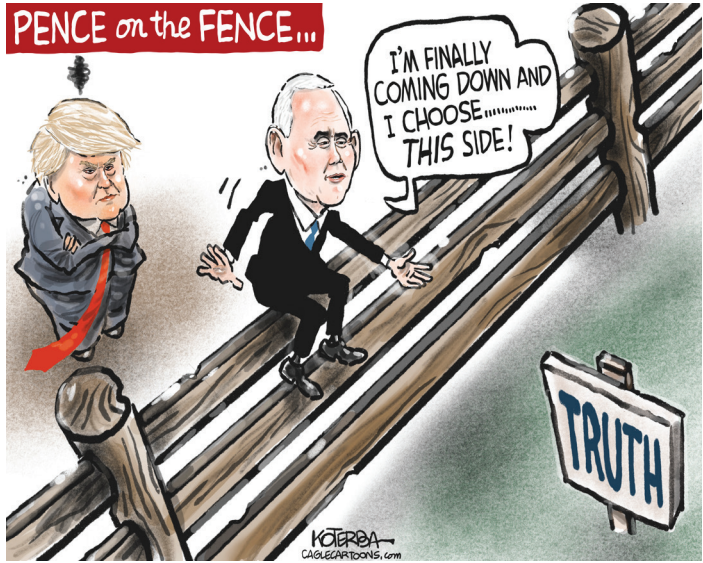
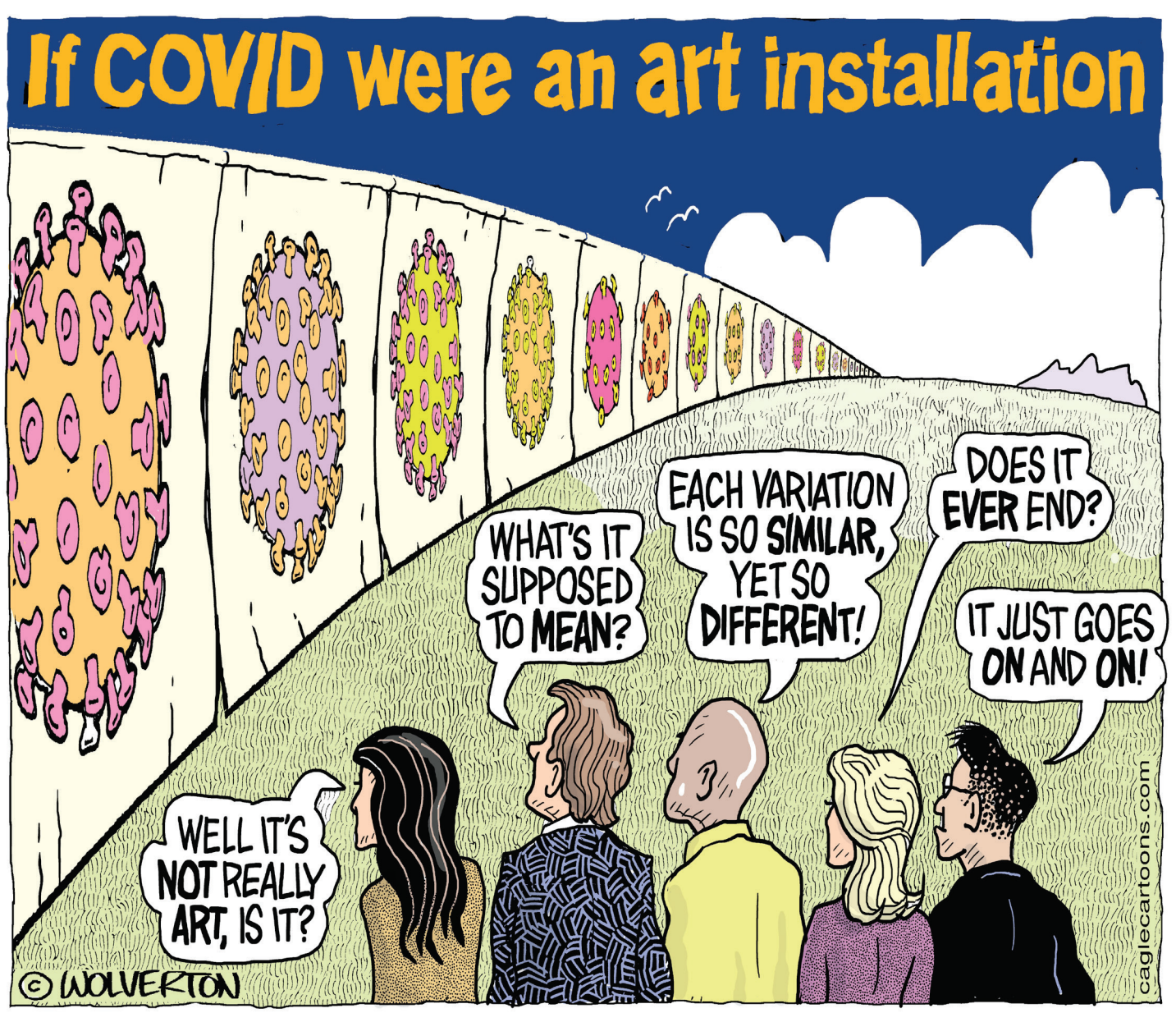
To be fair, we cannot be 100% certain that the woman in the OHA report is Malec, as OHA has not — and said it cannot — provide identifying information. The entity also could not confirm if Barnett's mother, when given her name, was the individual. And yes, Barnett said it was OK for us to ask the OHA that question, as well.

But when you look at the timeline for Malec's passing, in a county as small as Wallowa County, it's pretty easy to put two and two together.

More details are needed to get to the bottom of this particular case, but at the moment, Malec's passing — and Barnett's account and document — raises some serious questions about the validity of OHA's data in this case, and could weaken its overall credibility.

This is not written to discredit the losses felt by people who have been severely impacted by COVID. There is no doubt it's real, and many have died from it.

But as you look a little deeper into OHA's data, it's clear something does not add up.



LETTER to the EDITOR

Stockgrowers comment on stranded cattle

We, the Wallowa County Stockgrowers, feel the need to comment on the unfortunate series of events, some out of the stockman's control, that occurred in the Upper Imnaha area stranding groups of cattle in deep snow.

You don't have to be a cattleman to know that mother nature can deal a tough hand. This came into play in this situation on a large scale, both locally and statewide. The stage was set by record drought in 2021, exacerbated by unseasonably warm, wet weather that pro-

duced a green-up at high elevations causing cattle to scatter in an unprecedented manner. This mild weather ended abruptly and was followed by a three-day blizzard that blew down thousands of trees, piled and drifted several feet of snow blocking roads and trails. The weather — a one-day record for snowfall in Joseph — was so severe that even aerial surveillance was made nearly impossible.

The nature of news doesn't allow for the reports of how many livestock are gathered from the range, protected from predators and shown incredible animal husbandry practices that most people

would call heroic. These types of events are commonplace and part of everyday ranching across our great industry. The introductory phrase of our mission statement of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association is to "promote environmentally and socially sound industry practices." We continue to hold ourselves to these standards and remain committed to provide for the livestock in our care, and practice responsible stewardship of our rangeland.

The Wallowa County Stockgrowers is a member organization that supports the livestock industry and its members.

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