

Oregonians don't need more secrecy about vaccinations

The new model for Oregon's vaccination policy is a dose of secrecy. The Oregon Health Authority cut the public off from Tuesday's meeting of the Vaccine Advisory Committee.

The committee has made recommendations about who should get the vaccine next. It's a critical question. The public has a right to know what it decided and how it made those decisions.

Every meeting of the committee has been streamed live to the public. Agendas, public comments, background materials and recordings have all been available. Not Tuesday's meeting.

Why? The committee "has completed its official duties and fulfilled its purpose of making recommendations" about vaccination order to the Oregon Health Authority, spokesman Rudy Owens said in an email to The Oregonian on Tuesday. "OHA is now working on planning for implementation of the committee's recommendations. OHA will conduct an evaluation with VAC members of the committee process."

That's one way to spin it. Another would be that a committee that is recommending state policy is holding another meeting and we don't want the public to see what it is doing.

The recommendation that the committee made was that the state should next vaccinate people with underlying health conditions, front-line workers, people in jail or prison and seniors and low-income people in group housing.

But if you watched the committee's meetings that were accessible to

the public you will know that there was considerable, polite friction about the recommendation. For instance, several members of the committee emphasized again and again that Oregon must do more to address health equity for communities of color. In the end, the committee's recommendation made no specific request to prioritize vaccinations for communities of color.

We would sure like to know what the committee discussed Tuesday. What is an evaluation of "the committee process?" Did committee members backtrack on their recommendation or express doubts about how they arrived at it? Oregonians will not know.

This is the second dose of secrecy that OHA has pulled on Oregonians in just a few weeks. It had decided it would stop releasing basic information about each person killed by COVID-19. It was too much work, OHA said. Gov. Kate Brown formally backed the decision.

The timing seemed odd because it could obscure the outcome of Brown's policy choice to vaccinate educators before educating more seniors. The new policy also seemed to devalue individual deaths, burying them in a lump of statistics. Brown ended up reversing the OHA decision — after news articles about it.

If Gov. Brown wants the public to trust the government's decisions, she needs to compel OHA to prioritize transparency, not more secrecy.

Should government require diversity on corporate boards?

Having women and minorities on corporate boards is smart for businesses. But should the state of Oregon dictate the makeup of corporate boards?

House Bill 3110 would give the state of Oregon that power. "If the board of directors has four or fewer members, at least one director must be female and one must be a member of an underrepresented community," the bill says. The requirements tick up as the size of a board of directors increases. The definition of underrepresented communities in the bill includes minority groups, people of mixed race and people of low income.

The law would apply to publicly traded corporations. Businesses in violation would face fines of at least \$100,000 a year. The secretary of state would also be required to publish a list of companies that comply.

The goal of diverse leadership is unimpeachable. But isn't the most important characteristic of serving on a corporate board relevant business knowledge, skill or talent? And why is being diverse so limited? Isn't this effort to be inclusive being exclusive? What about religious preference? What about sexual preference? What about different schools of economic thought? Why don't they matter?

Diversity on corporate boards is not a burden. It can be a lever to success. The state of California passed a similar law last year. Such a law in Oregon could improve businesses here. It could also cause some to question how much more the state of Oregon will meddle in corporate decisions. Tell your legislator what you think or email us a letter to the editor at letters@bendbulletin.com.



My Nickel's Worth

Bentz should follow Kinzinger

As a newbie, Cliff Bentz would be well served, just as a freshman in high school does, by looking up to and learning from one's upperclassmen and upperclasswomen.

Making stupid and avoidable mistakes early on tends to haunt you.

To learn the ropes, it's not very likely that Bentz will seek guidance and wisdom from any House Democrats, like his colleagues from Oregon, so my suggestion is for Bentz to ask fellow Republican, Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Illinois to be his mentor.

Kinzinger, a veteran legislator, recently underscored his commitment to his Constitutional oath and bravely voted to impeach former President Trump, breaking from the feckless Republican crowd that included Mr. Bentz. Courage over cowardice.

I offer this advice as a former and proud Oregon Republican voter in the mold of and admiration for many of Oregon's notable Republican leaders like Hatfield, McCall, Atiyeh and Paulus.

Even today as a registered Democrat, I believe in a just, honorable and honest Republican Party. Those of us in Oregon's 2nd District, regardless of party, would be better served by someone of the character of Rep. Kinzinger.

Mr. Bentz, in the high school vernacular, it's time to man up.

— Brian Bell, Bend

Who does Bentz represent?

The Oregon Republican Party recently passed a resolution condemning the 10 Republican U.S. House members who voted to impeach Donald Trump.

The resolution compared them to the traitor Benedict Arnold, asserting that the Republicans voting for

impeachment "repeated history by conspiring to surrender our nation to Leftist forces seeking to establish a dictatorship void of all cherished freedoms and liberties," and stating that "there is growing evidence that the violence at the Capitol was a 'false flag' operation designed to discredit President Trump, his supporters, and all conservative Republicans; this provided the sham motivation to impeach President Trump in order to advance the Democrat goal of seizing total power."

The Oregon GOP resolution is utter nonsense, but it begs a critical question. Since newly-elected Rep. Cliff Bentz did not vote for impeachment and I believe has yet to repudiate the Big Lie that the election was stolen from Trump, and since he belongs to the Oregon Republican Party, does he intend to represent the GOP, or the citizens of the 2nd Congressional District?

— Eileen Harrington, Bend

More than impeachment

As I write this, more than 430,000 Americans have died as the result of the COVID virus. Many of these deaths are directly attributable to the previous administration's constant stubborn denialism, breathtaking ineptness and callous disregard for human life.

I wonder if it's time to stop thinking about the impeachment process and start thinking about charging the head of the previous administration with manslaughter and criminal negligence?

— Jeffrey Richardson, Bend

Commit to truth

I was moved by the compelling article in Friday's Bulletin in which 10 Oregon House Republicans rejected

the Oregon Republican Party's leadership's claim that the Jan. 6 riots at the U.S. Capitol were a "false flag" of Democrats. As a progressive-leaning centrist, I am moved to strongly commend the 10 House Republicans who had the guts to stand up to the Oregon Republican Party leaders, and spoke truth against the party's gross distortion of facts. Healing of the huge political divide in our country must begin with both parties commitment to truth.

— Tom Hartrich, Bend

County got vaccination right

I had my first COVID vaccination this past Friday at the Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center. It was extremely well organized, quick and felt very safe. From the front gate, through the registration line, receiving the shot and waiting for 15 minutes before leaving it was a total of 25 minutes. There was an air of excitement and good feelings through the entire process.

The number of doses for Deschutes County has been pulled back for the coming week because it is ahead of other counties in Oregon. It seems to me that the Oregon Health Authority is penalizing a group that has been excelling in this process instead of holding them up as a positive example. Wouldn't it make more sense for representatives from other areas in Oregon that are not getting the vaccine out as quickly to visit and learn from the model in Central Oregon?

Let's spread the great work that these people are doing at the Deschutes County fairgrounds, give them kudos for being successful and share that knowledge with the rest of Oregon. Let's get everyone vaccinated as soon as possible!

— Gerry Sharp, Bend

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We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

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How to submit

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P.O. Box 6020
Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

GUEST COLUMN

The state's 'progress' on foster care may be misleading

BY JENNA APP

Since the start of the pandemic, official reports to child protection agencies have declined across the United States by 20%–70%, and the 22 member organizations of the Oregon CASA (court appointed special advocate) Network, all of which work with children who have experienced abuse, are concerned. This concern stands in sharp contrast to the Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division's recent news release on Jan. 27 that "despite the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic and historic wildfires... the Division was able to reduce the use of foster care to a historic low."

This assertion misses a fundamental point made with compelling

evidence by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute for Health, and the American Pediatric Society: The pandemic itself is the cause of the reduction in numbers of children entering foster care — and this is due to the simple fact that children and families are more isolated than ever before, making child abuse and neglect harder to detect and prevent. Nearly every evidence-based publication dealing with child abuse

and family violence has sounded the alarms bells because the dramatic natural drop in children entering foster care means that vulnerable children are not receiving the help they need. Yet the Oregon Child Welfare Division cites the statistic as evidence of a positive accomplishment.



App

Studies have revealed that pandemic-related challenges, such as social isolation, loss of a job, financial hardship, parenting stress, increased alcohol/illicit drug consumption, and emotional distress can significantly increase the risk of family violence, including child abuse. However, because of the pandemic-related restrictions, professionals (like teachers, coaches, social workers and other providers) who are trained to recognize and report child abuse cases have limited access to children and their families.

While overall reports of abuse are down, many hospitals have reported a sharp rise in child admission due to severe injuries from family violence. These findings indicate that the reduced number of child abuse reports observed in data across the county is due to underreporting and not due

to an actual reduction in child abuse incidence.

Given the significant and well-studied impacts of financial hardship and psychosocial stress on child maltreatment, many researchers suggest that child welfare agencies, as well as health care providers and educators, should be more vigilant about detecting possible child abuse signs during their online visits to children.

The real problem with the Oregon Child Welfare Division taking credit for the reduction in children entering foster care is that it is celebrating what is likely the opposite of a success story, and in doing so is ignoring the need for more action. Child abuse is preventable; implementation of strategies including strengthening household economic supports, better and more equitable access to mental health providers, and creating family-friendly

work policies and support systems can reduce stress during difficult times and increase children's opportunities to thrive in safe, stable, and nurturing households. Importantly, organizations like the CDC are warning providers to prepare for an influx of children entering foster care as schools begin to reopen, and the cumulative impacts of abuse are realized and reported. Is the Oregon Child Welfare Division putting into place the resources needed for the predicted surge in need, or is the agency instead too focused on issuing rose-colored press releases?

The Oregon CASA Network is concerned that in seeking an easy "win," the division may be failing to prepare for what is likely a very difficult time ahead for Oregon children.

■ Jenna App is the director of the Oregon CASA Network.