

OUR VIEWS

Reform
state
forest
institute

It wasn't state officials. It wasn't our elected governor, nor our elected state representatives.

It was news organizations — Oregon Public Broadcasting, the Oregonian, and ProPublica — who caught a part of state government doing what it should not.

The Oregon Forest Resources Institute was acting as a de facto public relations arm of the forest industry, lobbying and outright suppressing scientific information that challenged industry practices.

State government has now caught up. Sort of. Gov. Kate Brown ordered an audit. The audit came out earlier this month. It reaffirms and adds to what the news organizations found:

OFRI's board is made up mostly of industry representatives. That's actually by state law.

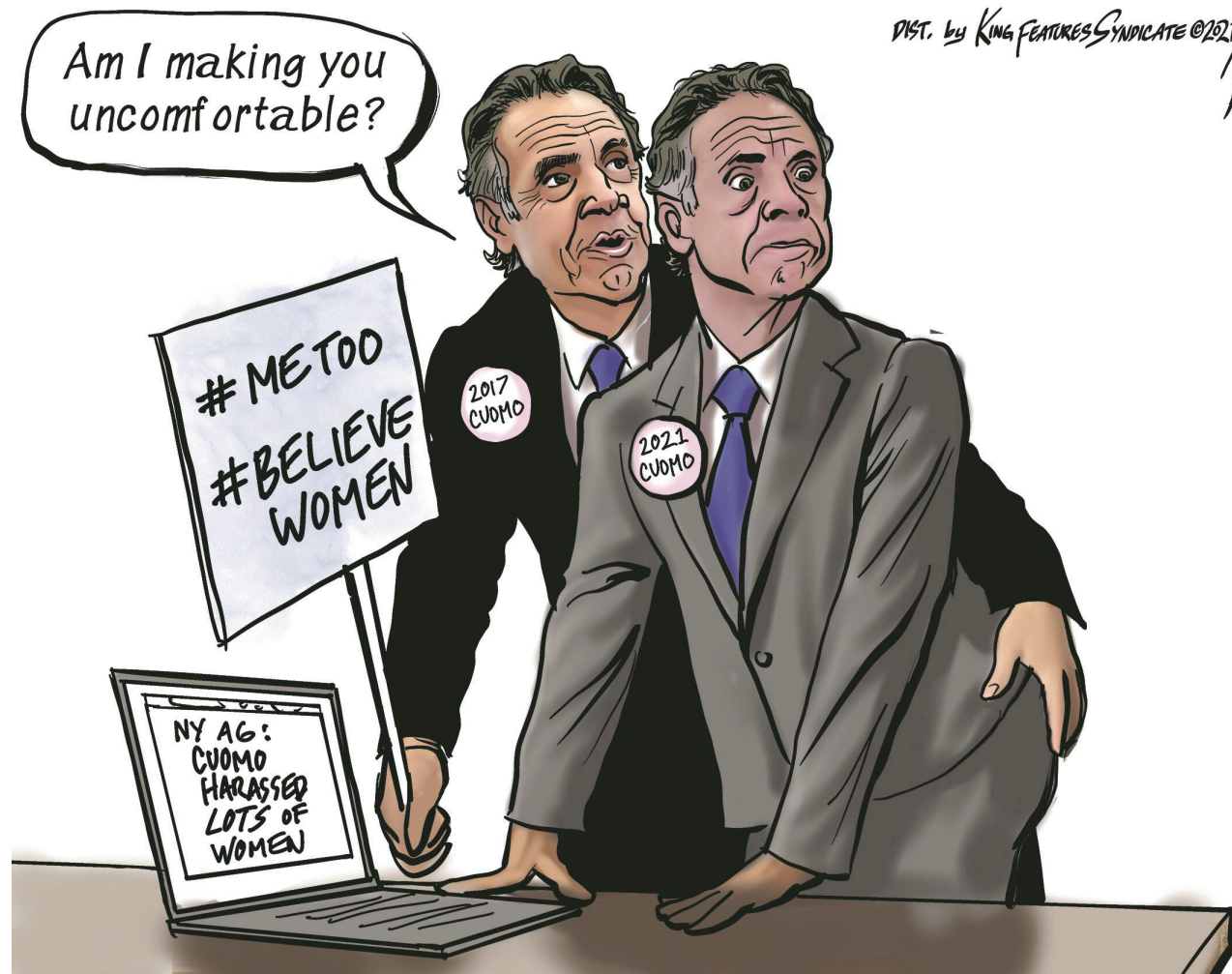
The organization "presents itself as objective, but at times oversimplifies complex forestry topics to the point of being misleading," the audit said.

And OFRI's statutes prohibit it from expending funds to influence or attempt to influence legislation. But it arguably has. For instance, it has argued before the Legislature for more funding. And it scheduled tours targeted to get candidate and legislator attention.

The audit recommended that the state's statute covering the OFRI be rewritten to clarify its role. It recommended including more nonindustry representatives on its board. It recommended more oversight and that the state clarify what OFRI can do to influence legislation.

Oregon should have a state entity devoted to explaining complex forestry topics to the public. But the issues are fiercely debated. And a state entity must do its utmost to advance objective understanding, not biased understanding. OFRI has failed in the past. Legislators should ensure these changes are made.

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.



Party spreads COVID, despite vaccine

By Allan Massie

I was sitting on an examination table at an urgent care clinic in Timonium, giving my history to a physician's assistant. An hour later, she would call me to confirm that I was positive for COVID-19.

Given the way that I felt, it was what I expected. But it wasn't supposed to happen: I've been fully vaccinated for months.

Five days earlier, I had gone to a house party in Montgomery County. There were 15 adults there, all of us fully vaccinated. The next day, our host started to feel sick. The day after that, she tested positive for COVID-19. She let all of us know right away. I wasn't too worried. It was bad luck for my friend, but surely she wasn't that contagious. Surely all of us were immune. I'd been sitting across the room from her. I figured I'd stay home and isolate from my family for a few days, and that would be that. And even that seemed like overkill.

The official Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guideline stated that, since I was fully vaccinated, I didn't need to do anything different unless I started developing symptoms. I'm an epidemiologist at a major medical research university, which has a dedicated COVID exposure hotline for staff. I called it, and workers said I didn't need to do anything.

Then, I started to hear that a few other people who had been at the party were getting sick. Then a few more. At this point, 11 of the 15 have tested positive for COVID.

Fortunately, none of us seem to be seriously ill. When fully vaccinated people ex-

perience so-called "breakthrough" infection, they tend not to progress to serious disease requiring hospitalization, and I expect that will be the case for us. But I can tell you that even a "mild" case of COVID-19 is pretty miserable. I've had fever, chills and muscle aches, and I've been weak enough that I can barely get out of bed. I don't wish this on anybody.

Our research group at work has shown that the COVID vaccine isn't always fully effective in transplant recipients. I'm proud of the work we've done. But once I got the vaccine, I figured the COVID battle was over for me. Out of an abundance of caution I took an antibody test shortly after my second vaccine dose. It was off the charts.

As much as I hate me and my fully vaccinated friends being sick, I've been thinking about what our little outbreak means for the rest of us. Here's what I've concluded:

State and local health departments, and the CDC, need to do a better job collecting and reporting data on breakthrough infections. The CDC announced in May that it was only going to collect data on breakthrough infections that led to hospitalization or death, which are fortunately rare. But that means that outbreaks like ours will fly under the radar. Any of us could infect others, apparently including other vaccinated people. It's not clear if our group got sick because of a particularly virulent variant, because the vaccine is wearing off or for some other reason. Without good

data, we'll never know.

Fully vaccinated people exposed to COVID need to isolate at home and get tested. I thought I might be overreacting by leaving work in the middle of the day and immediately moving to our basement at home. Now I'm glad I did.

Governments and businesses should consider bringing back masking requirements, even for vaccinated people. We're still at risk of getting sick, and we're still at risk of infecting others. The CDC recently recommended masks for vaccinated people in areas with over 50 new infections per 100,000 people per week. In the seven days before my exposure, Montgomery County had 19.4 new infections per 100,000 people.

Pharmaceutical companies, research institutions and governments should prioritize research into booster vaccines. At one point it seemed like two mRNA doses or a single Janssen dose might be the answer. But apparently, whether because of variants or fading immunity, being "fully vaccinated" doesn't necessarily mean you're immune.

COVID-19 vaccines do an enormous amount of good. I expect a milder course of disease since I'm vaccinated. But COVID-19 isn't over, even for the vaccinated. As the pandemic continues to evolve, we need to evolve with it.

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OUR VIEWS

Editorial from Bloomberg
Opinion:

As calls for the Food and Drug Administration to fully approve COVID-19 vaccines grow louder, the agency itself has little to say. This is a mistake. The agency insists it is "working as quickly as possible" and has suggested that full approval may come for at least one vaccine by the end of summer. The public is left wondering: What's taking so long?

This isn't just a minor nuisance. It undermines trust in the vaccines and damages the FDA's most valuable asset — its credibility.

The drug regulators have good reason to insist on thoroughly reviewing many months of clinical

trial data before fully licensing any medicine. The emergency use authorizations for the vaccines now administered in the U.S. were based on just two months of follow-up data — enough to be confident that the vaccines are safe, effective, and fit for use in response to a pressing need, but relying on a faster analysis than the FDA requires for its full approval process. To fully approve the vaccines, the FDA looks at more data and satisfies itself on a range of other issues, including developing detailed guidance on use.

This two-track system, allowing flexibility when circumstances demand it, makes sense. To many outside the agency, however, it seems contradictory. Late last

year, the FDA pronounced the mRNA vaccines safe and effective enough for emergency use; many months later, it hasn't fully licensed them. So are the vaccines safe and effective or not? That's a reasonable question — and the agency has failed to answer it clearly.

With the delta variant racing through the population and the pace of vaccination in the U.S. still too slow, many observers, including some infectious disease professionals, have accused the FDA of dragging its feet. Without transparent communication from the agency itself, it's impossible to know whether that charge is correct. On Friday, an agency official said it was making further efforts

to speed its review, making one wonder why every effort hadn't already been made. The FDA traditionally hasn't explained its ongoing work in detail, but hesitancy over the COVID-19 vaccines makes that reticence unacceptable.

If it's now in a position to affirm that six months' worth of clinical trial data provides stronger confirmation that the shots work safely, it should do so, and announce that the licenses will soon be forthcoming. It should also explain what further steps are involved, and how long they'll take. This would reassure Americans that the shots are indeed safe and that anyone who hasn't yet gotten them should go ahead without delay. It would

assure businesses that requiring vaccinations for their employees right away is wise. And it would discourage states from forbidding vaccine mandates until the shots are fully approved.

More thing. Right now, at a moment of exceptional stress, the FDA is hobbled by its lack of a permanent leader. After more than six months in office, President Joe Biden has yet to make the appointment. The agency's professionals are surely aware of the urgency on vaccines. They know it would be a mistake to bow to pressure by cutting corners. Competently led, they can be more effective — and help restore public trust — simply by explaining what they're doing.

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

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U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

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Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Lynette Perry, Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane

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

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Doby, 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 attorney; 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 Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Andrew Bryan, Jessica Dougherty, Chris Hawkins, Travis Cook and Julie Huntington.