

# Opinion

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## OUR VIEW

# Some state agencies failing to do audits

Two state agencies — Oregon's Housing and Community Services and the state's Higher Education Coordinating Commission — have year after year failed to perform internal audits.

Imagine you were in charge of a business to ensure Oregonians with low incomes get stable and affordable housing. Or imagine if it was a business to ensure students — especially those who are underserved — can go on to success in higher education.

Maybe the business generally does a good job. But year after year, it failed to perform a requirement under state law to determine if the business is doing the best it can to meet its objectives and spends taxpayer money wisely. Shouldn't the state do something about it?

The answer requires some nuance. First of all, there are ways around the requirement — it can be waived. And sometimes, it's not only the agency's fault.

Oregon Housing and Community Services, known as OHCS, is the state's agency to ensure Oregonians with low incomes get stable and affordable housing. Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission, or HECC, works to ensure students have paths to postsecondary success.

State government has many lines of defense to ensure programs work and money is spent carefully. There are the managers at the agency, the employees, reviews by state legislators and sometimes audits by the auditors in the Secretary of State's Office.

One additional state requirement for larger state agencies is for an internal audit function. Those are essentially people who work in an agency and are supposed to independently evaluate it and ensure it is functioning properly. Agencies can also contract out for the work.

State agencies that are big enough are supposed to do a risk assessment to identify problem areas and then perform at least one internal audit per calendar year. And, as we said, agencies can be granted waivers from the requirement. But repeatedly granting waivers is like not having a requirement.

The state puts out a report at the end of every year looking back to see how agencies did. The new report came out Monday. OHCS and HECC weren't the only agencies that did not perform the auditing functions. But they have repeatedly failed to do so. They both got waivers.

OHCS also did hire an external firm to do internal audit work in 2020 and hired an internal auditor. So, it is making progress.

HECC is a relatively new agency, formed in 2013, though it didn't come together until 2015. And the reason it hasn't gotten around to its internal audit functions? It asked for funding for the position in 2017 and 2019. Legislators didn't fund it until the 2019 session. The auditor is working with HECC's management to now live up to its auditing requirements.

Those explanations are somewhat encouraging. But if legislators continue to not fund positions or allow the requirement to be waived, the requirement can become meaningless and problems that could be caught may not be caught.

*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.*



# 2020: bad, but not the worst

By Ryan Young

Humans don't rule the world, it turns out. COVID-19 is too small to see, as President Donald Trump pointed out. It has still killed more than 300,000 Americans in less than a year. It also ended the longest economic boom in American history and threw millions of people out of work. Millions of people who kept their jobs had to adapt to working at home — while also making sure their remote-schooling children paid attention to their on-screen teachers. COVID-19 meant people were mostly unable to go to movies, concerts or sporting events in 2020. And yet, by historical standards, it was a good year.

COVID-19 is a novel disease. No human caught it before 2019. Scientists created effective vaccines in about a year. By comparison, smallpox has been around since at least ancient Egypt in the third century B.C. The earliest evidence of inoculation dates to 10th century China. That's more than a thousand years between smallpox's first appearance and its first effective treatment — for a disease with a 30% fatality rate. But inoculation was rarely practiced until the 18th century, so it didn't help very many people for its first 900 years or so.

When Abigail Adams had her children inoculated in 1776, it was still a scary, new technology for most people. It was an act of courage for her to set a positive example like that. And it took an additional two centuries for smallpox to be eradicated altogether, in 1977. Our generation's COVID timetable is unimaginably better than that with which our ancestors had to

deal. That does not mean COVID is not a serious disease with serious economic and social consequences. Yet, it does mean that 2020 was not the worst year ever. Not even close.

COVID has taken a huge toll on millions of lives. For people who didn't get sick, isolation was often the hardest part of 2020. Depression, suicide rates and addiction problems all worsened in 2020. Stress from falling behind on bills and rent could have lasting consequences for millions of people.

But we also have ways to stay in touch and give comfort to each other that previous generations never had. Telephones existed during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, but phone companies limited them to emergency use only, because the women operating manual switchboards in crowded offices kept getting sick. Radio, television and email did not exist. The Postal Service was even slower than it is today.

Today, isolation is still hard. But at least we have Zoom, Netflix, Facebook, text messages and operator-less cell-phones. Online food, grocery and retail delivery were all growing before the pandemic hit. Thankfully, some of that infrastructure was already in place coming into 2020, because we needed all we had and more.

Go back just a few generations, and the best you could do was the Sears catalog. Thanks to the removal of net neutrality regulations in 2017, an explosion of investment in networks generated enough new capacity to handle exploding new

bandwidth demand from widespread videoconferencing and streaming.

It is important to learn the right lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. If we do, we can ensure that 2020 will be the worst year any of us have to face in our lifetimes.

The most important lesson is that openness is important. Scientists need to be able to communicate across national borders without restrictions. Supply networks need to be as open and frictionless as possible, without trade barriers and nationalist chauvinism getting in the way. Regulatory agencies need to be more open to new innovations and approaches. The FDA's rapid COVID vaccine approval should be the norm, not the usual process that averages a decade of waiting and \$1.3 billion per drug.

For ordinary people and small businesses that need to adapt to quarantines on short notice, it is important for regulators to get rid of excessive permits and other requirements. If a regulation is not needed during a pandemic, it was probably never needed in the first place. Some heavy regulatory housekeeping is in order as we emerge from the pandemic.

This was a difficult year. The new year will have its own challenges. But previous generations had it far worse. Our job going forward is to make sure our pandemic experience is far worse than anything our grandchildren will have to endure.

*Ryan Young is a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.*

## Your views

### Proof lacking of Trump's claims for election fraud

Responding to Jim Carnahan's letter of Dec. 31, "Americans at least deserve to have a fair election." Wow! Where do I start? How about the Justice Department and Trump-appointed Bill Barr, "No evidence of fraud." The Department of Homeland Security ... "The most secure election in our history."

Mr. Carnahan seems like an intelligent and articulate gentleman, making it hard to understand why he'd embrace Trump-driven conspiracy theories regarding our election. Is it that President Joe Biden doesn't fit into his conservative politics? I feel your disappointment, Jim, but do you truly believe all the "debunked" disinformation? Fact-checking is pretty easy nowadays. Obviously you've gleaned your information from agenda-driven right wing news sources? You can't understand why all these lawsuits (many brought before Trump-appointed judges) have been dismissed? (SCOTUS refusing to even acknowledge one of them). Here's some documented reasons, Jim. Most lacked

any merit whatsoever, no credible evidence, frivolous, unreliable witnesses, without standing ... hearsay is not evidence. Many were dead on arrival at every level of our judicial system. There were no "compelling arguments" no proof that "dead people voted," that "more people voted than existed," no fraud period.

My favorite is the mysterious "trailer full of ballots hauled from New York to Pennsylvania." There are no records or proof because it didn't happen. And those "experts" with the "amazing information on the questionable accuracy of the voting machines?" They are crawling back into their holes after being threatened with legal action over their unsubstantiated, baseless claims. Trump knew he was a loser long before Election Day and began setting up his voter fraud scam, he knew it would be a huge money grab so of course he keeps the lie going. So sad to see so many of my fellow citizens fall for what is basically a con! 70% of Trump voters cannot accept reality. If only they could somehow just "magically" make votes disappear. That's not how democracy

works, you can't just make somebody president. Sorry. Lastly, would someone please list all the "great things" Donald has done for our country? I'm curious ...

**Mike Meyer**  
Baker City

### I wear a mask to protect myself — and those who don't

While standing in line to check out at D&B, I heard a man declare "no government is gonna make me wear a mask." I was about to respond when the woman in front of me gave a thumbs up and encouragement. It made me wonder what God might be thinking and I realized this was probably his response. "I gave them brains; why won't they use them?" I am a retired public health nurse and I wonder the same thing about those folks. Wearing a mask has nothing whatsoever to do with your rights. I am 77 years old and wear my mask to protect myself and those who don't believe in wearing one. Won't they do the same for me?

**Iva Mace**  
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.

**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.

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

**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 administration:** 541-523-6541.

Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ray Duman, police chief; Sean Lee, 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 School District:** 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260.