

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Help for our ailing theaters

To say it's been a bad 12 months for movie theater owners is an understatement akin to noting that it's been a good year for the makers of disposable face masks.

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have closed or greatly limited attendance at theaters.

And even if there were no limits on audiences, film companies have postponed most new releases, so one of the main attractions of the experience doesn't exist.

Restaurants have suffered immensely, too — but at least they have food to serve.

Baker County's only moviehouse, the historic Eltrym Theater in Baker City, reopened in early March after being closed for most of the previous year, but with occupancy limits.

A bill introduced recently in the Oregon Legislature would help these ailing businesses, and lawmakers should make it a priority for passage.

House Bill 3376, introduced March 16 by Rep. Rob Nosse, a Democrat from Portland, would give \$8.7 million to the Oregon Business Development Department to disburse grants to indoor movie theaters of up to \$50,000 per business, plus \$10,000 for each screen for theaters with more than two screens.

(The Eltrym has three screens.)

Although as introduced the bill would make eligible all theaters, including large national chains such as Cinemark and Regal, Nosse said his bill could be amended to "just focus on theaters that are small and primarily locally owned."

Regardless of the details, the \$8.7 million price tag is a pittance compared with the \$2.6 billion Oregon will receive through the American Rescue Plan Act, the COVID-19 relief package President Joe Biden signed earlier this month.

Terry McQuisten, who with her husband, Dan, owns the Eltrym, submitted written comments in support of House Bill 3376.

Terry McQuisten writes eloquently of the "gaping debt wound" her business has sustained, and the unique nature of theaters, which, "unlike a lot of businesses, have really had no viable option to adapt to the pandemic and continue operating."

McQuisten is optimistic, but also realistic.

"We are determined to survive this pandemic," she wrote to the Legislature. "It has been a year, though, and we are now beginning to make payments on (loans). In effect, we've taken out loans to pay loans. All the while, we've been doing our best to adapt to provide a safe environment for our guests by investing in air scrubbers for our HVAC and devoting more staff time to cleaning."

McQuisten writes that theaters play a role in "keeping communities livable, vibrant and connected."

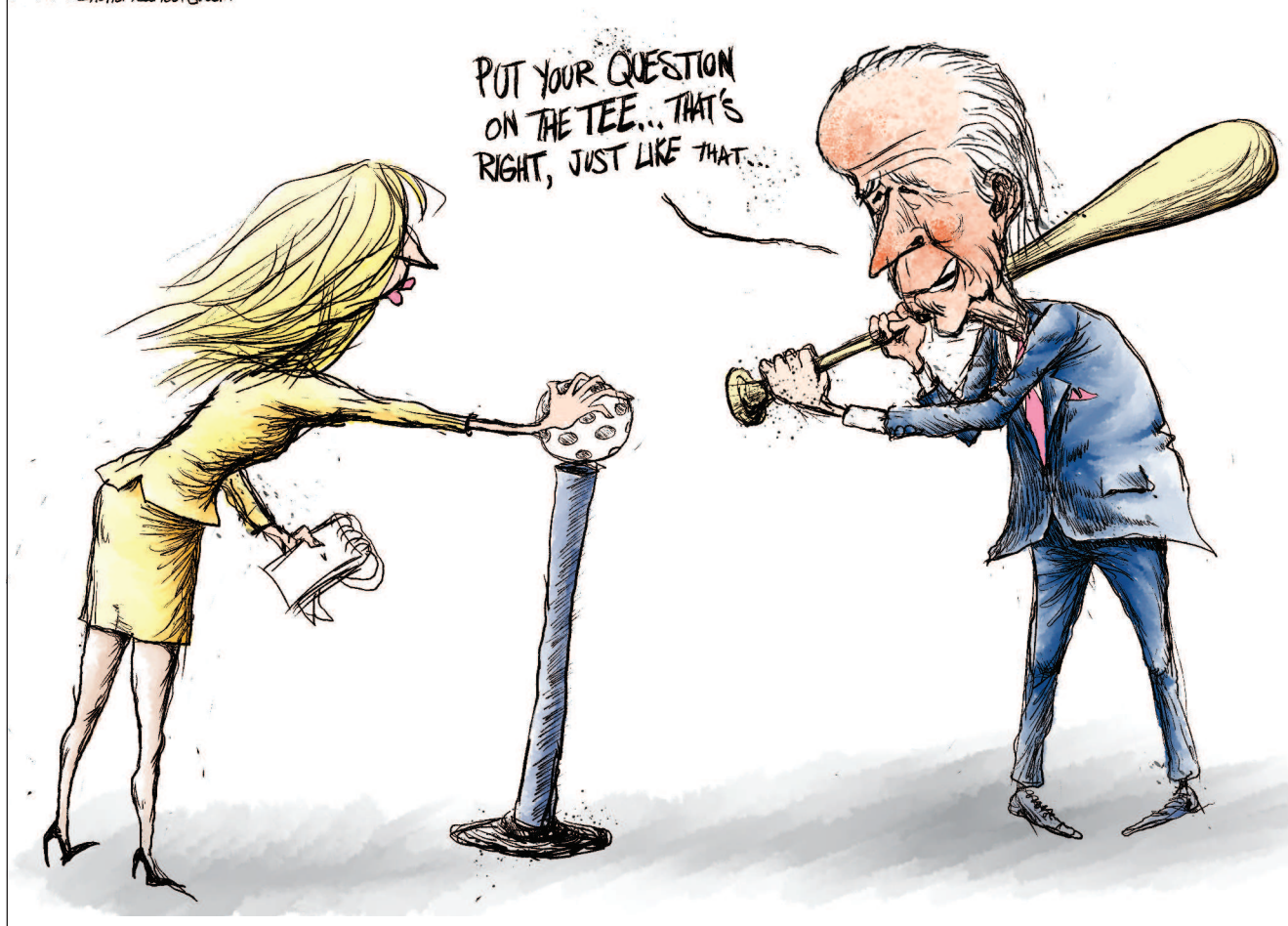
That's especially true in rural areas such as Baker County, where the Eltrym's is the only bright marquee still shining.

Losing another business, and the jobs it provides, would be a blow to Baker City and Baker County.

But the Eltrym is also an entertainment and cultural fixture, and the void its absence would create quite likely would not be filled.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Photo: Mike Stetten/Caricatures.com



# Overcoming vaccine hesitancy

By Doug Badger and Edmund F. Haislmaier

One-third of Republican respondents told pollsters earlier this month that they don't plan to get COVID-19 shots. Another 20% said they haven't yet made up their minds.

While public health officials have been worried about vaccine skepticism among minorities, the poll's responses diverged much more by political affiliation than by race.

To understand why many politically moderate to conservative Americans seem disinclined to get vaccinated, GOP pollster Frank Luntz recently convened a focus group of "vaccine-hesitant Trump voters." What he heard, as reported by The Washington Post, was illuminating.

By the end of the session, all the participants said they were now more likely to get immunized.

One participant's comment crystallized the key lesson from the two-hour exercise: "We want to be educated, not indoctrinated."

What changed their minds had nothing to do with politics. Participants said that an appeal from former President Donald Trump wouldn't persuade them to get a shot. Nor did messages they viewed from various congressional Republicans. A pro-vaccine public service announcement produced by Fox News fell flat. So did a PSA featuring former Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter.

Participants found the voice of government authority similarly unpersuasive. A pharmacist who formerly worked at Merck, a company helping to produce vaccines, said: "I know their vaccines are good products. I trust them. What I don't trust is the government telling me what I need to do when they haven't led us down the right road."

So what made these Trump supporters shift their views on vaccines?

Science — offered straight-up and with a dash of humility.

The unlikely change agent was Dr. Tom Frieden, who headed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the Obama administration. Frieden appealed to facts, not his credentials. He noted that the theory behind the vaccine was backed by 20 years of research, that tens of thousands of people had participated in well-controlled clinical trials, and that the overwhelming share of doctors have opted for the shots.

He leavened those facts with an acknowledgment of uncertainty. He conceded that the vaccine's potential long-term risks were unknown. He pointed out that the virus's long-term effects were also uncertain.

"He's just honest with us and telling us nothing is 100% here, people," one participant noted.

Contrast that with what we've heard from the CDC, which has too often professed to know things with certainty, only to be later proven wrong.

Until March 19, for example, CDC recommended that students be kept 6 feet apart in classrooms. The agency's "science brief" on the subject says that its "recommendation for 6 feet of physical distancing is based on historical studies of other contagious diseases."

But the CDC brief does not cite a single classroom study supporting the 6-foot separation. The only classroom-based study it cites for that standard examined a 1982 meningitis outbreak in an elementary school. According to CDC, that study found that the "carriage rate was higher for students in a classroom with chairs spaced less than 40 inches (3.33 feet) apart" — not 6 feet.

The findings of that study, and a long list of others, are consistent with recommendations from the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics that schoolchildren maintain a distance of 1

meter (3.28 feet).

CDC has nevertheless complicated school reopenings by recommending — until quite recently — that schools place desks at least 6 feet apart.

As Dr. Ashish Jha, Dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, told The New York Times, "Six feet doesn't protect teachers, but it does keep kids out of school."

Although millions may uncritically accept CDC's recommendations, it's no wonder that millions more do not. It's not that they are "anti-science," it's that they don't just blindly accept whatever they're being told by "experts" and government officials. They want to base decisions about their health on reliable information honestly presented, understanding that every option comes with a degree of uncertainty.

In that sense, vaccine hesitancy among Republicans doesn't look all that different from vaccine hesitancy among minorities.

"I've been thinking the messaging was going to be very different for communities of color, for Democrats, for Republicans," Natalie Davis, a co-founder of the left-leaning United States of Care, told The Washington Post. "But it feels like it comes down to the basics that are shared across populations. People want full, accurate information so they can decide if this is the right thing for them and their loved ones."

It's a sobering message for many in the expert class, whose hectoring on everything from COVID-19 to climate change rests on asserting their authority and demanding acquiescence. It turns out, people are more receptive to education than indoctrination.

Doug Badger is a Visiting Fellow at The Heritage Foundation. Edmund F. Haislmaier, an expert in health care policy and markets, is Heritage's Preston Wells Senior Research Fellow.

## Letters to the editor

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- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr.

**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 County departments:** 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district clerk; Kerry 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 Thursday 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.