

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# State's sluggish vaccine strategy

Oregon has been more efficient at restricting businesses and denying students the best education possible during the COVID-19 pandemic than it has so far proved to be at inoculating residents with a vaccine that offers great potential to thwart the virus.

Given the state's stumbles over the past three weeks, it's reasonable to wonder whether Gov. Kate Brown and other state leaders actually believed the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines would be available in mid-December.

Oregon received its first doses on Dec. 14, but it didn't start vaccinating health care workers until Dec. 16. Only one other state waited longer to give its first shots.

The problem has never been a shortage of doses.

In early December, before the first shipment arrived in Oregon, state officials said they expected to receive 147,000 doses by the end of 2020.

But the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 226,700 doses had been delivered to Oregon as of Tuesday Jan. 5.

Yet as of that day, just 55,239 people in Oregon had been inoculated. Just three states have used a lower percentage of their vaccine supply, according to Bloomberg. In early December, Brown estimated the state would inoculate 100,000 Oregonians by the end of the year. The state barely reached half of that level.

Brown issued a written statement about the situation on Monday. It reads not like a mea culpa, but rather like something a teenager might say after being caught out after curfew with friends.

"Oregon, like most of the country, is not moving fast enough," Brown said.

Except Oregon isn't like "most of the country" when it comes to deploying its vaccine doses. Indeed, most of the country — 46 of the other 49 states — is doing better than Oregon.

Brown: "All states are grappling with the same logistical challenges ..."

No doubt that's true. But why, then, are most states outperforming Oregon?

South Dakota has administered more than 60% of its vaccine doses. Maine, Connecticut, Tennessee and North Dakota have used more than half of theirs.

Brown announced Monday that she had "directed the Oregon Health Authority to achieve the benchmark of 12,000 vaccinations administered in Oregon per day by the end of the next two weeks." Brown termed the campaign an "all-hands-on-deck effort."

That's a fine goal.

But why is the governor setting this goal on Jan. 4, three weeks after the first vaccine doses arrived and more than a month after it was obvious that federal regulators would be approving at least the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine?

This should have been an "all-hands-on-deck effort" even before the first doses arrived.

Distributing the COVID-19 vaccines is not solely a state issue, to be sure.

Hospitals and health departments are administering many of the doses. Some people who were offered the vaccine declined to take it. And the holiday season isn't the ideal period to undertake this task.

Yet as Brown herself said, none of these challenges is unique to Oregon.

The governor's call to action Monday, belated though it is, was welcome — and necessary. Nothing is more important than the speedy, efficient inoculation against COVID-19 in curbing the spread of the virus to the point that businesses can fully reopen and students can return to their classrooms.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## Your views

### Government is threatened by 2020 election fraud

Our government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" is in danger of perishing due to election fraud of 2020.

I am an American citizen, before all else, and believe in the Constitution, The Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence. The preamble to the Constitution states "We the people of the United States ... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Abraham Lincoln wrote "Government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from this earth."

Now our government is, indeed, in danger of "perishing." The right for "a

fair and free election" has been denied "we the people" in the 2020 federal election for president of the United States and other offices.

Given the above, I thought it was my responsibility to search out information on what is known about the election of 2020. I found a comprehensive summation, "The Navarro Report." In the summation of the findings, "The Navarro Report" states "the weight of evidence and patterns of irregularities are such that it is irresponsible for anyone — especially the mainstream media — to claim that there is "no evidence" of fraud or irregularities." Further, it states that "the ballots in question because of identified election irregularities are more than sufficient to swing the

outcome in favor of President Trump should even a relatively small portion of these ballots to be ruled illegal."

Given the failure of the government, both state and federal, it is necessary for us to communicate to our congressmen to do their due diligence and address the wrong perpetrated on the American people. If voter fraud isn't addressed now "this nation runs the real risk of never being able to have a fair presidential election" is noted by "The Navarro Report" and confirms my view of this.

If "we the People" don't exhort our government representatives to address this, who will?

Karen Cloudf  
Baker City

# Making schools a top priority

By Danny Westneat

The raging debate about whether to reopen schools during the coronavirus pandemic seems destined to come to an end in the next few months.

Not because they finally figured out the right path, based on infectious disease controls or societal values. But because of the vaccine.

I don't blame anyone for not solving this one. Whether to send kids and teachers back into classrooms, or keep doing Zoom school, was 2020's impossible issue.

The growing damage to some kids of keeping schools closed is painfully clear. At the same time, more than 300 school employees around the country have died from COVID-19 (what complicates this tragic stat is that it isn't known for many whether they caught the virus at school, because testing and contact tracing has been so spotty).

Scientists have since learned more about how the coronavirus spreads, and concluded in a study last week that some schools probably could have been reopened faster. Especially had we deployed more testing, to better track outbreaks and understand the rates of disease spread in surrounding communities.

Looking back, though, we tended to devote those testing resources to things like getting college and pro football back up and running.

The intractability of all this was highlighted for me in October, when a doctor forwarded an open letter by five pediatric physicians, arguing that schools for younger kids should reopen. They made a good case. But then I asked the doctor, based on his own experience with infectious disease controls in local hospitals, whether he himself would be willing to stand in a classroom with dozens of kids rotating

through for six or eight hours each day.

His answer: "For the record, no way in hell would I do that ... My sense is that our education system is so broken and under-resourced that many cannot even fathom what it would really take to do this safely ... there are lots of things that can make this safe, if only we choose to do them."

Story of the pandemic right there. Lots we could have, should have done, but didn't.

The hope now is that this "impossible issue" could — repeat could — be made somewhat moot by the vaccine.

There are only 3 million K-12 public school teachers in America. If we made it a priority, we could have National Teacher Vaccination Day, offering them all the shot in one day. Then go back to in-person school (after the waiting periods for the vaccine to take effect). There would still have to be PPE and other disease controls, and many parents may still choose not to send their kids, but at least the decision-tree logjam would be shaken up.

I know, hoping technology will fix a problem is the easy way out. But with vaccination here, I'd argue we should be more focused now on the future anyway — on how students are going to recover from a degraded year of schooling.

So here's a big idea for 2021: Why not use the federal COVID relief money, which clocks in at \$824 million for K-12 schools for Washington state, for example, on a jobs program in which we hire older students to do one-on-one tutoring in schools?

Two education professors at Brown University just proposed this on a national scale. They argue the best way to tackle COVID-19 learning loss would be to hire 300,000 to several million part-time tutors nationwide.

"Tutoring is among the most effective education interventions ever to be subjected to rigorous evaluation," they write. "Our blueprint is that ... high school students would tutor in elementary schools, college students in middle schools, and full-time 2- and 4-year college graduates in high schools via AmeriCorps."

"Returning schools to the way they were when they closed last spring will not heal the damage students have sustained," echoes Robert Slavin, an education research director at Johns Hopkins University, who has also proposed what he dubs a "tutoring Marshall Plan."

This is the best COVID recovery idea I've heard yet, by far. For starters, one-on-one tutoring just works. It isn't that costly — one of the proposals above estimates around \$1,000 per year per kid. That means tutoring, say, half the K-12 kids in Washington state, could cost on the order of \$550 million — only about 2% of what the state spends on schools annually (and less than the \$824 million the state was just granted in schools COVID relief).

It could help jump-start the pandemic-frozen job prospects of high school seniors and college kids. More crucially, it could reintroduce Zoom-quarantined little kids, many of them poor and falling behind, to one-on-one academic attention from another human.

That last part is priceless. Social distancing can stem the spread of a disease. But the year of our pandemic has shown how brutal isolation can be for public education. Maybe the key to a more promising 2021 involves doing the exact opposite.

Danny Westneat is a columnist for  
The Seattle Times.

### Letters to the editor

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**Mail:** To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814  
**Email:** news@bakercityherald.com