

EDITORIALS & OPINIONS

The Bulletin
AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERHeidi Wright Publisher
Gerry O'Brien Editor
Richard Coe Editorial Page Editor

Passage of House Bill 3103 is critical to Deschutes River

Walk along the river trails in Bend, and the Deschutes River is majestic and restless. Move upstream toward Wickiup Reservoir, and you don't have to be an expert to know the river is in trouble.

Fish kills. High silt content. The habitat is so bad the Oregon spotted frog is threatened to wink out of existence.

The struggles to tame the river changed it into something less healthy. Before irrigation canals and reservoirs, the Deschutes had more regular flows. It averaged 600 cubic feet per second to 800 cfs upstream of Bend. Until recently, it's been fluctuating much more wildly from 20 cfs to 1,800 cfs. Low flow levels warm up the river making it more unhealthy.

That problem is being addressed. Central Oregon's irrigation districts have agreed to leave more water in the river. Piping irrigation canals is terri-

bly expensive but moves water more efficiently so not as much has to be taken from the river. Flows in the Deschutes may ratchet up to a minimum of 300 cfs in the next several years. That's progress.

The Oregon Legislature is considering a bill, House Bill 3103, that could make a critical change to improve the flexibility of how water can be used in the Deschutes Basin and across the state.

Consider Wickiup Reservoir. It's one of the largest reservoirs in Oregon. It's about 50 miles from Bend by car. It can hold up to 200,000 acre feet of water, at least when snowpack and climate change cooperate. (One acre foot of water is the amount of water to



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin file

Water flows along the Deschutes River below Wickiup Reservoir in November.

cover an acre in one foot of water or about 325,851 gallons.)

Every drop of water in the reservoir is officially designated for the use of irrigation by North Unit Irrigation

District, which serves the area around Madras. On the state level, rights to store water are tied to specifics — the location of the reservoir, the location of the dam, where the water is di-

verted and the purpose or use of the stored water.

Say you want to change one — to release more water from Wickiup to help water habitat for the spotted frog and other creatures. The Oregon Department of Justice issued a memo in 2018 saying that although there are exceptions, Oregon's Water Resources Department doesn't have the authority to change storage rights. HB 3103 would allow the change for the use of water.

It wouldn't only benefit the situation at Wickiup. Other reservoirs in Oregon have similar restrictions that limit flexibility.

In the past, some irrigation districts and farmers have wanted more than just flexibility in use of stored water. They have wanted flexibility in where the water was stored, as well. That is something that Oregon should do, too. But changing the use is much, much less controversial. This bill could pass this session. Legislators, pass it.

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.

My Nickel's Worth

Let's memorize Gorman's poem

Thank you to Cheryl McGinnis for the idea of memorizing Amanda Gorman's exquisite poem. I'm in it, with you, Cheryl, to incorporate this hope-filled message into the cells of my being.

While blending the inspiration of this poem into my mind and soul, an idea came. What if many of us memorized this powerful work of art and promise? What if someone recited this daily from a street corner in our city of Bend?

What if residents and visitors of this lovely town every day could count on hearing Amanda Gorman's words for unity, for commitment "to all cultures, color, characters and conditions of man?"

What if we're brave enough to be the light we are looking for "in this never-ending shade?"

Are there others of you who are already on this project? Let's do it!

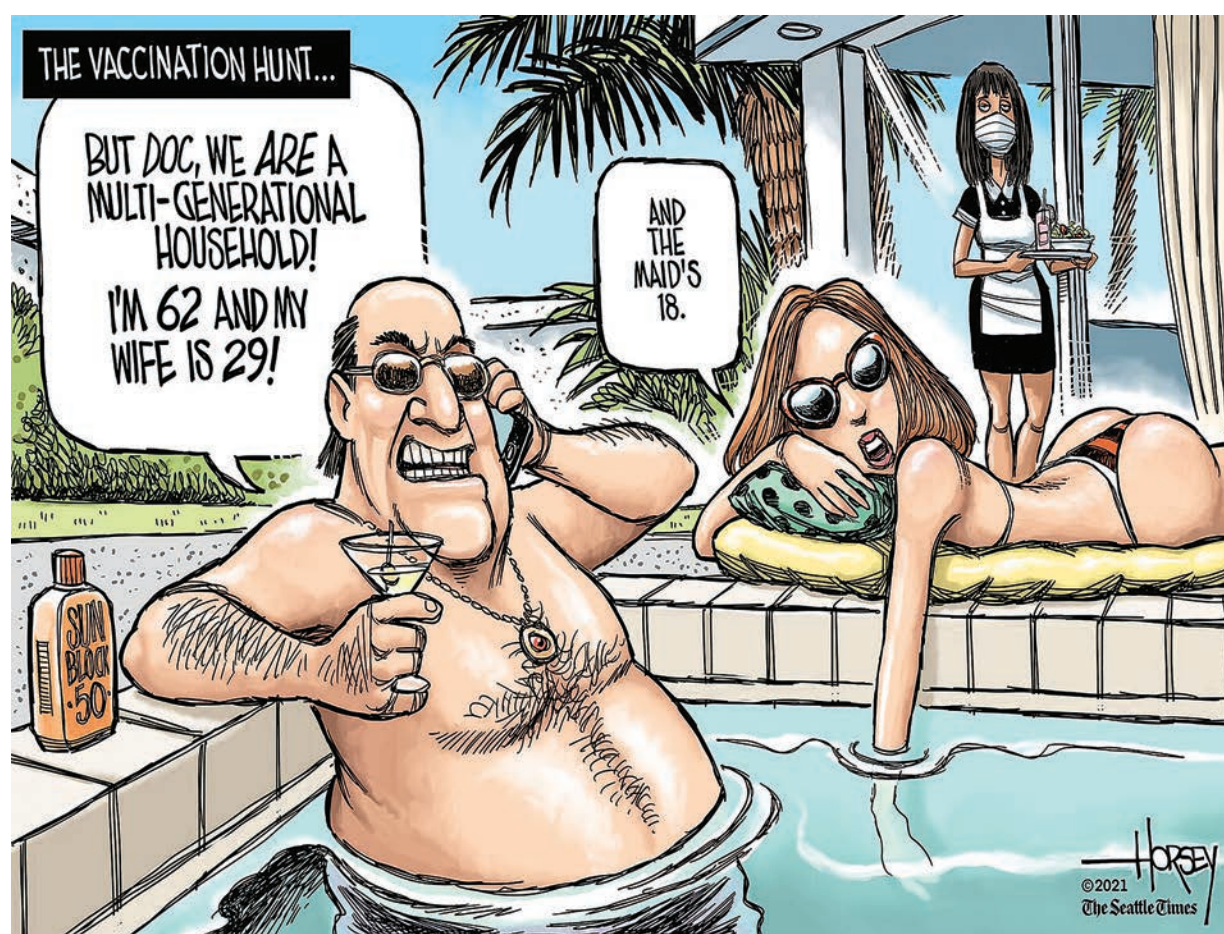
— Andrea Furber, Bend

Madras councilor had a point

While using the word "terrorist" might have been overly inflammatory, the basic message of Madras Councilor Austin Throop's comments seem well-taken: Why is any public official violating the state protocols put in place to deal with this incredibly destructive virus? Community leaders should be on the cutting edge of community safety, even if their egos get bruised.

Mayor Richard Ladeby apparently cut Mr. Throop off, telling him "We're not here to have a lecture." Last time I looked, the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech did not have such guidelines.

— L. Thomas Clark, Bend



Can the school board please answer questions?

An exact quote from an article on the front page of Feb. 2's paper regarding teachers getting vaccinated:

"It has relieved a lot of stress to have access to these," said Sarah Barclay, president of the Bend Education Association teachers' union. "They're heading back into classrooms with lots of (COVID-19) exposure, ... so just knowing there was prioritization to help ensure community safety,

we're very thankful for that."

Why are we sending students "back into classrooms with lots of (COVID-19) exposure?" Do the students and everyone in the students' circles not matter?

I am just utterly confused.

— Donna J. Casey, Bend

A shot of praise

I want to thank St. Charles Medical Center and the Deschutes County Health Department for providing the

COVID-19 immunizations. As a hospice volunteer, I was eligible for the immunizations at the hospital. My husband was eligible for the immunizations at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds.

There were many volunteers and medical professionals at both sites who answered all our questions, assisted people with mobility issues, and carefully checked our temperatures, ID and appointment times. Everyone observed social distancing, wore masks and were careful to observe

us following the immunizations as we waited the 15 minutes required. Members of the National Guard were on duty at the fairgrounds, as were several volunteers who transported many people from their cars to the facility.

We are grateful to everyone who was there to help us and others.

— Patty Taylor Dutcher, Prineville

Wrong decision

I am writing to express my anger and frustration at Gov. Kate Brown's recent decision to redirect vaccine supplies to Portland. Coming on the heels of her other decision to inoculate educators above seniors, this news is disheartening at best as it further delays the possibility of my husband or me obtaining this necessary vaccination.

My husband is over 65 with heart disease and a faulty mitral valve that will require surgery in the near future. We have been strictly following the guidelines of social distancing and masking; consequently, we have been unable to see our children and grandchildren in over a year. I have not seen my 87-year-old mother, who resides in an assisted living facility, in over a year.

I am appalled at this decision. If Gov. Brown's motivation is to reduce the number of COVID-related hospitalizations, I fail to see her logic.

While I understand that there is a need to open public schools, older people with underlying conditions are at most risk of becoming severely ill and dying. She will have hospitals filled with seniors on ventilators and a rising death toll.

Please help me understand how these decisions are in the best interests of public health.

— Karen Jost, Bend

Letters policy

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.

Guest columns

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

Fax: 541-385-5804

Write: My Nickel's Worth/Guest Column
P.O. Box 6020, Bend, OR 97708

We fear Super Bowl Sunday may become a super spreader event

Super Bowl Sunday is nigh upon us, and one can sense the anticipation for a competitive game and a large gathering of friends to watch it with. Don't do it.

I hate to throw cold water on what has become a de facto national sports holiday, but there's this nagging pandemic thing out there that, while vaccines are starting to spread across the country, has not really abated.

It does appear we may be on the downhill side of this, but as you recall, it's been a roller coaster of spikes and declines several times over this past year. Take a look at the graphic we publish each day on Page A2. Surges of varying amounts have happened following every sort of national holiday — July 4th, Labor Day Weekend, Thanksgiving and Christmas. De-

schutes County Health Department and St. Charles Medical Center publish daily infection counts, and one can see the same trend there, too.

Last July 16, the county saw a bump of 28 new cases; Sept. 19, there were 16 new cases; Dec. 4, it exploded to 129 new cases; Jan. 1 saw 108 new cases. The Oregon Health Authority noted that it did not see a post-Thanksgiving surge across the state as people appeared to be more aware of the issue. However, case numbers did pick up following the Christmas holidays.

St. Charles, for the greater part of January, had an average of 40-plus patients hospitalized for COVID-19, the highest numbers since the pandemic began. Those numbers are slowly dropping off to a "normal" average of



GERRY O'BRIEN

10 to 15. The statewide numbers have mirrored this trend, as well.

More distressing is that the number of deaths in Oregon from COVID-19 is about to top 2,000 by this weekend.

What does it tell us? Logic dictates that families and friends did gather in groups during those holidays, and the result was a spike in cases. This Sunday could be no different unless we choose to self-isolate one more time. Hosting Zoom, Skype or other online chat room meetings with your friends instead of being together in one room is the better alternative, although,

granted, not as much fun.

All this is aimed at trying to get back to some normalcy, especially for our restaurants and tap rooms.

Restaurants are still reeling in Central Oregon. They are what make this region so livable.

We're glad to see Bend's Sparrow Bakery launch a "Twice More" campaign encouraging all of us who can afford it to order takeout or dine in twice as many times per week than usual. This is no time to be complacent with the advent of the vaccine and think that restaurants may pull out of this economic dive. Restaurants, bars and food trucks all still need our help. (For listings of local restaurants, take-out options, check out our GO! Magazine in print and online).

Which brings us back to why we

need to sequester for just a little bit longer. It is no time to become complacent and believe that with the advent of a vaccine, things will return to normal in short order. Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health Administration is seeking to make mask-wearing and other requirements permanent for the life of this pandemic. We can help bring this sequestration to an end earlier if we abide by the rules: distancing, wearing a mask, good cleaning practices and avoiding crowds.

I'm a big fan of the Big Game as much as anyone, and it goes without saying I savor the chips and dips and munchies along the way. But there's one spread that we should avoid this Sunday and that is the Super Bowl Super Spreader.

■ Gerry O'Brien is editor of The Bulletin.