

EDITORIALS & OPINIONS

The Bulletin
AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERHeidi Wright Publisher
Gerry O'Brien Editor
Richard Coe Editorial Page EditorTime is running out:
Get vaccinated ASAP

As we slowly emerge from our isolation cocoons thanks to the year of the COVID-19, people may feel a little disoriented meeting in groups again, shaking hands or even standing close to one another. It's almost like the cicadas emerging after 14 years, but we're not chirping as much as we would like.

That's because there are still unknowns out there. The COVID-19 delta variant is spreading across the globe and has been found in Oregon and Deschutes County.

It affects those who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 the most, but there's the unknown as to whether vaccinated folks can carry it or even pass it on. And reports are it is much more contagious.

As of Thursday, St. Charles has 14 coronavirus patients hospitalized, three of whom are in ICU and on ventilators. While that number is far from the high of 40 during the worst of the pandemic, it is concerning because numbers are trending upward. Deschutes County had three recent deaths from COVID-19 in the past several days and yesterday recorded 14 new cases. Statewide there were 421 new confirmed and presumptive cases reported.

The death toll in Oregon from COVID-19 stands at 2,833.

Troubling as all this is, there is a sure-fire way to curb it: Get a vaccination. Most clinics, pharmacies, the hospital — all offer a vaccine of choice. It is even easier than was waiting the mere 30 minutes to get one at the county fairgrounds a few months back — which ran like a well-oiled machine.

Small towns give
with their hearts

Despite the traffic jams at roundabouts under construction, or the detours, or the 15-minute "rush hour" commutes, it still feels like we all live in a small town.

Drivers are generally polite, residents are helpful to visitors and there are still moments when we recognize each other face-to-face, now that the face masks have come off.

A great example of the caring and giving spirit of Central Oregon came out of a tragic event last week when a horse-racing jockey accidentally died after being thrown from a horse at the Crooked River Roundup.

The crowd was stunned when the accident occurred during the first race of the event. When it was determined that jockey, Eduardo Gutierrez-Sosa, 29, died from his injuries, the rest of the racing card was canceled.

Gutierrez-Sosa was a journeyman jockey primarily based out of Grants Pass. He was married and had three children.

Last Wednesday was the start of the three-day roundup in Prineville,

which is back after a year off due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Our hearts are broken," Doug Smith, race chairman for the roundup, told The Bulletin in an email. "We ask that everyone keeps those he left behind in their thoughts and prayers."

The audience did more than that, however. In about an hour, race officials had raised more than \$3,500 from attendees for Gutierrez-Sosa's family, according to a Bulletin story.

It is one of the many, albeit small, giving gestures that make up our communities. Another was the packages of water and necessities that the Bend community delivered en masse to the homeless camps during the recent heat wave. It made a difference in alleviating the extreme temperatures.

There are lots of other examples. Suffice to say that despite the trials and tribulations of ongoing heat, fires and coronavirus issues, the small-town feel remains alive in Central Oregon: neighbor watching out for neighbor.

Concerned about the vaccine? Ask a health care professional. Get the straight skinny from those in the know. Don't take our word for it, and you don't have to take the governor's word for it. Do a bit of research, whatever it takes to make you feel at ease in getting vaccinated.

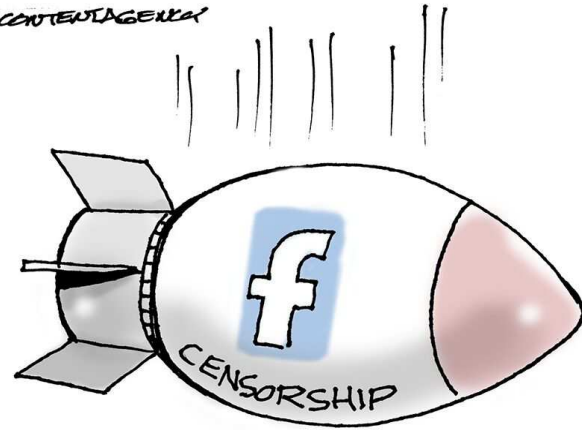
As of Wednesday, 2,457,522 Oregonians have had at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and 2,285,052 people have completed a COVID-19 vaccine series.

In June, there were 7,241 cases of COVID-19; 92% of these cases were unvaccinated people, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Further, minorities, people of color and Native Americans are sorely lacking in getting the vaccine. The OHA says the minority groups are hovering at the mid-40% range. It is making a push to move that number to 80%, or some 240,000 people, by summer's end. That's a big hill to climb, but getting the word out will help.

If you're interested in tracking COVID-19 in Oregon or the vaccination numbers, here's a great dashboard to view: <https://govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19>.

By curbing this new variant now, we can hope for an easy transition back to normal work schedules, school hours and leisure time.

SUMMERS TRIBUNE/CONTENT/AGENCY

'Infrastructure' fix is simple: Pipe
clean water to Native Americans

BY BIDTAH BECKER AND ANNE CASTLE

Much of the infrastructure talk in Washington these days focuses on large, complicated projects involving tunnels, bridges and highways. But there is a much more basic matter involving infrastructure that also merits attention: the need to provide clean water to the more than half a million Native Americans who lack the sort of water and sanitation services that other Americans take for granted.

These households may have no toilet, no sink or any piped connection that delivers clean water, as a report by the Democratic staff for the House Committee on Natural Resources laid out in 2016. Others may be connected to a contaminated water supply that is not suitable for drinking and, in some cases, even poisonous. Still others may rely on systems that are deteriorating, unreliable and possibly polluted.

That so many citizens lack access to basic plumbing should be unacceptable in a modern country. Yet Native American households are 19 times more likely than those of white people to lack indoor plumbing. (Black and Latinx households are twice as likely as white ones to lack the same services.)

The public health impacts of not having clean water are obvious. At the beginning stages of the coronavirus pandemic, Native Americans were 3.5 times more likely than their white neighbors to be stricken with the illness. Unsurprisingly, the disproportionate incidence of covid-19 in Indian Country has been strongly correlated with the lack of indoor plumbing and access to clean water.

When you lack running water to wash your hands, or you share an outdoor latrine with other households, or you can't isolate because you're forced to drive to a water collection point used by the whole community

to fill your plastic water buckets for the week, limiting exposure to a potentially lethal virus becomes nearly impossible.

Concerted efforts by tribal governments, urban Indian organizations and the Indian Health Service to provide vaccines to tribal members have slowed the incidence of covid among tribal members. But Alaska Natives and American Indians still have the highest hospitalization and death rates of any ethnic group. Tribal elders were hit particularly hard by COVID-19, a devastating loss of Indigenous culture.

Native communities have chronically lacked access to clean and safe water for decades; the consequences of federal government inaction were simply laid bare by the pandemic. The lack of clean, piped water is not just a Native American predicament. In other rural areas outside of reservations, some households don't have clean piped water. But nowhere else is the problem as concentrated as in Indian Country.

Moreover, the United States owes a special obligation to its Indigenous citizens. The federal government appropriated their lands in exchange for the promise that the tribes would have permanent, livable homelands where they could prosper and thrive. That promise has gone unfulfilled in countless ways, and it is meaningless if Native American homes do not have clean water.

This problem is not intractable. It simply requires properly funding and constructing the necessary systems. At least one solution has been authorized since 1959, when Congress created the Indian Health Service's sanitation facilities construction program. Several other federal programs are intended to address the problem, but all have fallen short.

There have been encouraging signs that the Biden administration and

members of Congress recognize the injustice. This year, the White House's Domestic Policy Council has held two listening sessions on Native Americans' access to clean drinking water. Resolutions have been introduced in both the House and the Senate acknowledging the federal government's responsibility to provide clean water to tribes. Sens. Michael F. Bennet, D-Colo., and Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., have introduced the Tribal Access to Clean Water Act of 2021, which would fund the unmet need in four federal agencies that administer programs addressing clean water infrastructure in Indian Country, for a total of \$6.8 billion.

Each of the infrastructure packages now under consideration by Congress would dedicate significant resources for clean drinking water systems nationwide; but a specific, targeted appropriation such as the Tribal Access bill is what is desperately needed.

Investing in clean water infrastructure has far-ranging benefits: It creates good-paying jobs, nurtures future generations and offers the chance to address long-standing and persistent racial injustice. The Indian Health Service has noted that every dollar it spends on sanitation facilities to serve Native American homes has at least a 20-fold return in health benefits.

The current emphasis in Washington on infrastructure improvement and addressing racial justice provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to correct a shameful state of affairs that has been allowed to persist for far too long.

■ Bidtah Becker is an associate attorney for the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority and former director of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources. Anne Castle is a senior fellow at the Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy and the Environment at the University of Colorado and former assistant secretary for water and science at the U.S. Interior Department.

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

Klamath Dams are driving salmon to extinction and not helping people either

BY MARK ROGERS

The Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited represents 3,800 conservation-minded anglers across Oregon. We are known for our stream habitat restoration work and our reliance on solid science to inform our programs and views.

One of the most important watersheds in which we are invested is the Klamath River. The Klamath was once the third-most productive salmon river on the West Coast, but its salmon and other native fish populations have declined precipitously and the multi-species fisheries this river supported historically are now in deep trouble.

Coho salmon are now listed as threatened under federal and California law. Spring chinook salmon, once the Klamath Basin's dominant run, have decreased by nearly 98% and now

approach extinction. Fall chinook populations — even heavily supplemented by hatchery production — have been so poor the past few years that the Yurok Tribe had to suspend fishing for the first time in the Tribe's recorded history.

Klamath River salmon are both sacred to local Tribal cultures and a keystone species essential to the resilience of the entire river ecosystem. The current desperate shortage of water in the Klamath Basin is exacting a heavy toll on them, and on everyone else.

While we can't do much to make it rain or snow more, we can take other actions that would help all the basin's residents. In particular, we can follow through on a multi-party agreement, twenty years in the making, to remove four old hydroelectric dams.

The Iron Gate, Copco I & II, and

GUEST COLUMN

J.C. Boyle dams are outdated for their original purpose (energy production). Three of the four produce so little energy they are money-losers. These dams also provide zero water supply benefit, for agriculture or anyone else. Moreover, these dams completely block fish access to more than 400 miles of historic habitat and create some of the worst water quality in the nation.

Twenty-three parties, including PacifiCorp (the utility company that now owns the dams, and doesn't want them anymore), the States of Oregon and California, Tribes, commercial fishing groups, federal agencies, and TU and other conservation organizations have signed an historic settle-

ment agreement that is centered on the removal of these obsolete, polluting, fish-killing dams.

Some have argued that the cost of removing the dams and restoring the project footprint will be far more than is estimated, due to the spike in cost of construction materials over the past year. But the dam removal project is a deconstruction project, and involves tearing down and hauling away old concrete, not pouring it.

The Public Utility Commissions of Oregon and California — whose charge is to protect ratepayers — have already determined that removing the four Klamath dams is in the best interest of ratepayers in both states. While the removal project may see some cost escalation due to the drawn-out federal permitting process, the existing \$450 million budget has built-in contin-

gency funds to cover cost overruns.

In addition, the States of Oregon and California and PacifiCorp have agreed to chip in an additional \$45 million, if needed. Lastly, the cost of upgrading the dams so they could continue to operate for hydropower production (while enabling fish passage) would be far greater than the cost of taking them out, under any scenario.

The plan for removing the old Klamath dams — and the budget for doing so — has been vetted thoroughly by independent experts and approved by federal and state regulators. Restoring the free flow of the Klamath River is one thing we can and should do as soon as possible to help all Klamath Basin's residents, human and wild alike.

■ Mark W. Rogers is chair of the Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited from Sandy.