

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Welcoming a vaccine

Government officials, including Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, have said they don't believe society can return to something approaching normal until a vaccine is widely available for the coronavirus.

But a recent poll suggests a significant number of Americans don't necessarily concur — or at least that they aren't eager to bare their shoulders for an inoculation against the virus that has affected the world like none since the Spanish flu in 1918.

The poll from The Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about half of respondents definitely would get a vaccine for the coronavirus.

Considering the miraculous benefits that vaccinations have conveyed on the human race, eradicating deadly diseases such as smallpoxes and nearly eliminating once-common afflictions such as polio and measles, the poll results are troubling.

The timing, before we have a lot of information about trials of possible vaccines, might have influenced the results. About 20% of respondents said they would refuse the vaccination, while almost one-third said they aren't sure whether they would.

A certain level of trepidation is not surprising since we're not accustomed to researchers putting a vaccine on such a fast track. Yet experts, including Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, emphasize that, as with other vaccines, this one will be rigorously studied for safety as well as efficacy. "I would not want people to think that we're cutting corners because that would be a big mistake," Collins said. We should be grateful, not suspicious, that scientists are striving to create a vaccine as soon as possible — their work will save lives and help the economy recover. The speed of their efforts reflects the severity of this pandemic, not a lack of rigor.

Some concerns expressed by respondents are utterly unfounded. Among the roughly 20% who said they won't get the vaccine, about 4 in 10 say they fear the inoculation would infect them. But the leading vaccine candidates don't contain the virus itself — they would spur a response from the immune system without it.

The coronavirus vaccine should be one of the great medical achievements of our lifetimes. But only if we embrace its benefits, both for ourselves and for society.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## OTHER VIEWS

# Get the Supreme Court on camera

### Editorial from The Chicago Tribune:

The U.S. Supreme Court has been making history lately, and not by the usual method of issuing decisions in important constitutional cases. The coronavirus pandemic has prompted the justices to break with tradition in some big ways.

The first was to hear oral arguments remotely, so that they and the contending lawyers don't have to travel to the courtroom in Washington, D.C. Like many other people who once worked in offices, the justices have been doing their jobs from home. They apparently concluded this option would work fine not just for reading briefs and doing research but also for grilling attorneys as they present their cases.

The first case, heard on May 4, was a trademark dispute involving the travel website Bookings.com. The justices and lawyers called in to the teleconference and the business unfolded more or less as usual. The marble columns at the building's main entrance did not crumble from the shock waves — despite one embarrassing moment when a toilet was heard flushing. Let's all pretend "the flush heard around the country," as a CNN headline dubbed it, never happened, shall we?

The new format did make a difference: Instead of jumping in helter-skelter to interrupt the attorneys and

one another, the justices politely took turns asking questions. The more orderly proceedings induced Clarence Thomas, who sometimes goes years without speaking at these sessions, to ask several questions.

The justices also approved another change: allowing the live broadcast of oral arguments. In recent years, the court has made audio recordings available afterward. This, however, was the first time that Americans could hear cases argued live. Since then, they have gotten to hear several more. For anyone with an interest in the Supreme Court, which includes some journalists, it's an exciting change.

It should allay any fears the justices had about live broadcasts. "Remind me why they haven't been doing this all along?" Gabe Roth of Fix the Court, an organization that advocates more openness, asked the Los Angeles Times.

Maybe it will encourage the court to give Americans an even better picture of its work by admitting video cameras, as soon as the court goes back to hearing cases in person. If hearing is good, seeing and hearing is better.

The justices have long rejected this option. During his time on the court, David Souter said, "The day you see a camera come into our courtroom, it's going to roll over my dead body." The late Antonin Scalia feared brief video

clips would be used on news programs in ways that would "miseducate the American people." Elena Kagan worries that "we might filter ourselves in ways that might be unfortunate."

The same objections could be raised about audio, which has become routine. We think the court as well as the public would benefit from the greater understanding that would come from letting ordinary people watch arguments as they happen. On occasions when major cases are decided, plenty of Americans would tune in to see John Roberts or Ruth Bader Ginsburg summarize the court's opinion — or their dissent.

Sen. Dick Durbin and Rep. Mike Quigley, both from Illinois, have repeatedly introduced bills to require the court to allow all open sessions to be televised. "Supreme Court rulings affect the lives of every American from every ZIP code in the country," says Durbin. "Yet, Supreme Court arguments and decisions can only be watched by a few hundred Americans who are able to obtain a seat in the courtroom and view them live."

Maybe the experience with live audio will make the justices realize that there is nothing to fear from video. The work they do is a vital part of our system of government, and every American should have the opportunity to see how they do it.

# Magical May; and the tale of a boy and a backhoe

I was puttering about in my yard the other evening, enjoying the carefree amble of a man whose lawn is freshly mowed and flower beds recently purged of at least the most obvious weedy infiltrators.

I was reaching across the stump of our honey locust — long since felled, and little lamented as it cast but a puny patch of shade — stretching to snag a windthrown willow limb, when a zephyr filled my nose with the scent of new lilac.

If May were casting about for an official aroma I likely would nominate that one.

It is not quite the sweetest smell of spring — bitter cherry, named for its flavor rather than its odor, earns my vote in that category.

But lilac has a heft to it — an almost physical presence as it arrives at my nostrils, as though the fine sensitive hairs inside were quivering like the just-plucked strings of a guitar.

Moisture seems to enhance the aromatic effect.

This particular evening was dry, but the clouds draped the foothills and had that swollen appearance which suggests rain is imminent.

The same breeze that wafted the lilac over my cheeks also carried the fresh damp tang of all that liquid suspended overhead, a veritable ocean in the sky.

Often as not in our climate, which is a much closer kin to the desert than to the rainforest, this preview is in effect the whole show,



JAYSON JACOBY

and the clouds slide to the east, stubbornly holding their moisture until they slam into the unyielding granitic masses of the Wallows and the Seven Devils, those ramparts of the Rockies.

But it is in May when the pregnant clouds are most apt to deliver on their promise.

Indeed it was later that week that rain sluiced down for the better part of a day, swelling streams and puddling muddy, pollen-speckled water in every depression.

I enjoy such days, in the main.

I relish them for their very rarity, among other reasons. I feel the same about other abnormal phenomena such as the night when the temperature, rather than halting at a more customary zero, continues to plunge to 15 below, or 25, or the November afternoon that feels more like August and no matter the yellowed leaves and the blazing orange patches where the tamaracks grow thickly.

But I also appreciate day-long May rains because they nourish the greenery that helps sustain us through the long and inevitably torrid summer. In the soggy May day lies the promise of the cooling canopy of July ash leaves, the

plump tomato and the smiling sunflower.

May, moreover, is the balm which eases us, gently and with no painful chafing, from one season to the next.

I would despair were true summer to arrive hereabouts as soon as May, just as I would if winter, with its incessant frigidty, barged in along about the end of September to commence its long residency.

In most years May boasts the year's first 80-degree afternoon — a chance to remember what it is to wear shorts outdoors without wincing.

But there is nothing malignant about early heat, even though it always feels rather like an ambush, coming as it does after so much monotonous chill.

A hot afternoon in May lacks the treachery of the same temperature in July, when it's likely to be just another sizzling day in a long series. In high summer the only potential relief during a heat wave is the thundershower — exciting, certainly, but as unreliable as that one friend who invariably shows up an hour late and without the promised potato chips.

But in May, no matter how stifling any individual day, I am comforted by the knowledge that the North Pacific will almost certainly conjure at least a couple more cold fronts soon — those refreshing intervals that hold off summer for a bit longer while lilac still perfumes

the cool hours on the edge of dusk.

On the night of the May 19 election I received an interesting email.

A man, inquiring on behalf of his 5-year-old son, asked if I had a photograph of the 1995 Case backhoe that Baker City plans to sell.

This particular piece of equipment garnered considerably more attention than most earthmoving implements, due to a curious clause in the city's 1952 charter. That clause requires the city to get voters' approval before selling property, including equipment and vehicles, worth more than \$10,000.

City officials figure the backhoe could fetch around \$16,000 through an online government auction, so on the ballot the backhoe went.

Voters, perhaps assuming they weren't going to get to use the machine to remake their own spreads, went for the city's plan at a rate of better than 92%.

This unusual bit of electoral intrigue prompted stories in The Oregonian, among other news outlets that generally show little interest in Baker City happenings.

I told the boy's father that I didn't have a photo — my file on publicly owned backhoes is woefully thin — but that I figured I could get one.

I immediately thought of Tom Fisk.

Tom is the operations supervisor

for the city's public works department. When I have any question involving a city street or sewer pipe or anything else that can be paved or buried or busted, he's almost always the first person I call.

The reason for this is simple — he almost always has the answer.

And as I expected, Tom was able to supply me with a photograph of the increasingly famous backhoe, which I duly passed on to the dad.

But Tom wasn't satisfied.

The photo he sent was an older one, he said, and it showed the backhoe not with its bucket, but with a different tool — one the city isn't selling.

So on the rainiest day in almost 5 years, Tom went out to get a couple more photos of the backhoe, this time wearing its standard attire, so to speak. He texted the pictures to me, and I again forwarded them on to the father.

He thanked me profusely and wrote in an email that his boy was very excited by the photos.

I emphasized that I was merely the messenger, and that Tom deserved the credit.

I suspect he would deflect that credit, would suggest that he had done nothing special.

But I'd like to believe that helping to make a little boy smile is precisely the sort of thing for which the word special is meant.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.