

# Opinion

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## OUR VIEW

# Obscuring public notices

Gov. Kate Brown said when she first took office that throughout her career she has “sought to promote transparency and trust in government, working to build confidence that our public dollars are spent wisely. As governor, this will not change.”

As governor, it has changed.

She issued an executive order that allows local governments to post required public notices about their budgets only on their own websites. That's like the fox guarding the henhouse.

It has nothing to do with protecting public health during the pandemic. It's an attack on government transparency.

You have probably seen public notices in newspapers. They are those long, wordy, technical and dry ads usually in the classifieds. They can make your eyes glaze over.

Public notices, though, have information that is important to people, such as how the government plans to spend taxes. And they are required by law. They exist so the public knows what their government is doing, so government is transparent and open.

Public notices are reported to have begun in English newspapers in 1665 with what was later renamed as The London Gazette. It published notices from the King's Court, from London officials and so on. The practice later spread to the United States. Congress made it a requirement in 1789 for the federal government to publish similar notices in newspapers.

So much has changed. The internet makes it much easier to share information and to find it. State and local governments across the country have pushed for the freedom to only publish such notices on their own websites.

The biggest argument for that is: It's free. It costs money to run legal notices in newspapers. And the Baker City Herald is no different. This newspaper makes money off of legal notices.

But the important issue is getting information to the public. Where does the public look for such information? In newspapers. Remove it from newspapers and bury it on a website and who will see it? That precisely could be the goal.

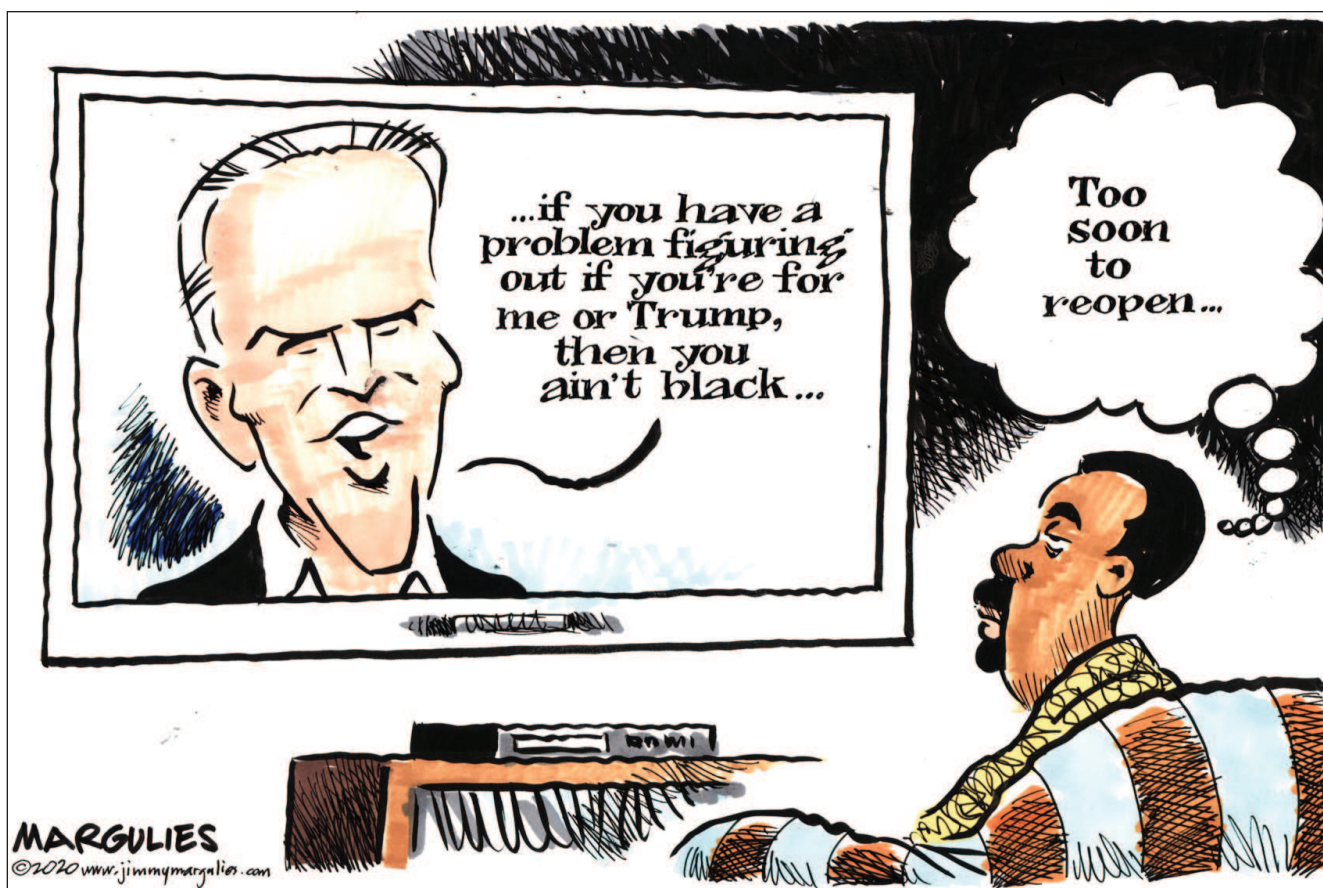
The internet is available almost everywhere. But as we all know, and politicians and school officials say again and again, not everybody has access to it. Why would the governor make a move to secrete more information on the wrong side of the digital divide?

The other issue is the absence of connection between the change and the pandemic. We asked the governor's office about that. We were told that the change was made at the request of local governments who were concerned about completing their budget processes on time.

That argument just does not make sense. Publishing legal notices is part of the routine. It's not an onerous requirement. Where is the danger to public health and safety? What's the problem? There isn't one.

Gov. Brown has done her best during the pandemic to balance public health, the economy and keep government operating and open. When there's a threat like COVID-19, politicians can use it to make changes with less public scrutiny. Never let a good crisis go to waste, as the saying goes. Gov. Brown chose this crisis to undermine public access to information about how tax dollars are spent. She has changed.

*Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.*



# Vaccine: Speed versus safety

If there is a silver lining to the flawed U.S. response to the coronavirus pandemic, it is this: The relatively high number of new cases being diagnosed daily — upward of 20,000 — will make it easier to test new vaccines.

To determine whether a vaccine prevents disease, the study's subjects need to be exposed to the pathogen as it circulates in the population. Reopening the economy will likely result in faster spread of the coronavirus and therefore more opportunities to test a vaccine's efficacy in trial subjects.

Under a proposal under discussion by a committee set up by the National Institutes of Health, each of four or five experimental vaccines would be tested on about 20,000 trial participants with a placebo group of 10,000 for each vaccine. Some 50 U.S. medical centers — and perhaps an equal number overseas — would participate in these trials.

On May 18, Moderna, the biotech company, reported promising results in the first eight of 45 people enrolled in an initial test of the safety and immune responses to its vaccine. Analysts attributed a 900-point jump in the Dow that day at least partly to this very preliminary data, so eager are investors for any signs of progress in efforts to control the pandemic.

Moderna is running animal and human studies simultaneously, and plans to invest hundreds of millions of dollars to build laboratories where the vaccine will be produced even before it's approved. The Food and Drug Administration on May 12 promised an accelerated review of Moderna's vaccine, which works by injecting pieces of synthetic viral RNA into the body to stimulate an immune response to the virus.

The speed in developing vaccines for widespread testing this summer is impressive, certainly compared with the nation's inadequate, delayed response to providing coronavirus testing and PPE to health care providers.

Still, many scientists have expressed skepticism at the breakneck timetable put forward by some Trump administration officials, who say that 100 mil-

## ARTHUR ALLEN

lion doses of a vaccine could be available by November. Even the normally sober Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told a Senate committee on May 12 that a vaccine could have proven safety and efficacy by then.

Running a trial of the size and speed contemplated by the NIH will be an immense undertaking. Just setting up trial locations and getting common consent and data-entry forms into shape usually takes months. Enrolling 30,000 people for a single vaccine trial is a big challenge.

In addition, defining success in a vaccine against COVID-19 will be no simple matter. As scientists design vaccine trials, they first have to set the “endpoints” that determine success or failure. Death? Length of illness? Hospitalization? Number of days in which a subject is infectious?

If there is little virus circulating where a trial is being run, even a vast study won't prove anything. On the other hand, if a vaccine trial had started in early April in New York City, where roughly 10,000 cases a day were reported for weeks, 30,000 participants would have been plenty to show whether the vaccine protected against disease.

In all likelihood, the big NIH trials will focus on rates of infection as well as clinical symptoms such as fever and cough. To discover whether the vaccine prevents severe disease, which is relatively rare, is harder. COVID-19, according to one account, kills about 0.6% of those it infects, while perhaps six times that many require hospitalization.

People who take part in a trial will be given clear instructions to protect themselves against infection through social distancing, face masks, frequent hand-washing and so on. That will lower the numbers of people infected during the study.

“You'd have to ask all the people enrolled in a trial to practice good hygiene,” says Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. “You don't want them to get infected — but you do.”

When Jonas Salk announced the successful trial of his polio vaccine in 1955, the nation celebrated a vaccine that could virtually eliminate a deadly infectious disease overnight. A new coronavirus vaccine may not provide that kind of overnight success. Instead, it may be more akin to the flu vaccine, which reduces the risk or severity of the illness but requires a new shot each year.

Vaccinating 20,000 people in a trial can reveal whether a vaccine is clearly dangerous to a general population. But when 200 million receive the same vaccine, less common side effects could still affect thousands. Botched batches of polio vaccines released after Salk's trial permanently paralyzed 200 people and killed 10. Early vaccines against measles caused tens of thousands of cases of grave illness in the 1960s.

Maurice Hilleman, the vaccine pioneer who developed successful vaccines against measles, mumps, hepatitis A and B and other diseases, once said he never breathed a sigh of relief “until the first 3 million doses” had been delivered.

Unexpected problems naturally bedevil quick rollouts, as this one will almost certainly be as the nation searches for a way to check a pandemic that is killing tens of thousands of Americans and paralyzing the economy. But as Gregory Poland, the leader of Mayo Clinic's vaccine research, told me, “There is an irresolvable tension of speed versus safety.”

*Arthur Allen is an editor for Kaiser Health News, which publishes California Healthline, an editorially independent service of the California Health Care Foundation. He is also the author of “Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver.”*

## Your views

### Two questionable letters

Recently, the Herald printed two letters, in two separate editions, written by two different authors who I refer to as the M&Ms. One of these two

letters attempted to enlighten us as to the mental state of the President of the United States. The other letter attempted to explain why churches hold worship services. What these two let-

ters did show us was that the M&Ms did not have a clue as to what they were talking about.

**Sig Siefkes**  
Baker City

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

**President Donald Trump:** The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to [www.whitehouse.gov/contact](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact).

**U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley:** D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; [merkley.senate.gov](mailto:merkley.senate.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden:** D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; [wyden.senate.gov](mailto:wyden.senate.gov).

**U.S. Rep. Greg Walden** (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; [walden.house.gov](mailto:walden.house.gov).

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR

97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

**Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read:** [oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us](mailto:oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us); 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

**Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum:** Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us).

**State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario):** Salem office: 900

Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: [Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov)

**State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane):** Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: [Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov)

**Baker City Hall:** 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Lynette Perry, Arvid Andersen, Larry

Morrison, Jason Spriet and Doni Bruland.

**Baker City administration:** 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Ray Duman, police chief; Sean Lee, interim fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

**Baker County Commission:** Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

**Baker County departments:** 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

**Baker School District:** 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Andrew Bryan, Kevin Cassidy, Chris Hawkins, Katie Lamb and Julie Huntington.