

EDITORIAL

County strikes a balance

Baker County officials have struck a reasonable balance in pursuing a vitally important goal — removing the shackles that have stifled the local economy, but without opening the floodgates to a torrent of coronavirus cases.

The proposal the county submitted to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's office Friday is consistent with Brown's stated goal to reopen the state's ravaged economy "gradually, carefully and incrementally."

Brown should make it a priority to scrutinize the county's plan and to authorize county officials to put it into practice as soon as possible.

Baker County suggests a moderate approach. Some businesses that are closed or restricted now — notably, restaurants and bars — wouldn't immediately reopen or be allowed to resume welcoming customers into their dining rooms. Instead, during the first phase of the plan, which would last two weeks with the option of shortening the period if medical experts agree to do so, restaurants would continue to be limited to takeout and delivery, and bars would remain closed. Other businesses, such as beauty salons and barbers, could reopen but with requirements including social distancing, frequent cleaning of surfaces that are touched often, and scheduling appointments with clients to allow a team to employ "contact tracing" in the event of a confirmed case of the virus. Contact tracing is the method by which officials can identify people who could have been infected by a person known to have COVID-19 by tracing the patient's movements and contacts.

During the second phase, restaurants and bars could reopen, but with reduced seating to allow for social distancing. The plan wisely reserves more stringent regulations for groups most vulnerable, including those living in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Visiting could resume in those places only during the third phase, which, like the transition from the first to the second phases, could happen in two weeks or potentially sooner.

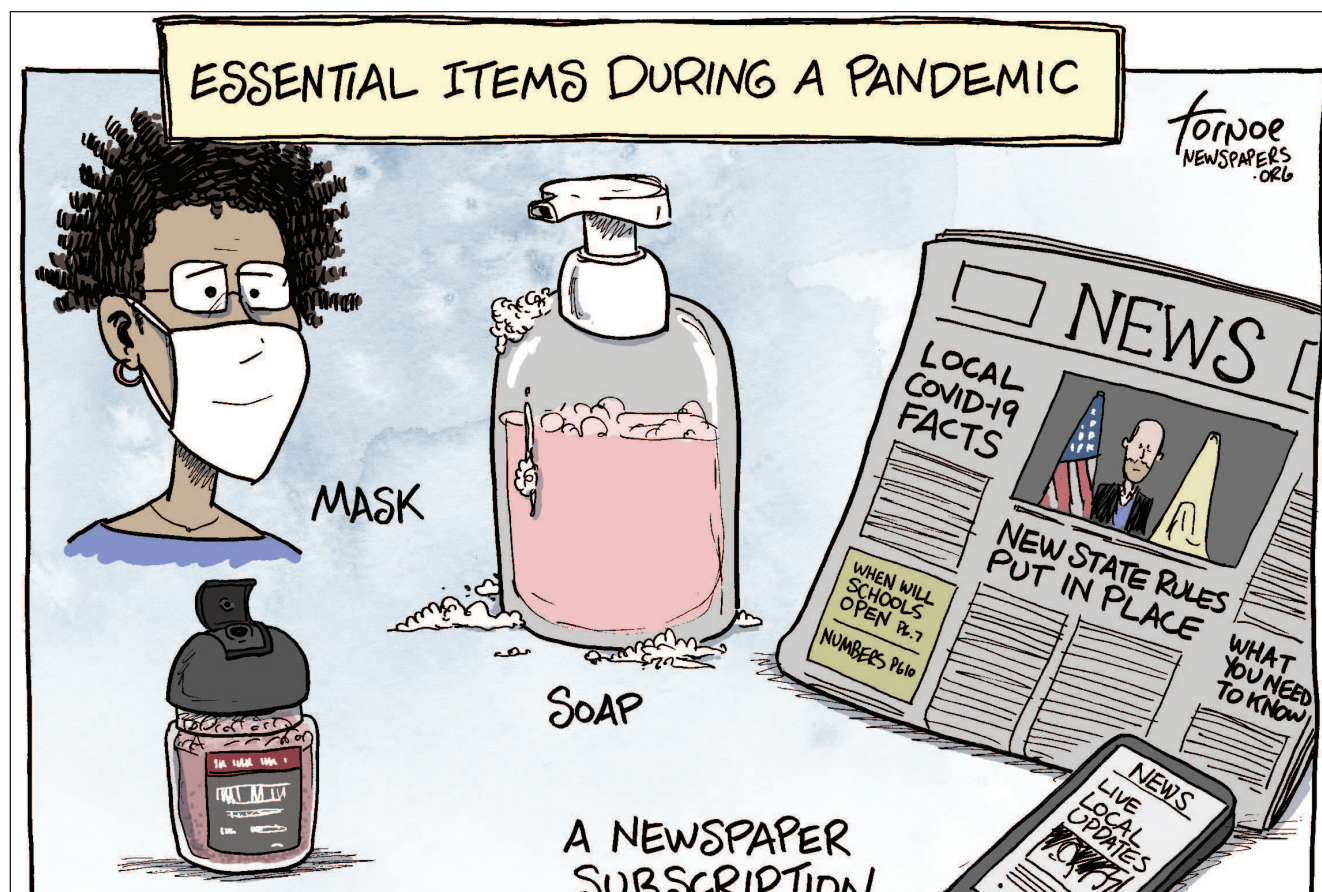
Throughout, the county's proposal emphasizes the importance of social distancing and the need to remind people, and business owners, to continue to use precautions to stem the virus.

And in keeping with the governor's framework for reopening the economy, the county's plan includes thresholds, such as at least eight confirmed cases of the virus in a one-week period, that if reached would halt the progress of reopening the economy.

At this point it seems unlikely the county would reach that threshold. As of Monday Baker County had not had a confirmed case of the virus, and 75 people had been tested.

The governor has said that her strategy for easing restrictions will likely reflect the dramatic differences among Oregon's 36 counties. This is sensible — restrictions that might be reasonable in densely populated counties such as Multnomah, with about 822,000 residents and 664 confirmed virus cases, likely aren't needed in Baker County, population about 16,800.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Local news more vital than ever

During this coronavirus pandemic, access to accurate and trustworthy information in your community is as critical to life under quarantine and as sought after as hand sanitizer and face masks.

Your local newspaper provides the news and information unique to your community. Where are the testing sites and who's eligible, which businesses are open, what is the local online unemployment benefit application process, and much more. But your access to local news and information is gravely threatened by the economic carnage COVID-19 has wrought.

While local newspapers continue to field reporters and bring news and advice from public health authorities in print and online — at considerable cost — their revenues have all but disappeared as the businesses that were their most important advertisers were shuttered. That's why America's Newspapers and other organizations representing local news providers are asking Congress to take urgent action to ensure you don't lose your vital sources of timely and trustworthy information.

First, we're asking that Congress expand and clarify the Payroll Protection Program to ensure it covers all local newspapers and news broadcasters. While some of these outlets may be owned by large organizations, they must survive on their own. It's only fair that they should be included in any expansion of the program. These loans



DEAN RIDINGS

will keep the newspaper employees — your neighbors — on their payrolls and help get the news to you in print as well as online. We appreciate the bipartisan letter of April 19 from U.S. Senators Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), John Kennedy (R-La.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and John Boozman (R-Ark.) that requested waiving the Small Business Administration's (SBA) affiliation rule to allow local media outlets to access funding, pointing to the critical role these outlets play in keeping communities healthy and informed.

Second, we are asking that the Trump Administration direct current federal government advertising funds to local news and media outlets. These public service and informative ads could be similar to the ones running right now about the U.S. Census. They could carry critical government information about data from the CDC, access to small business loans, medical resources for families and other important topics. We're asking for a commitment that would be spent in an equitable manner across all local news providers.

We also believe that there should be an immediate relief package that is based on total newsroom employees. Some local news organizations won't survive without some type of immedi-

ate grant or infusion that is tied to the organization's employees who directly work in the newsroom.

This is not a demand for an industry bailout by local news providers. Instead, these measures recognize that local news publishers are on the information front line of the coronavirus pandemic, providing a public service vital to keeping our communities safe, secure and sustained during this unprecedented public health crisis.

Please contact the offices of your senators and representatives in the U.S. Congress and tell them you support expanding the Payroll Protection Program to include your local news source and that the federal government should use your local newspapers or news broadcaster to convey important information through public service ads. And finally, let them know that a grant based on newsroom employees is critical at this time. Visit www.usa.gov/elected-officials for their contact information.

Take this easy action to ensure that your access to local information doesn't become another victim to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you and may you and your family remain safe and informed during this difficult time.

Dean Ridings is the CEO of America's Newspapers, which is committed to explaining, defending and advancing the vital role of newspapers in democracy and civil life.

Grocery bags a health hazard

Due to the emergency and current danger we face with the outbreak and ongoing national coronavirus crisis with concerns of potential community transfer of the COVID-19, I submit my genuine concerns regarding the 2020 Ban the Bag legislation, encouraging consumers to bring their own unsanitary reusable bags from home to our grocery and food stores in light of the community transfer of the highly contagious coronavirus. I have contacted many state representatives and Oregon's Governor's office, including Oregon's Health and Human Services, to no avail.

I believe the governor, Kate Brown, had and has the responsibility to send out a directive to all state and local elected officials informing them to notify all grocery/food stores within their localities as to the New "BAN" on the recent 2020 Ban the Bag Legislation, which in reality was a dumb idea to begin with considering the danger to health and safety of our community, in light of the community transfer of viruses, germs, flu and diseases. However, now this has been brought to the forefront and is very evident due to the crisis we are now facing daily and which poses a more present danger by consumers bringing their unsanitary reusable bags from homes, even sick homes, to our grocery/food stores placing bags in food carts, conveyers and checkout counters, handled by cashiers then transferred to subsequent consumers who place their

DON BECK

food and grocery items on these surfaces and then handled by the same cashiers and then are taken home to our kitchen counters, tables and family members.

The governor herself or staff should have notified all elected officials and grocery/food stores or at a minimum contacted the grocers' association and stakeholders that implemented the Ban the Bag Program and informed them of the new overriding ban of their program. Informing them to notify all their members immediately, not allowing them to continue for weeks after the outbreak with potential risks daily to our community citizens. This is irresponsible to not take the threat more seriously and do the right thing for the health and safety of Oregonians. It appears the only consideration being for the grocery stores to make consumers pay for their bagging of their purchases, with no regards for the health and safety of their consumers and the deadly effects that their economic decision has on our communities.

This goes beyond our current crisis and will continue to be a danger as long as people bring in these bags, potentially harmful and sometimes life-threatening, into our food source. I see customers set them down in the filthy germ-ridden parking lots before going into the store,

and some do the same while loading in vehicle with some loading into back of pickups where they haul who knows what then bring them back to the store and recycle the germs on them. Customers still put them in the food baskets and if contaminated they bring the contamination into the enclosed buildings and air conditioning and ventilation systems move the virus in air flow, endangering lives. Only store-furnished new bags should be available to ensure the health and safety of all consumers. I was told some stores sanitize the baskets twice and sometimes maybe four times a day, but what about all the times between cleanings, it only takes one customer and one bag to infect many people between cleanings.

This is a serious and grave threat and danger to the innocent unsuspecting citizens of our community that should not be forced on them by government for us to endure when there is an easy solution. STOP bringing bags from home to our grocery stores, even one life is too many to risk for the cost of a 5-cent bag. Bags are fine with the grocery stores, plastic or paper as long as the consumers pay for them. Seems more about their bottom line than health and safety first for their loyal customers.

May the health and safety of our friends and neighbors be a priority for all of us. God Bless us!

Don Beck lives near Baker City.

Letters to the editor

- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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