

Siuslaw News

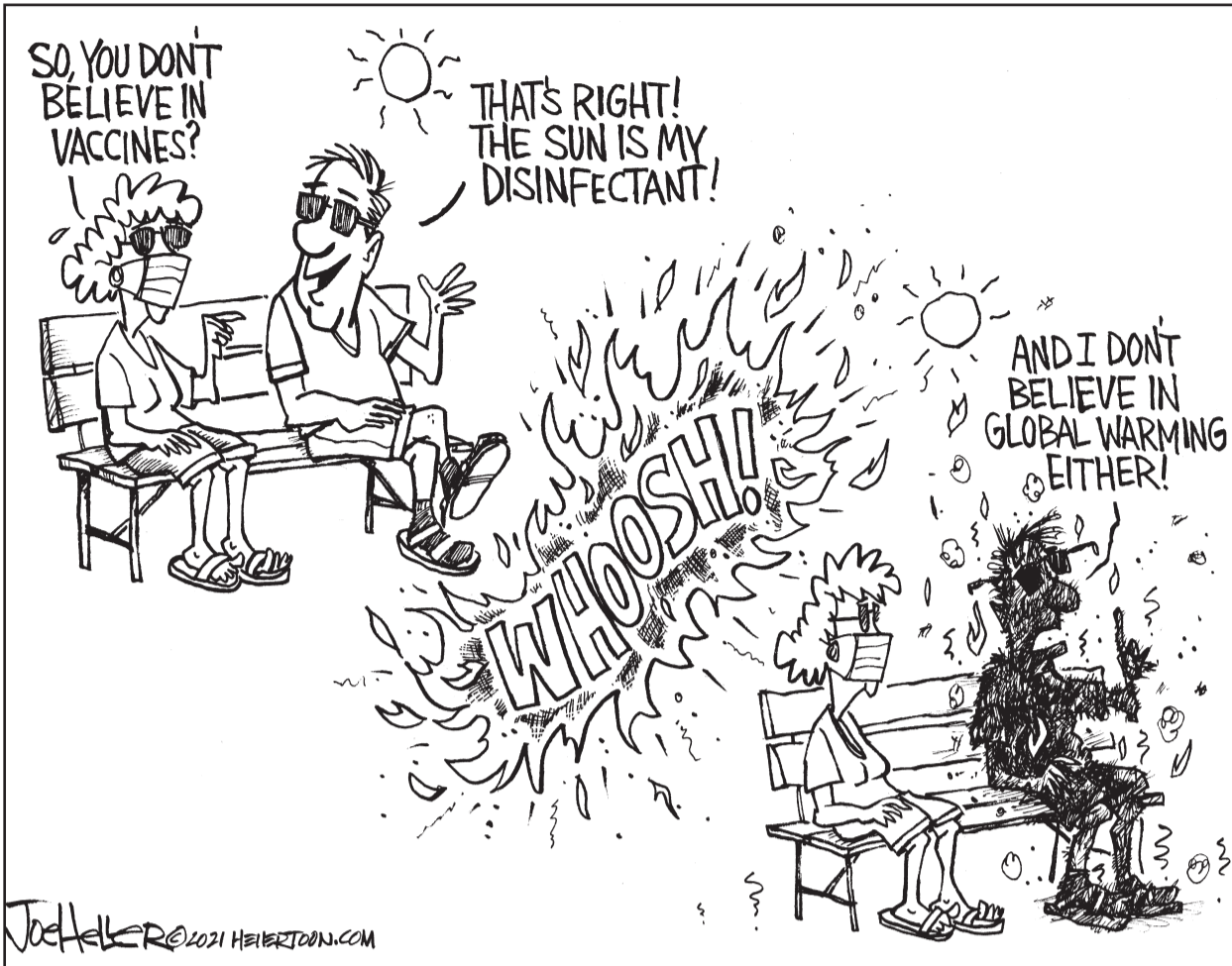
P.O. Box 10  
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# Opinion

## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." — Thomas Jefferson (1800)



## A CELEBRATION OF COMMUNITY

There's something magical about being near a child watching the sky light up with fireworks on the Fourth of July. After 15 months of isolation, that magic was even more present in Florence this past weekend.

The Independence Day holiday weekend was the first large-scale, in-person celebration held in Florence since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020. Thanks to groups like Florence Habitat for Humanity, Oregon Coast Military Museum, Florence Elks Lodge #1858, Kiwanis Club of Florence, City of Florence, Port of Siuslaw and others, the area was able to host family-friendly events all weekend. This was all done thanks to the hard work of our emergency response organizations and the community volunteers and staff members who step up time after time.

If you were able to attend any of the events in and around the area on July 3 and 4, you probably saw a sea of faces, some familiar and some not. There were easy smiles as people greeted each other with handshakes and laughter. People crowded together, shoulder to shoulder, and it felt like the return of something important. It was community — the blend

of residents and visitors, friends and family, business employees and patrons, volunteers and sponsors — and people from all walks of life coming together to make new memories in Florence.

### From the Editor's Desk Chantelle Meyer

Still, ever present was a reminder of those who could not be here.

In the past year and a half, we've honored holidays in various ways, often limited to families and small groups, outdoor ceremonies, virtual parties or drive-up events. We've grown familiar with navigating technology and seeing people in little boxes on screens or behind barriers. It makes sense that people would dive into holiday festivities now that they are allowed.

It's important to remember that the pandemic isn't over, however, even as Oregon Gov. Kate Brown reopened the state on June 30. Those who are immunocompromised, unvaccinated or otherwise unable to return to "normal" right away were unable to participate in many of this weekend's festivities. These people are just as much a part of our community

as those who were able to gather in person.

There are also people who can't or don't celebrate a traditional Fourth of July. Veterans and those suffering from PTSD may not do well with the sounds and sensations of fireworks or large groups. Some people struggle with patriotism and have complicated feelings about the U.S. and its history.

Again, these people are just as much a part of our community.

As we continue to move forward with vaccinations — Oregon reached its 70% vaccination target on July 2 — more people may join in summer activities in person. Or they may not. Everyone is processing the pandemic differently.

Florence's all-American Fourth of July on the Boardwalk marked an end to isolation and a return to community. As the lights burst across the sky and hundreds gathered beneath the bright sparkles of the fireworks, something else was palpable in the air. It could have been the music spun by DJ Al Rojas, and a crowd blending voices to join in song, but I think it was more about how we can continue to get through this together.

It's one more way that the Florence community is so special.

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## Siuslaw News

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