

# Time to heed government warnings

Eastern Oregonians are typically an independent bunch who take great pride in overcoming challenges, from natural disasters to forest fires to economic downturns.

Our independence is a hallmark of a great culture, and it is one that resents outside interference or government overreach. We carry a muted skepticism of government, a sentiment rooted in the very foundations of our nation.

We now face a steep challenge regarding the COVID-19 virus, and now is the time we must put away any inherent distrust of government and start listening to what our elected and appointed leaders and health officials are telling us.

The COVID-19 virus isn't a conspiracy. It isn't make believe. It isn't part of some bizarre political plot to unseat the president. And it isn't "just like the flu."

For one, the common influenza virus isn't exactly a walk in the park if you happen to come down with it. It kills thousands of people every year and puts healthy people out of action for weeks. Comparing COVID-19 to influenza isn't really any comparison at all.

True, statistics show now that most of us, if we happen to fall victim to COVID-19, will suffer mild symptoms. That fact, though, has never really been the point. The COVID-19 virus is very

dangerous to older folks and those with underlying health conditions. At the same time, the American medical system isn't geared to take on a massive pandemic. That's been the point all along — there might not be health care available for those who need it.

The measures instituted by the government and by states, including Oregon, are methods to save the lives of people that are the most vulnerable.

The closing down of restaurants and social distancing measures are to protect everyone, but especially those who are the most vulnerable.

That is why we all must pay very close attention to what our president is telling us and what his deputies are saying. We can't shrug this off as just another common malady, like a head cold, because it's not.

If we can mitigate the spread of this virus then we can buy ourselves time to develop a vaccine or treatment without an undue loss of life. If we ignore the guidance from our governor and our president, then we are simply putting other people's lives — and maybe even our own — in danger. It is really that simple.

Our independence is a treasured piece of our culture. Now, though, is the time for all to heed the warnings and guidance from our government.



## GUEST COMMENT

# SILVER LININGS

By Rose Howe

This morning, as I sit in my easy chair, a shawl wrapped around my shoulders to ward off the chill that pervades the house, my thoughts are on the world at large. The fire is starting to take hold in the wood stove and the kettle will soon be boiling for the much needed first cup of tea of the day. Normally, I wake up and the first thing I feel is gratitude and thankfulness for having a new day stretching out before me. Today I woke up and still felt a sense of gratitude, but also a desire to write and share my thoughts on the situation that faces the entire world at this time.

COVID-19, a wee little bug, that is creating havoc wherever it surfaces. Striking terror in some, nonchalance in others but still evoking strong feelings as it makes its way relentlessly across the globe. The news media, for the most part, seems to add fuel to the fire by continually painting a doom and gloom picture along with their reporting. A picture that often minimalizes the good things coming out of this crisis and emphasizes the negative. Hard as it may be, one can always find a silver lining if one looks for it.

Living in a small community, a community that has a large population of older citizens that are considered very vulnerable to this new virus, it cannot help but create worry and stress. Most folk living in the countryside tend to keep their pantries well stocked, their freezers often chockablock with frozen meats, veggies and fruit. That is often in part to living miles from a large city and the huge department stores city folk are used to having close by. However, our little family owned grocery shops do a wonderful job of keeping us local villagers well supplied with all manner of goods from fresh veggies to dry goods and much more. Folk in the country tend to be much more self-sufficient than our city counterparts. While many in the big cities

were dashing to the shops to stock up on toilet paper, country folk were feeling thankful for the venison and elk in the freezer, courtesy of hunting season last year!

As the virus spread from country to country, then across the United States, the realization that this relentless bug might — no, would — eventually make its way to Eastern Oregon became a certainty as county after county saw cases pop up. Plans were made by health care facilities such as clinics, hospitals, county health departments and ambulance services to prepare for the worst yet hope for the best. Maybe, just maybe, because we are somewhat isolated, somewhat away from the big cities, our county could be spared for a while. Ah! Wishful thinking!

The Oregon government has done a very good job some might say of keeping its citizens informed of the statewide spread of the virus. Before long, Deschutes County to the west of us and Umatilla County to the north had their first cases. It was creeping closer. The day the Grant County Health Department announced our first confirmed case of COVID-19, local social media lit up like a fireworks display on the Fourth of July! Everyone wanting to know who it was, how had they got it, where had they been, who was next? All of a sudden it was as if common sense flew out the window and mass panic cunningly slipped in and took its place! Neighbor started to look askance at neighbor, rumors started flying like shrapnel through the air — all because of a nasty little bug.

Yes, this is a nasty little bug! An insidious invader of our shores that is wreaking havoc left, right and center. Disrupting our schools, our work environments, in many cases our livelihoods. Small businesses are being devastated; our local restaurants and many little specialty shops may well be forced to close their doors. This is a trying time, yet we are strong and will get through this! My mind firmly holds on to the old

adage, "This too shall pass."

Yesterday, as I was heading home after teaching my EMT class in Spray, I passed numerous campers, trailers, cyclists and other "outsiders" along the road. They were camped at almost all the parks alongside the river. Even a couple of camps were set up on the gravel bars down by our old farm outside of Kimberly, folks no doubt from the big cities, wanting to get away and enjoy our country air. At first, I must admit, a grumbling issued from deep inside me. What were these people doing here? What were they thinking? Do they realize how much they could be straining local resources such as the local grocery shops or if they get sick, the local health care facilities? Then I realized who would not want to get away from the hustle and bustle and stress of the west side of the state at a time like this! It was inevitable our wonderful little piece of heaven would be a balm to their soul.

So during this time of stress and uncertainty, let us think thoughts of good health. Let us face tomorrow with a smile for our friends and neighbors. Oh, and let me add... when someone is sick and we EMTs turn up at their door dressed like we are about to enter a home full of alien invaders sprouting tentacles and covered in contagious slime, please know it is just protocols we have to follow. It does not mean the person we are helping has the dreaded bug; it means we are out there helping folk in their time of need. So give us a smile and thumbs up too as that protective gear is hot to wear!

Spring is here! Blossoms cover the trees in the orchard, bees are on the wing, birds are singing and frog songs fill the evening air. The sun continues to rise and each morning we wake up is a blessing. What will come will come, and we will all get through this. What wonderful little communities we live in out here in the wilds of Eastern Oregon!

Rose Howe is an EMT in Grant County.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 'What is going on in Grant County again?'

**To the Editor:**  
What is going on in Grant County again?  
The four-year experienced emergency coordinator bypassed — why?

Sheriff Palmer suggested emergency meeting of county court — why?

Prior talk between sheriff and county commissioners occurred — when??

"No comment" from Sheriff Palmer. Is this an indication of the transparency his task force will display in handling this emergency?

We would hope The Blue Mountain Eagle will dig deeper to find out what is really going on and monitor closely the emergency response.

Sandy and Mark Murray  
Prairie City

### 'Support computers for all Oregon students'

**To the Editor:**  
It is urgent and imperative to provide for Oregon students' educational needs while protecting their health and that of their teachers and communities. Let's use a 21st century tool to avoid a bleak future for our state's students, both immediately and in the long term.

Internet-connected tablets and/or laptops will allow students to continue to pursue their educational needs. Devices with built-in cameras enable real-time interaction with teachers and other students.

Other states provide their students with tablets and/or laptops and Oregon can too. Already in Crook County, every high school student has a Chromebook and kindergartners have iPads. Students in grades 5-12 in the Sisters School District have district-issued Chromebooks.

What's the cost? Oregon has 588,000 K-12 school children. Chromebooks retail for about \$150. Buying in bulk, cost would be around \$58 million.

Oregon's public colleges and universities educate 162,000 students. A Dell Latitude 5300 retails for \$1,300. The cost of a bulk purchase would be around \$162 million.

The issue of internet access can be significantly addressed via partnership agreements with internet service providers and using smartphones as mobile hotspots.

Providing for at-risk students and those with individual education plans is important. And already hard-working teachers will need support to deliver effective online classes.

Finally, when the current C-19 crisis passes, computers will be well-used in regular and hybrid classrooms.

Please consider urging your state legislators to support computers for all Oregon students.

Kate Marquez  
Klamath Falls

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  - **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
  - **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.
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