

## EDITORIAL

Taking  
stock

We're less than a week into one of the more noteworthy periods in American history, and although only the passage of time will allow us to reflect on the coronavirus crisis with true perspective, we can at least attempt to take stock of where we are.

For many of us where we are, most of the time, is home.

Schools are closed. So are some businesses. And many people, as they should, are heeding the advice of medical professionals and avoiding close contact with others to deprive the virus its straightest avenues of infection.

But we needn't become hermits to protect ourselves and our friends and neighbors, and we're not doing that, either.

People are still going outside to get exercise in the March sunshine. Social distancing recommendations notwithstanding, this, too, is important. Staying healthy is a boon for our immune system. And exercise releases endorphins, the hormones that improve our moods.

Baker City residents have responded in heartwarming fashion to the potentially disastrous restrictions that have been imposed on businesses owned by our friends, family and neighbors — especially restaurants and bars. We're taking advantage of the carryout meals, showing our support with our appetites and, more importantly, with our wallets.

There is, of course, nothing routine about the situation.

And yet many parts of life remain ordinary even amid this unprecedented situation. With a few exceptions (the sad, and silly, obsession with toilet paper, for instance) most of us have about the same access to necessities that we had last week, last month, last year — shelter and food and water. It appears this will continue.

Even social media, which is more apt to fray than strengthen the social fabric, has contributed something important during this crisis that's so frightening to some of us.

Laughter.

Coronavirus is deadly serious. But the pandemic has also spurred a latent talent for online humor — social media is rich in virus-related memes that should provoke guffaws even from those who are determined not to crack a smile until the crisis eases.

And laughter, like exercise, is good for the body and for the soul.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Unprecedented action needed  
to curb spread of coronavirus

RICK MEIS

President Trump compared the coronavirus pandemic to war. Imagine sending half our soldiers to war with no rifles or helmets. That's overly simplistic but reflects what we are asking of hospitals and medical providers facing this crisis.

The war analogy reflects our nation's primary problem. When non-professionals call the shots in war, it's a disaster. An untrained, non-professional English commander who had bought his commission sent the Light Brigade to its demise 165 years ago.

The Lancet, a global medical journal, had an editorial Friday stressing that "... health-care workers are on the front-line and their safety must be ensured." Twelve of its 15 featured articles are on this pandemic. Our elected leaders must defer to trained professionals.

Oregon Health Sciences University recently determined COVID-19 will require an additional 1,400 hospital beds in a matter of weeks in Oregon, a more than 20% increase. The chief medical officer at OHSU said the number of new cases may double every 6.2 days.

It took 3 months to reach 100,000 coronavirus cases worldwide. The second 100,000 only took 12 days.

We need bold leadership over political expediency. The White House spent weeks playing down this issue, as the White House did for the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918, instead of listening to experts, creating trickle-down decision-avoidance at every level. We are weeks behind. Coronavirus is apolitical; partisanship must go away.

On Monday, the US was about where Italy was 2 weeks earlier. On Thursday, Italy experienced 427 deaths. That speaks volumes about the need for hard, fast decisions and an end to political expediency.

It would behoove our leaders to err on the side of health and safety.

Vo, Italy, between Venice and Milan, tested everyone and found that half of those showing no symptoms tested positive, and were isolated. By testing everyone, and acting accordingly, they were able to hold the outbreak to a minimum because of the national lockdown.

Imperial College professor Andrea Crisanti, who participated in the Vo effort, noted that the small-scale containment program in the Italian city should serve as a model for addressing this pandemic. On Monday, Imperial College released a report that includes modeling that display estimated results of different actions. Due to our severe shortage of ventilators, which are required, the death toll could be over 4 million deaths in the U.S. if drastic

action isn't taken. No amount of money can buy equipment that isn't available.

Elected officials must do as Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases recommended on Sunday: a two-week near-total shutdown of the country to dramatically slow the spread.

Elected officials say we are doing everything we can. That's false. This week we've seen how unprepared we are. A Tuesday article noted that a very ill Oregonian waited 6 days for coronavirus test results. Another hospital tested a person who died; it was over 3 days before the results showed she had COVID-19.

Discussing crowded bars, restaurants and airports, Dr. Fauci said "I would like to see a dramatic diminution of the personal interaction we see" now. He proposed a 14-day national shutdown and told President Trump he wants an "overly aggressive" response that includes "whatever it takes" to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Dr. Fauci understands the human health ramifications. Elected officials focus on economics, not health and safety.

Necessary services can't stop. The majority of travel — air, train, car — is unnecessary and must be halted. Elected leaders must defer to experts who understand the levity of our predicament.

Coronavirus is spreading exponentially. To not take significant actions now increases problems of COVID-19 to beyond manageable levels as well as making the impact of an inevitable shutdown infinitely worse.

"The shutdown is inevitable as it

is already happening, but not in a controlled fashion which is extending the economic pain and amplifying the spread of the virus," Bill Ackman, CEO of Pershing Square Capital Management, wrote Wednesday morning.

Money is being allocated to address this issue, as is necessary. However, this is a public health crisis and that's where the primary focus must be. Worrying about commerce should be the last concern of our leaders. Senator Merkley's Thursday newsletter displays this problem by focusing on getting money allocated and distributed. Only in the last paragraph does he address what should be the primary focus: stopping the spread.

Think triage; this is a health emergency.

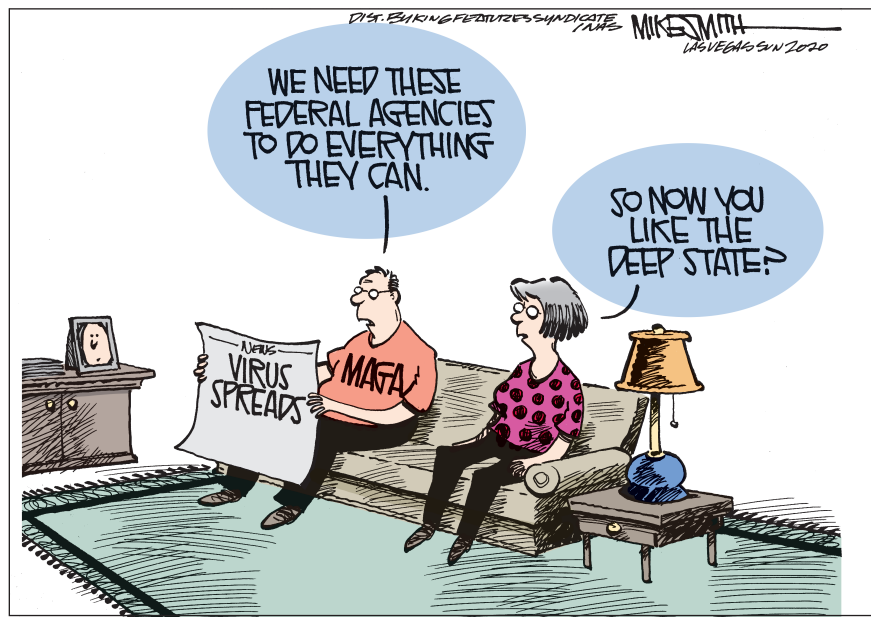
Money can't buy time. Critical supplies have very limited availability, like ventilators and test kits. The country is running out of protective gear for healthcare personnel and infected people. Money can't buy hospital beds and test facilities anywhere near fast enough. We are already running out of trained medical staff. We must dramatically slow the spread.

We've all seen that graphic on flattening the curve. Money can't flatten that curve from exceeding our country's capability to handle the exponential spread of coronavirus. That means the most aggressive possible actions must be taken to dramatically slow the movement and interactions of people.

Coronavirus infections double each week. The economic hit to Main Street America will likely double each week we don't see aggressive decisions to slow the spread immediately.

By the time you read this, things will have changed dramatically from when this was written.

Rick Meis lives in Halfway.



## Living history, and pondering books to be written

As we live through historic events that arrive not every day but every hour, I'm thinking of the future as well as the present.

It is ever fascinating to me to wonder what I might remember, years and decades from now, about changes which in their immediacy and sheer volume seem so monumental that their vibrancy can't be tarnished by time.

Sept. 11, 2001, for instance, was a milestone — one of a handful of epochal days in American history and probably the most notable in my lifetime (I was born in 1970).

Yet my recollections of that sunny September day lack the clarity I would have predicted, even at the span of nearly two decades.

I think the coronavirus might well be different — dramatically so.

Indeed I think it's plausible to believe that for Americans old enough to form lasting memories of these days in the winter and spring of 2020, the coronavirus crisis will attain a prominence not so dissimilar to that of World War II among the generations that lived through that conflict.

I don't mean to suggest the two events are comparable on certain levels, to be sure.



JAYSON JACOBY

America was directly involved in the Second World War for close to four years, and nearly half a million service members died.

There is good reason to believe that coronavirus in our country will not approach the war's longevity or death toll.

But no single event since that war has caused such upheaval to our society, at the most fundamental levels, as coronavirus has done.

The repercussions arrived so rapidly that I've felt a trifle overwhelmed, as though I were caught in one of those terrible dreams in which the tasks accumulate but I seem helpless to deal with even one.

(And like as not, while clad only in my underwear.)

In the span of a few days, all manner of traditions that seemed as reliable as the passage of the seasons became casualties.

Sports all but ended.

March Madness, a symbol of

spring as certain as the chilly north wind buffeting Baker Valley (but much less annoying), was canceled.

Schools closed.

Sit-down meals at restaurants are banned, and theaters dark and silent.

Terms such as "social distancing" have entered the vernacular, and I suspect they will be more difficult to dislodge than the slogans of past crises — gas lines, for instance.

It is natural, and reasonable, to compare these precautions, some of them unprecedented in our lifetimes, with the level of the threat and decide for ourselves whether we think the scales are balanced.

I understand why some people say they are not — indeed, that the response is grossly exaggerated.

Doctors agree that the coronavirus, though quite infectious, has a relatively low fatality rate of roughly 2% — and much lower yet for young, otherwise healthy people.

I suspect many people, including those who dismiss the more dramatic precautions as hysteria, assumed — if they ever thought about the subject — that only a disease that was both easily spread and widely fatal would prompt this level of response.

There is, I'll concede, a certain comfort in the statistics. The same is true for our individual risks of, say, dying in a car crash. Most of us, after all, probably will not contract coronavirus. And most of those who do will survive, quite likely without even knowing the virus breached our defenses.

Yet despite this relatively remote risk of any one of us suffering severe illness, much less dying, I don't believe America's response to coronavirus is unreasonable.

This is partly because of the uncertainty.

We know much more about how dangerous coronavirus is now than we did even a few weeks ago. But I am not comfortable making broad assumptions about a virus that, until around the turn of the year, few people who don't work in virology likely had heard of.

Moreover, the restrictions we have either taken voluntarily, or that have been imposed by the government, are indisputably effective at reducing the spread of the disease.

And although the short-term effects can be serious — most notably the economic harm — absent these precautions the coronavirus would

infect far more people, and the blow to business likely would be even more persistent and dire.

None of this, obviously, can be proved now.

Which returns me to my original point about pondering the future.

It seems to me that budding sociologists and other observers of human society will have plenty of topics to keep them academically occupied for years, if not decades.

By 2040 bookshelves will sag, I suspect, with the work of historians who have examined every aspect of the great coronavirus crisis of 2020 (ideally, of course, it will be confined to a single year).

I like to think I'll pass enjoyable hours in my dotage reading some of these.

But I wonder how much I'll remember of what it was really like. How vividly will I be able to recall when the closures were arriving in my inbox with stunning rapidity, when toilet paper jokes were the epitome of humor, and when the issue of airborne droplets was suddenly, shockingly, more important than the Final Four.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.