

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Reversing the trend

The major rise in COVID-19 cases in Oregon that started in late July appears to have passed its peak, with the case rate declining.

But Baker County is lagging behind that trend.

While the statewide rate of cases per 100,000 population dropped by 14.3% for the week ending Sept. 18, Baker County set a record with 139 new cases that week.

The county's rate per 100,000 rose by 8.6%, to 822. That was the fourth-highest rate among Oregon's 36 counties for that week, behind Harney (1,099 per 100,000), Lake (1,040.2) and Malheur (900).

Four Baker County residents have died this month after testing positive, bringing the county's total to 23 deaths during the pandemic.

The record-setting rate of infections, however, is being driven largely by younger, unvaccinated residents, who, though much less likely to have life-threatening effects from the virus, can keep the virus circulating in the community.

From Sept. 1-15, about 72% of the county's cases were in people younger than 50. Unfortunately, those younger residents also have a much lower vaccination rate, which means they're more likely to become infected and, potentially, to spread the virus to others.

The vaccination rate among residents from age 12 to 49 (children younger than 12 aren't eligible to be vaccinated) is 35.8%. The rate for county residents 50 and older is 57.8%.

The value of vaccination is indisputable. Breakthrough cases — infections in people who are fully vaccinated — accounted for just 9.5% of the county's cases from Aug. 1 through Sept. 12.

So long as the county's vaccination rates remain relatively low — statewide, 74.3% of people 18 and older are vaccinated — it's vital that people who feel ill, regardless of age, strive to limit their contact with others temporarily.

That precaution, combined with boosting vaccination rates and wearing masks when social distancing isn't possible, should help Baker County join most of the rest of the state in reversing the recent record-setting rise in infections and severe illnesses.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Thanks to Senator Wyden for guiding River Democracy Act

Senator Wyden deserves a big thank you for initiating and guiding the River Democracy Act through the winding channels towards Congressional approval. As this drought and fire year has made so clear, protecting our watersheds is fundamental to countering the effects of climate change and preserving and enhancing the capacity of our landscapes to absorb, hold and release water and resist fire.

Several streams I (and others) nominated are included in the Act. I had hoped even more watersheds would be protected, but from tiny acorns mighty oaks grow, hey? As drought and fire persist into the future and the indispensability of even small waterways becomes ever more evident and protections ever more prevalent, perhaps more private landowners will see the advantages to themselves and their neighbors.

The Act however leaves too much scope for irresponsible logging by accommodating commercial sales under the aegis of fire prevention. Too often the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management reveal their bias toward commercial harvest over ecological recovery by cutting large trees and fire-resistant stands that have more environmental than commercial value. Long term ecological values are subordinated to short term local economic gain. This needs to change.

The same concern applies to overgrazing livestock in riparian zones. Many small and medium-sized streams are severely degraded by 125 years of cattle grazing. That's why more and more streams are being enclosed by barbed wire, to keep cows out. It would help if the Act recognized this fact and made some practical gesture to address this particular issue.

Despite the criticisms above, I, like so many Oregonians, are thankful to Senator Wyden for The River Democracy Act.

Wally Sykes
Joseph

Health care worker alarmed by Oregon vaccine mandate

I am a concerned health care worker. I am alarmed by the recent vaccine mandate to all health care workers in Oregon by Gov. Kate Brown. This mandate is unconstitutional.

We live in America, the greatest country in the world where we still have God-given freedoms. We should have the freedom to choose whether or not we receive a vaccine. I am a free-thinking American, I can look at all the science, consider my options and conduct my own risk benefit analysis and make an informed decision.

We now know that vaccinated individuals can be infected, spread and die from COVID-19 just like the unvaccinated. Their risk of severe infection may be less but that doesn't exempt them from playing vaccine Russian

roulette of possible side effects of clots, neurological problems, myocarditis and even death.

How is it legal to force a treatment on someone that could cause their demise? Vaccine companies don't care. They make millions and bear no liability for injuries or death. According to the CDC, I have a 99.97% survival rate in my age group and that's without the vaccine.

I believe in freedom, and as a free American I should be able to make my own decision, one that was not forced upon me by fear and coercion of elected leaders. Freedom is what America was founded on and is what so many people died for. Let's honor their sacrifice and keep America free.

Hospitals across the country are experiencing staff shortages and fatigue. Is this really the time to put a vaccine mandate on all health care workers that could potentially result in worse shortages and a deterioration in patient care and safety? I encourage the citizens of Union County to stand behind their local health care workers, who work tirelessly every day to care for the sick in our community.

I have seen the pandemic bring the worst out in many of us. People are angry and people are fearful. Let's not find one more reason to divide us. Let us instead love one another and support one another's medical freedom of choice.

Lilly Roe
Island City

We're becoming more accessible, less connected

By JULIE and DAVID BULLITT

It makes all the sense in the world: If someone is accessible, easier to contact, then it is not much of a reach to assume that we can easily establish and maintain a connection with that person, right?

Not so much.

The fact is that the more accessible we are, the less connected we have become.

Remember when there were no cellphones? Some of you reading this never experienced such a time. It might as well be the story of Abraham Lincoln walking miles to school in the cold Illinois winter with no shoes on his feet. That's how ancient a world without cellphones seems.

But not that long ago, if you wanted to talk with a friend, you had to use your land line phone at home. If Mom or Dad or a sibling was already on the phone; sorry — you had to wait. But when you got your chance to use the phone, it was the best. Tethered to a wall with a cord and dumbbell-heavy receiver, that was your chance to connect and catch up. And if you were not home? There were these things called phone booths — a phone inside a big glass box that took your loose change (back when we had that, too) to make a call.

We also used to write letters. Real letters with a pen and paper. They required actual handwriting — not

typing on a keyboard. You needed an envelope and a stamp and a postal worker to deliver it; it took days and sometimes longer for your letter to reach the recipient. Remember those awesome, nerve-wracking, anxiety-laden moments of writing, then mailing a love letter? Some of you do. Now, they're largely gone for good. Today, it's a few seconds, a couple of taps or dictation, and a click.

The reality is that when communication was more difficult, when it took more effort and more work, it mattered more. If you took the time to write a letter, you really took the time. You thought about it, maybe crumpled a few sheets of paper first before settling on what you really

wanted to say.

People used to look forward to checking their mailbox each day. If we got a letter, we would go inside, sit down, open and read it. Focus. Smile. Maybe write back. And a phone call from a friend or grandparent? Was it so bad to have to sit in one place and talk? The phone cord imposed a structure and forced us to stay focused, without the flexibility to multitask. The conversation, the person we were writing or speaking to was what mattered.

Technology is an amazing thing, it really is. The problem, though, is that, while technology has created more conversation and communication, it has come with a lot less focus.

Less human interaction. Less connection. And that, folks, is just not a good thing.

There is no going back to the days of wall phones and writing regular, lengthy "snail mail" letters. That doesn't mean you can't take some time to call a friend without distraction or write them an occasional letter. Tell that loved one how you feel, what's going on in your life, or just "hello." But don't do it with an emoji; do it with a stamp.

Married for 35 years, Julie and David Bullitt are, respectively, a family therapist and divorce lawyer. They are co-authors of "The Five Core Conversations for Couples."

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from Dallas Morning News:

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz is right to be concerned about a soon-to-be-operational Russian gas pipeline. He's wrong to obstruct U.S. diplomacy over it.

For months, Cruz has been holding up dozens of State Department nominations as leverage to get the Biden administration to reinstate sanctions related to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. It's an unprecedented level of obstruction, affecting nearly 80 diplomatic posts.

To be clear: Cruz's actions have nothing to do with the nominees or their qualifications. The nominations simply appear to be the only

lever Cruz can think of, so he's pulling it.

This is not a minor hiccup. Without those emissaries on watch, the world is less accountable to U.S. interests. This newspaper's reporting of Cruz's "tantrum," as it was characterized by U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro last week, has drawn a sobering comparison, just days after our nation's observance of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The commission formed to investigate those attacks identified unfilled diplomatic posts as a dangerous vulnerability at the time. Eight months into his term, 57% of President George W. Bush's nominees for key national security posts had been confirmed. At

the same point in his tenure, Biden has just 26%, we reported.

"It is scandalous that these nominees and many others are being held up for reasons completely unrelated to them and the positions they will hold," said Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., who chairs the Foreign Relations Committee. "Such irresponsible behavior jeopardizes our national security."

Cruz is understandably frustrated with the Biden administration. In passing the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019, Congress stipulated sanctions against Russia if they pressed construction of the pipeline. Biden dropped those sanctions, saying they weren't

working and the pipeline is all but operational.

There is speculation that Cruz wants to show Biden is weak on Russia in advance of his own presidential run in 2024. And at times, we've seen Cruz's libertarian tendencies lead him to find validation in an inept government rather than work toward a better one.

But those factors aside, Cruz is not wrong to be concerned here. A 2017 report from Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy identified, "15 discrete instances where Russian entities used price and physical volume manipulation of crude oil or natural gas supplies — often amid political tensions —

to pressure consumers located in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet countries." The pipeline will connect to Germany, expanding Russia's control over the European natural gas market. Biden needs to show that the U.S. will stand up to Russian aggression.

But blocking diplomatic confirmations is the most counterproductive and petulant way for Cruz to raise those concerns. A critical part of curtailing Russia's malign activities will be working with our allies. That requires a functioning diplomatic corps, the very thing Cruz is kneecapping with this stunt. He should drop his objections immediately.