

EDITORIAL

Vaccine progress continues

Oregon’s sluggish effort to administer the COVID-19 vaccine doses it has received hit a snag on Friday. The governor said on Tuesday, Jan. 12, that starting Jan. 23, people 65 and older, along with teachers and other school employees, would be priority groups for inoculation. But on Friday the governor, blaming “deception” by the Trump administration regarding a federal vaccine reserve that apparently doesn’t exist, said vaccinations for teachers would start Jan. 25, and starting Feb. 8, people 80 and older would be the priority. It wasn’t clear, as of press time Friday afternoon, how quickly the state expected to use the 200,000 or so doses of vaccine that as of that day it had failed to administer.

The state’s focus for inoculations thus far, understandably, has been on doctors, nurses and other health care workers, and residents and staff of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Naturally, though, the majority of Oregonians who aren’t in one of those groups have wondered what the next phase of this vital vaccination effort will look like, and when it will begin.

Making it a priority to protect older Oregonians didn’t require any detailed analysis. According to statistics from the Oregon Health Authority, 17% of the Oregonians infected with the virus are 60 or older. Yet that group accounts for almost 91% of the state’s COVID-19-related deaths.

The state’s, and Baker County’s, experience with COVID-19 vaccinations contains some disappointing results. Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, told the Herald this week that just about half of the Baker County residents who have been offered a vaccination have taken it. This is perplexing given that health care professionals would presumably understand that COVID-19 vaccines, though they were developed much more quickly than previous vaccines, still had to comply with federal standards.

Staten said she expects the acceptance rate will increase when the vaccine is offered to people 65 and older. It must do so, if we’re to make the best use of the miraculous medical advancement that COVID-19 vaccines are.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Opportunity for conservatives

By Lee Edwards

We often hear calls for national unity when presidents are inaugurated. And we’re sure to hear them again, despite the fact that we are still divided, red and blue, liberal and conservative, coastal city and heartland town.

But we should not despair. We’ve been divided since the birth of the Republic, when the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, the Hamiltonians and the Jeffersonians, fiercely debated our form of government. In the end, guided by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, we came together.

Our divided nation fought a terrible civil war, pitting brother against brother. But in the end, we came together so that government of the people, by the people and for the people would not perish. For the next eight decades, we accepted a limited role for government until a Great Depression — and a great war — persuaded us to accept a larger role.

Five decades on, we debated and then decided to take a giant step toward limiting our government under the Reagan administration. Let us not forget the era when we restored Americans’ confidence in themselves and the future, engineered a period of unparalleled economic prosperity and won the Cold War without firing a shot.

For the last 30 years, we have debated and divided over the question of what we want from our government. Conservatives, led by groups such as The Heritage Foundation, made the case that that government is best which governs the least, and we found a receptive audience for our policy and personnel recommendations in presidential administrations.

In just the past four years, conservatives have achieved great things: the confirmation of three justices to the Supreme Court, a significant tax cut (for all Americans — not just the wealthy), unprecedented peace deals in the Middle East, the restoration of our military and a deregulatory policy that precipitated historic economic growth.

Now, despite the disappointing outcome of the 2020 election, is no time for conservatives to quit or walk away. We have been here before, after Robert Taft’s failure to win the Republican presidential nomination in 1952, Barry Goldwater’s landslide defeat in 1964, Ronald Reagan’s failure to capture the GOP’s presidential nomination in 1976. Each time, like the fabled phoenix, we rose from the ashes of defeat and, committed to the priceless principle of ordered liberty, brought about Reagan’s landslide victory in 1980 and Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America in 1994.

Now, in the wake of a fiercely fought election and a disappointing end, conservatives have a special role and responsibility — to oppose a progressive agenda that promises more government programs and regulations, more taxes and spending, that would take us down the road to socialism, the stated goal of the winning party’s platform.

At this time, it is up to conservatives to seize the opportunity to preserve and protect the American idea of limited constitutional government, free enterprise, individual freedom and responsibility, traditional American values based on our Judeo-Christian heritage and a strong national defense that will guarantee peace.

These ideas have served our nation and the American people well for 244 years. Now is the time for conservatives to have faith and to work all the harder to articulate a vision based on these ideas and to help bring our divided nation together.

Can we do it? Of course, we can. After all, we are Americans.

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A celebration of unnecessary horsepower

I was feeling melancholy the other day until I learned that I could buy a brand new, factory-warranted pickup truck that makes 702 horsepower and can go from a standstill to 60 mph faster than most Corvettes.

In 3.7 seconds, to be precise.

This is a level of acceleration that can make you regret choosing a greasy hamburger, with a double dollop of special sauce, for lunch.

In reality I can’t myself buy this particular pickup.

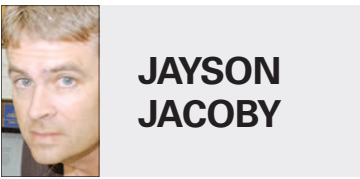
The sticker price of the 2021 Ram 1500 TRX that Car and Driver magazine tested recently is \$89,565.

This is a figure I associate with 30-year mortgages rather than 5-year auto loans.

But customers with financial resources more robust than my own indeed can stroll into a dealership and procure a four-wheel drive pickup that’s powerful enough to temporarily alter the Earth’s rotation if you tap its full complement of torque.

It’s a vehicle capable of sending seismometer needles squiggling when it launches all four wheels airborne and slams its curb weight of 6,866 pounds onto the planet’s crust, the sort of collision usually associated with meteor strikes.

The truck’s mass, by the way, is about twice that of a Toyota Camry, Honda Accord or any number of other conventional vehicles that



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the Ram could likely drive over with only the slightest quiver from its coil springs.

Conventional vehicles, which are thick on the land these days (and especially in the left lane on the freeway, where they are piloted by people who treat the speed limit as the 11th Commandment), are the preferred conveyances of responsible people.

They are the products of skilled engineers who have honed a technology that, though it’s nearly a century and a half old, continues to advance in perceptible ways.

Modern passenger cars have never been safer. They incorporate more computing power than an Apollo capsule, a passel of sensors that can rescue a hamfisted (or hamfooted) driver from all sorts of predicaments that even a couple decades ago would have ended with the summoning of an ambulance and a wrecker. And if the driver manages to outleap even this broad safety net, the car’s complement of air bags, upon the inevitable encounter with a solid object, will cushion vulnerable sections of his anatomy.

Today’s cars also reflect society’s

concerns about the environment. Most are fitted with diminutive engines with four cute little pistons that require relatively little gasoline to propel them. Some swap the engine for an electric motor and eschew fossil fuels altogether (except, of course, for all the gas and diesel and coal and natural gas consumed to produce the steel and aluminum and plastic parts, and in many places, to generate the electricity that fills the car’s batteries. But let’s not quibble about the physics of propulsion.)

The Ram 1500 TRX is the antithesis to these sterile, anonymous transportation pods.

The Ram is as responsible as a teenage boy whose parents are gone for the weekend, as ecologically sensitive as a bulldozer.

The Ram’s engine has eight full-size cylinders and it burns gasoline to keep the pistons whirring in these gaping tunnels.

A lot of gasoline.

Its tank holds 33 gallons — an Accord gets by with 14.8 — but even that prodigious volume won’t get you all that far.

Car and Driver averaged 9 miles per gallon during a 570-mile trip that included time plowing through — and launching from — sand dunes. In the dunes the Ram’s fuel economy wasn’t very, well, economic, at 4 mpg.

Thank God for fracking.

In an era when our lives are so

often circumscribed, when previously innocent pleasures, such as mashing the accelerator pedal just to hear a pushrod V-8 bellow through fist-wide exhaust pipes, are seen by many as veritable crimes against nature, I take great solace in the existence of the Ram 1500 TRX.

It’s a tire-melting, supercharged testament to freedom, a dismissive wave of the hand (or possibly another gesture) to the killjoys who disdain the internal combustion engine as obsolete and offensive.

(Actually it’s not terribly easy to melt the Ram’s 35-inch-tall tires, as the truck is all-time four-wheel drive and thus has so much traction that even its prodigious torque struggles to spin all four tires simultaneously while the truck is stationary. It’s the one feature the Car and Driver staff, which continues to celebrate the smoky rear-wheel drive burnout, lamented.)

The Ram, as uncouth as it might seem, a Neanderthal among the fleet of svelte, largely silent machines that dominate the automotive landscape, presents no threat to the current conformity.

Although Chrysler announced this summer that it won’t limit production of the 1500 TRX, as often is the case with niche vehicles, this truck will never consume any but the tiniest slice of the huge pie that represents pickup truck sales.

The price alone ensures this.

And in any case most buyers, no matter the monthly payment, are far more concerned with Bluetooth connectivity than with how many inches of suspension travel their truck has.

But even though I’ll almost certainly never own such a truck, I’m glad it exists.

I’m no Luddite, mind you.

I appreciate the efficiency of modern cars, and I endorse the goal of cutting carbon emissions as we go about our lives, and travels.

But I also revel in America’s unique relationship with the automobile, and in particular our affinity for the freedoms it affords the individual.

Any car can get us to the grocery store or the vacation spot, of course. Rigs like the Ram 1500 TRX can handle those banal tasks, too. But they can also claw through swamps and bash their way across boulder fields and generally dominate obstacles that lesser vehicles couldn’t get close enough to so as to activate their lane-departure warning buzzer.

Most of us neither need this sort of capability nor, likely, do we even want it.

But what we need has never defined America’s feelings about motor vehicles.

I hope it never does.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.