

Don't panic, but take virus seriously

If there was any doubt we are now living in a new, vastly changed world, those misgivings should have been appropriately vanquished during the weekend.

That means all of us should be carefully considering how we are going to move forward under the cloud created by the new coronavirus. There continues to be an undercurrent of doubt about the seriousness of the coronavirus, a kind of it's-not-that-bad type of attitude, and while no one can accurately gauge the outcome of this new malady, it is important that all of us take it seriously.

How serious does the government take it? In a nearly unprecedented move, the Federal Reserve slashed interest rates on Sunday to nearly zero. It also said it will purchase \$700 billion in Treasury securities. What that means in the big picture is federal officials believe the coronavirus pandemic carries the real potential to severely slam our economy — an economy that has, for the most part, been humming along for years.

School districts across Eastern Oregon have closed, and Gov. Kate Brown decided Monday to close the state's bars and restaurants and ban gatherings of more than 25 people in response to the coronavirus. The governor faces a nearly

insurmountable challenge. On one hand, she must do all that is necessary to protect Oregonians but, on the other, also must know that thousands of small businesses could be in jeopardy if measures prove to be too draconian.

But this virus may force the governor's hand, and the longer she waits to develop a way forward, the more dangerous the situation will become.

More than anything, though, we must all remember not to panic. That is becoming, apparently, an increasingly difficult concept to sink in, judging by the empty shelves at local grocery stores. President Donald Trump urged Americans to "calm down" in his press conference on Sunday, and we agree.

There is no need to rush to local stores and buy hundreds of dollars of goods. The American supply system — as robust as any in the world — continues to function. That means there aren't going to be widespread shortages of food and other items if we all act with some sense.

We may run the risk of becoming a broken record regarding the need not to panic. We'll take that risk. That's because the only way we are going to overcome this major and massive challenge will be to act in a reasonable, clear-headed manner.

OPINION COUNTERPOINT
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"THAT'S ODD: MY FACEBOOK FRIENDS WHO WERE CONSTITUTIONAL SCHOLARS JUST A MONTH AGO ARE NOW INFECTIOUS DISEASE EXPERTS..."

GUEST COMMENT

Thoughts on water quality and ag's future

By Jim Bahrenburg

Grant County ranchers and the Department of Agriculture from Salem met at the airport a week ago to discuss water issues and water quality. Many good questions were asked by ranchers, and the Department of Agriculture answered many of them. There were about 70 or more ranching men and women attending, and the Department of Agriculture will be returning again in each of the next three years.

A concern that I realized was not addressed that should be a concern for all of us is about the unknown affects of climate change and if warmer winters are the new normal. Most ranchers attending have experienced 4-foot or greater snow packs and 20-30 degrees below zero temperatures over the last 50 years. We are all dependent on snow and rain at the higher elevations and in the national forest. If in 10 years we experience a 25% reduction in our 8-inch to 14-inch

snow and rain, and in stream and river flows, can we adapt and prepare for how we raise crops and livestock? This change in weather may not happen, but I see the Forest Service and BLM in somewhat of a bind. Under forest health management there is a need to reduce fuels and open forest stands to reduce severe fire damage. If trees are spaced out and the slash and fuels are burned or removed and the forest soils lose the organic matter and their water holding capacity, springs and streams may dry up and we may lose the late season flows in the rivers. It seems that the hydrologists, silviculturists and soil people need to address this issue.

What concerns me most is that most of the ranchers, both men and women, attending this important meeting may not be ranching or farming 10 years from now in 2030. In a good year ranchers make money, and we buy things we need. In bad years we don't make money, but our operating

expenses remain the same, and paying those expenses contribute to the economic stability of Grant County.

What also concerns me is that a young couple with one or two children or a young man or woman who wants to ranch or farm can't afford to buy a tractor, let alone a ranch or farm, and add to that the yearly operating costs. Without the 40 or 50 years of ranching/farming experience in both good and bad years that each one of us has and the knowledge of how to handle tough situations, it seems to me there needs to be a lot of thought to addressing this issue while we have all the valuable experience and know how that was in the room at the airport.

It's hard to tell, but it's possible that in 2030 our country may need many young men and women who are willing to work hard 10 or 12 hours a day outside in the fresh air, 12 months of the year.

Jim Bahrenburg is from Kimberly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What is the back story behind emergency management coordinator resigning?

To the Editor:

I am happy to see that the Grant County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue agency is on top of the coronavirus situation, and serious about protecting the citizens of our county. The way this came about, however, seems a little underhanded. If it was necessary to bypass the county Office of Emergency Management for the responsibility of taking the lead, we all deserve to know why, and I hope someone will come forward with the information leading to the decision. If the reasons were sound, great. If we just lost a good emergency management coordinator for no good reason, I don't feel quite so safe. So please, what is the back story here?

Marie Bryant
Prairie City

Controversial 'emergency' meeting during crisis — why?

To the Editor:

When Sheriff Palmer strategized to create a task force to deal with the coronavirus threat to Grant County, he blindsided our Emergency Management Coordinator Ted Williams — and the public. The commissioners and the sheriff called an "emergency" meeting to take control of the cri-

sis by installing a deputy to "coordinate (the) stakeholders." But that is the role of the emergency manager! There are two big questions that the sheriff and county commissioners need to answer. Why was Williams blindsided by their plan to override his authority and hand it to the sheriff department? And, as important, why was this done through an "emergency" meeting — preventing not only Mr. Williams from knowing of it in advance, but also preventing citizen attendance or input about their decision? The sheriff's department is known for lack of transparency. Now, are we to wonder about the county court?

When did things shift from a reasonable expectation to use Search And Rescue (to assist our emergency manager) to SAR overriding Williams' established plan for a pandemic? The lead deputy of SAR had met with health professionals the day before the so-called "emergency" meeting. Did he announce then he would be taking control? Why was our emergency manager not informed? This was planned far in advance of the hastily called county court meeting that should have been scheduled out 24 hours ahead with the required 24-hour public notification. Through declaring it an "emergency" meeting, the commissioners bypassed the 24-hour notification rule, avoiding any public input or questions about their planned approval of the sheriff's department's power grab.

How sad that during a crisis the sheriff and the commissioners took this action that fosters division in our community. Nevertheless, given the determination of Grant County residents to muster support in times of crisis, we can work with one another and support our SAR leadership operating the emergency operations center.

But when this is over, commissioners and the sheriff owe Williams an apology, and owe us a review of when "emergency" meetings are warranted — if they wish to rebuild public trust in their leadership.

Kay Steele
Ritter

Reconsider emergency management amid coronavirus

To the Editor:

I am writing to strongly object to the appointment by the county court of a sheriff's deputy as coordinator of the county's emergency response mechanism, essentially negating functioning of the established emergency management team headed by Ted Williams who resigned as a result thereof.

At the very least, this is a duplication of efforts, a waste of taxpayer funds and an open invitation for disaster, given the documented history of the sheriff's office's unwillingness to engage in cross agency collaborative efforts.

As an elderly resident and landowner in Grant County, living remotely, I am keenly interested in a capable, willing and impartial emergency response. A power grab is woefully out of place here, as is territorial expansionism at the cost of the county's most vulnerable, in the case of COVID-19 virus, the elderly.

I urge you to reverse the appointment of Deputy Dobler and the creation of a new task force and return to the status quo, hoping Mr. Williams will reconsider his resignation.

Vega Nunez
Ritter



WHERE TO WRITE

GRANT COUNTY

- **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
- **Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: toccc1862@centurylink.net.
- **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net
- **John Day** — 450 E. Main St., John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.
- **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.
- **Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-934-2025. Email: cityofmonument@centurytel.net.

- **Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-932-4222. Email: cmtv@ortelco.net.
 - **Prairie City** — P.O. Box 370, Prairie City 97869. Phone: 541-820-3605. Fax: 820-3566. Email: pchall@ortelco.net.
 - **Seneca** — P.O. Box 208, Seneca 97873. Phone and fax: 541-542-2161. Email: senecaoregon@gmail.com.
- SALEM**
- **Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: governor.state.or.us/governor.html.
 - **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
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Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

- Publisher.....Chris Rush, crush@emediagroup.com
- Editor & General Manager.....Sean Hart, editor@bmeagle.com
- Reporter.....Rudy Diaz, rudy@bmeagle.com
- Reporter.....Steven Mitchell, steven@bmeagle.com
- Sports.....sports@bmeagle.com
- Marketing Rep.....Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
- Administrative Assistant.....Christy Smith, office@bmeagle.com
- Office Assistant.....Alixandra Hand, office@bmeagle.com

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