

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Easing restrictions

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has in effect acknowledged that the state's system for setting COVID-19 risk levels in the 36 counties, and the associated state-imposed restrictions on businesses and activities, was too reactionary.

Baker County has benefitted from the governor's reconsideration.

Under the system in place from December through mid-March, the county, based on the tripling of new cases during the two-week measuring period that ended April 3, would have moved from the lowest of the four risk levels to the highest ("extreme" in the state's parlance) starting April 9.

But in March Brown announced that counties, in certain situations, would not be subject to more stringent restrictions immediately after recording a jump in cases over two weeks.

As a result of the change, Baker County, which dropped to the lowest risk level on March 26, will remain at that level through at least April 22 despite posting 79 new cases for the two-week period ending April 3 (compared with 24 in the previous period). Under the old system, any more than 59 cases during that period would have pushed Baker County into extreme risk.

Now, the county's risk level, starting April 23, will be based on case counts, and test positivity rates, for the period April 4-17, what the state deems the "caution period."

The difference in effects between the old and the current state approach is considerable.

If Baker County returned to the extreme risk level — it dropped from that level on Feb. 5 — the effects on restaurants and bars, theaters and other businesses would be dramatic.

Today, with the county at the lowest risk, restaurants and bars can have indoor dining up to 50% of their capacity. In counties at extreme risk, by contrast, indoor dining is prohibited.

The risk level system, with its two-week periods, creates uncertainty that is grossly unfair to business owners as they try to plan their operations. A restaurant owner, for instance, faces the prospect of being stuck with freezers full of food, and cooks and servers scheduled to work, only to be banned from welcoming diners.

The system is inherently flawed because it relies solely on case counts and positivity rates, without considering the biggest sources of COVID-19 infections. Throughout the pandemic, Oregon has subjected restaurants and bars to some of the state's more stringent restrictions, despite a shortage of evidence that indoor dining is a significant vector for the virus.

The new two-week caution period, though an improvement, fails to address that gap between cause and effect.

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett, in an email to the Herald on Tuesday, April 6, wrote that the county's recent surge in cases has "not shown a direct correlation to restaurants or bars ..." Bennett contends that restrictions intended to curb the spread of COVID-19 should not, therefore, focus on those businesses.

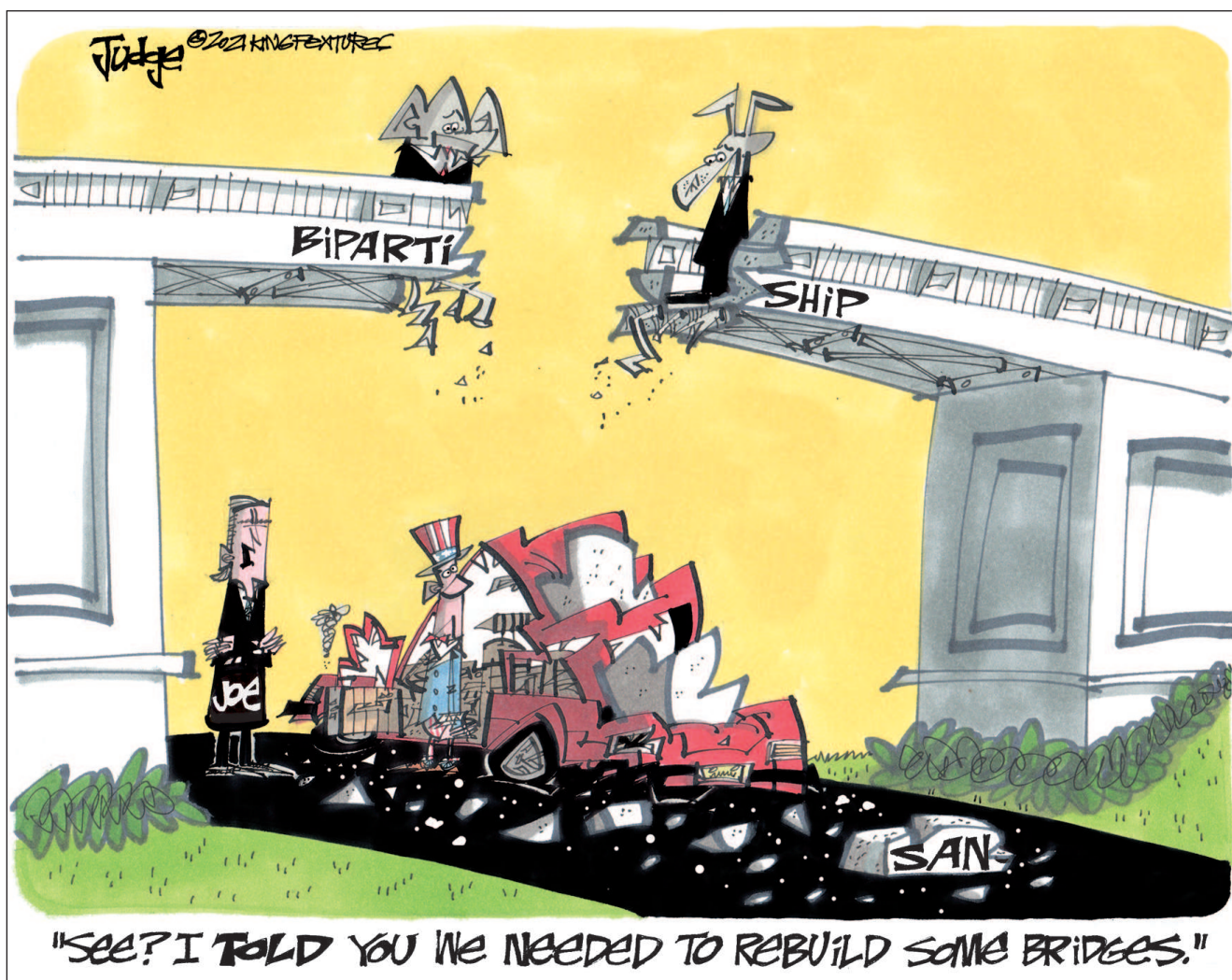
Bennett is right.

Also on Tuesday, Brown announced another change to the risk level system, adding new statewide thresholds that must be met for any county to move to the extreme category. No county will move to, or stay in, that category if fewer than 300 people — total, for the entire state — who have tested positive for COVID-19 are in a hospital. As of Tuesday, that statewide number was 163.

This is another positive change, acknowledging that one statistic — new case totals — doesn't necessarily reflect how the virus is affecting the medical system.

But the governor needs to do more to address the ongoing inequities in the restrictions she has imposed, including those that do little if anything to limit the spread of the virus but cause significant harm to businesses that have been struggling under the yoke of those restrictions for more than a year.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Welfare system widens voter base for Democrats

Let us drop the term "racist" as it has become obvious that the word is only used by the simple-minded to try for special privilege and recognition of a quality of their birth, not of their value as a functional human being. Looking back to the 1960s, when all people of good conscience deplored the then practice of racial discrimination, we dealt with the inhumanity and freed our country of this vestige of the Democrat South. After that, things were working well until Lyndon Baines Johnson, a disgusting person, introduced the program which gave free money to welfare people under terms that removed the father from the home. For the lazy and promiscuous, it became a way of life passed down through the generations. The Democrats were happy with the outcome as it provided a reliable voter base they depend upon, and do to this day. How about this — "if you are on public assistance you cannot vote in any election held in a year where you receive public money for more than six months."

Rick Rienks
Baker City

Concerned about America's status as a free nation

I have a concern about our current administration and its willingness to kill thousands of legal citizens of this country by abortion and then opening our southern border to allow thousands of illegal immigrants to come in and make citizens of them. In a government of the people it seems to me the admin-

istration is overstepping its authority here.

I know pro-abortionists claim a fetus isn't a live person until it is born, but just think of it this way. Every pregnant woman from the days of Adam and Eve has never given birth to anything other than another human being, so if killing a fetus isn't killing another human being, what is it? When a baby is stillborn, doctors say it died in the womb. Doesn't that mean there was life in the womb, or it couldn't have died?

I have also heard that some abortion advocates want to extend abortion rights even beyond birth. If this is a fact and the way our laws are getting so lax on criminals, even murderers, why not do away with the term murder and replace it with the term "delayed after birth abortion?"

Since abortion clinics were considered essential during the pandemic, I'm guessing that statistics would show that in 2020 this nation killed as many human beings through abortion as were killed by COVID-19.

Another concern to me is the term "Black Lives Matter." The term seems to indicate that blacks are the only people who have ever been persecuted and are still being persecuted. I'm sure this refers to the time of slavery in this country and to the present time, but this is just a small segment of history compared to the history of the world.

Now let's take a look at another segment of mankind in history. If you look in the Bible you will find that Israel, the Jewish nation, has been enslaved and persecuted almost from the beginning of time. One of the latest examples

was Hitler trying to exterminate the Jews during the Second World War.

Throughout the world's history many nations or empires have risen to power, normally by conquering or enslaving other nations. Eventually the same thing happened to them and they also disappear. So far the only nation in history to disappear through conquest and slavery and then reappear as a nation is Israel. After all the Jews have gone through and finally finding equality as a nation again, they are still facing the fact that many nations and some other segments of the world population still want the Jews eliminated from the world.

Why the difference in attitude toward the two groups mentioned here? Shouldn't we assume that Jewish lives matter too?

Another concern about the current administration is its abuse of our Constitution. Based on our Constitution the presumption is that our government is of the people, by the people and for the people. This indicates that the elected officials work for the people. The current administration apparently has a different interpretation of the Constitution. To them it reads: "Government over the people, by the elected, for the elected."

This indicates the people are subject to them.

Until we the people stand up for our rights, we are allowing the elected officials to form a ruling class for themselves and we are no longer a free nation.

Dick Culley
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Sharing the vaccine with the world

Editorial from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

As more Americans roll up their sleeves for a potentially life-saving vaccination, we are called by moral imperative and social justice concern to reflect on the reality that countries without the Western world's economic capital are being left behind.

A New York Times story tells the grim tale: Residents of wealthy and middle-income countries have received about 90% of the nearly 400 million vaccines that have been delivered. Poor countries could wait for years to see their citizens vaccinated.

There is a choice to be made, and the U.S. has outsize power in the deliberation. A patent is pending on a 5-year-old invention that is at the center of several COVID-19 vaccines, and the government will control the patent. It could be used to pressure drug companies into producing the vaccines and expanding access to countries in need.

America must respond to this crisis. The unparalleled success in developing the vaccines that now are being distributed came partly at the incentive of massive public funding from the U.S., Britain and the European Union

in the form of public-private partnership with drug companies.

This success, hailed as a monumental triumph of science and medicine, will not deserve our national pride if we do not share the success with those who are less fortunate.

Patent-sharing is a start. Companies should be compelled to publish their vaccine formulas then follow up with guidance as to production.

The World Health Organization is pleading for help. It created a technology pool in 2020 to help companies share their expertise across borders. The system is in place. Not one vaccine company has chosen to participate.

Manufacturers in India and Canada have said they could produce the vaccine if they could achieve a patent licensing agreement. This is where the U.S. could help. Usually, drug companies control nearly all of the intellectual property associated with the production of drugs. But, the pending patent deals with the manipulation of a certain coronavirus protein, a manipulation that was discovered in 2016 at a lab at the National Institutes of Health. It was shared with

Moderna, and government-run trials commenced. The Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer vaccines also rely on the 2016 discovery.

President Joe Biden has promised to help an Indian company produce about 1 billion doses by the end of 2022, and his administration has donated doses to Mexico and Canada. The promise is paired with another: that Americans will be cared for first.

Being at the front of the line is a comforting place to be. But we are called to turn in our comfortable spots and look at who waits behind.

If we are not to be moved by compassion and conscience, then perhaps we should reflect on competition and America's standing as a world leader: Russia and China have stepped up to say they will fill the vaccine void.

Americans should reach out to their federal leaders and ask that vaccines be treated as "global public goods." The U.S. should usher to approval a proposal at the World Trade Organization to waive intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines and treatment. Medical innovation is a human accomplishment that must be shared, for the good of humanity. All of humanity.