

State should reset virus response

Frustration. Confusion. Fear. Anger. Anyone who is paying attention to the COVID-19 pandemic is familiar with these emotions.

When a nation is faced with a tremendous challenge, the actions of federal, state and local governments set the tone for how we as individuals respond.

The new coronavirus is a tremendous challenge. But, rather than uniting Americans against a common enemy (the virus), many government actions have led to division.

Oregon has, in many ways, been a success story when compared to other states. Our hospitals have not been overwhelmed by COVID-19. Cases per 100,000 population are the second lowest in the nation. Death rates are the sixth lowest in the nation.

The unemployment rate in Oregon is in the middle of the pack — 19th highest in the nation — indicating that the state's actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have been effective without disproportionately damaging our economy.

Now, Oregon's new case rate is on a significant downward trend after the spike that began during the December 2020 holidays.

That's all the good news. More frustration, confusion, fear and anger surrounded the state's recent decision to punish Grant County businesses by forcing the county from the lowest risk level to "moderate" because the state's electronic laboratory test reporting system did not work as intended, causing a backlog of previous cases to be reported as occurring all on the same day, skewing the data.

Although state officials knew their system was having problems and knew that older cases from Grant County had not been reported, they used these old cases to justify enacting further restrictions on businesses — despite pleas from our local public health administrator, the county court and our state representative.

Why? It just doesn't make sense.

And then there's the vaccine rollout. Once vaccines began arriving in Ore-

gon, what should have been a well-planned, easy-to-understand vaccination program has become deeply political.

The governor's actions have pitted senior citizens and the medically vulnerable against educators. And now, with the announcement that promised vaccines would be diverted from multiple rural counties to the Portland metro area, there is the appearance of pitting urban versus rural.

Thus, more frustration, confusion, fear and anger.

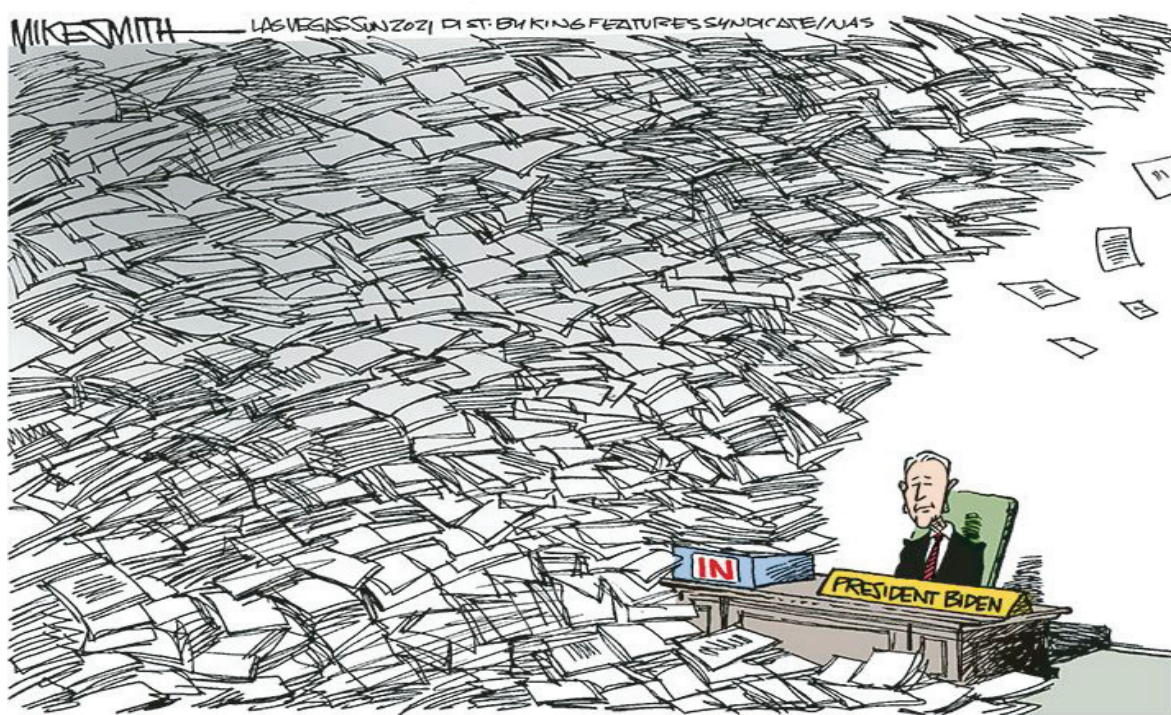
It didn't have to be this way. Oregon should have followed the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice's COVID-19 recommendations, which spelled out in detail how vaccines should be prioritized for vulnerable groups. Doses should be distributed proportionally to counties, based on population — with small tweaks to assure the most vulnerable groups are vaccinated first.

Oregon has thrown this logical and science-based guidance out the window, replacing it with complicated and ever-changing plans. An Oregon COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee was created to ensure the needs of "systemically affected populations, including communities of color" were met, yet educators — a group that is 89% white, according to the 2020 Oregon Educator Equity Report — were moved ahead of senior citizens and affected communities of color.

Rural Morrow County — population 11,600 — vaccinated all health care providers and was ready to vaccinate educators and senior citizens per state recommendations last week, when it was told that further doses destined for the county were being sent to the Portland metro area instead. More frustration, confusion, fear and anger.

It's time for Oregon to hit the reset button. When it comes to counting cases with business restrictions on the line, use the actual date of the positive tests. When it comes to vaccine rollout, stick to ACIP guidance and send out the vaccine to counties based on population.

Take the politics out of it.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'If people?'

To the Editor:

This letter is in response to part of an article in the Jan. 27 Eagle titled, "Natural Resources Advisory Committee elects new chairman." The article was informative and to the point, but a statement in the latter section of it has caused me some concern: the statement, "If people can get it through their heads..."

The subject was addressing fire hazard fuels and who was responsible for the problem. Just a few simple, and I thought well-known, facts: First, there is a total of 62,963,610 acres in the state of Oregon. The national forests lay claim to 16,000,000 of those acres and the Bureau of Land Management to another 15,700,000 acres. Now simple math, without including all the other federal and state agencies, show that just between these two agencies very near 50% of our great state is under government control.

Now what "people" are we talking about being responsible for overstocked fuel supplies? Presently, I can look out my window and see 100 acres of juniper, sage brush, toad flax and medusahead, knapweed, surprisingly all on BLM land.

I understand that these agencies are under a mountain of regulations and restrictions. Several years ago, I requested permission to cut a dozen juniper trees on the BLM we border to help with protecting my property from fire. I was told that I could not because that would require an environmental impact study.

This letter is not directed at any one person or even organization, but please let it be known that the "people" are not the sole source of the problem of overstocked fuels!

In closing I would like to add the BLM's mission statement: "The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."

Richard Smarr
Dayville

Bad moon on the rise, No. 2

To the Editor:

Following up on my last letter, let's say you are driving around in your \$50,000 car/pickup/ATV while texting. OK. Why not swing into a place that sells the Blue Mountain Eagle? Now go park and enjoy the latest happenings. First of all, my predictions are as follows. No. 1, within one to two years, President Biden will be declared mentally unable to serve and the vice president will step in. I truly believe that this was the plan to begin with. No. 2, the new administration will launch the new Green Deal program. This will halt coal production and severely curtail oil production. The domino effect will limit production of electricity (especially in the East) and somewhat all over the U.S. No. 3, the borders will be open to anyone who desires to enter (better brush up on your Spanish) and crime numbers will skyrocket. Amnesty will be granted to all illegal aliens to include many dead ones. That sounds similar to our vote counting. No. 4, the stock market will crash as it did when Obama took over. The feds will raise interest rates to try and prevent inflation. Due to the fact that many people will lose their homes, the housing market will take a dive. You may be able to get a free home with a fill-up since gas will approach \$8 a gallon. Next comes the depression as it did in the 1930s. I predict this time it will be much worse. That is about it as far as my predictions. I may be

wrong, but that is doubtful because my wife claims that I'm the smartest man in the universe. OK. Maybe I exaggerated a little bit. But still, I'm the smartest man at 343 S. McHaley St. Next, here is a few things you can do to prepare for my predictions. No. 1, stock up on nonperishable food (canned and dried) and try to stay away from items that require refrigeration because power may be limited or not at all for long periods of time. No. 2, keep plenty of flashlight batteries on hand.

Ed Butler
Prairie City

Fair elections are our history

To the Editor:

The Blue Mountain Eagle has featured election workers in the past, and in light of the attacks on the integrity of the vote in this nation, most recently stunningly equated with Joseph Stalin's murderous regime in a letter to the Blue Mountain Eagle, these articles must be re-visited. On Nov. 6, 2020, in the Eagle, Lenora Thomason, who has been a Grant County election committee member for 40 years and served in November 2020 despite the risk to her health, was quoted as saying, "If all of them people would work on the election once, they would see that everything is on the up and up." In another article, first published Nov. 3, 2020, and then updated Nov. 6, "Out of the Past: Nov. 4, 2020," that included a photo of election workers and a local woman handing them her ballot, the Eagle reported:

"From 50 years ago: When citizens exercise their voting franchise, it means work for local election board members all across the country. Three county candidates ran unopposed in Tuesday's balloting. County Commissioner Joe W. Officer of Izee received 1,704 votes, according to unofficial tallies. Mrs. Grace K. Williams, county district attorney, polled 1,556 votes. Running in three of the county's 15 precincts only, Mrs. Betty Dompier of Prairie City received 342 votes for justice of the peace in District No. 2 — Union, Austin and Strawberry Precincts. There were 80 absentee votes cast in the county."

Notably, Grace K. Williams, attorney, was, in 1958, the first woman elected as district attorney in Oregon. That historical result was possible due to a fair election, conducted by a competent county clerk and trained election workers. It is time to stop the slander.

Nancy Nickel
John Day

'It's time to change practices'

To the Editor:

Another threat of litigation against the U.S. Forest Service (front page article "Forest Service Axes 21-inch rule").

Why was the 21-inch rule really put into place by the USFS? Let's hear the truth. Was it forestry science that brought about the rule? No, I believe it was to appease the environmentalists. How has that been working for us? Unhealthy forests that are loaded with so much fuel that, when conditions are right, we have massive destruction of our renewable resources. With property and human life loss. Ask yourself, has this rule and holding the Forest Service hostage in courts been working for you?

Mr. Klavins thinks there are other ways of fixing the Eastside Screens along with this rule.

The Forest Service has alluded to increasing the acreage of controlled

burns, in the last few years, to solve the extra fuel conditions. I wonder, how much carbon particles are being put into the atmosphere helping to increase global warming? The smoke from our 2020 western Oregon fires traveled all the way to Europe and beyond.

Mr. Klavins said the Forest Service cut out an entire objection period. If you read on in the article, Mr. Stephen Baker, a Forest Service spokesman, said the agency held a 30-day public comment period that began Aug. 11. He said they extended the period an additional 30 days.

I took the time to write in to Mr. Shane Jeffries in the Ochoco Supervisor's Office and lodged my objections with sound forestry science behind them.

The last 30 years our renewable national resources have been going down hill and up in smoke. It's time to change practices. Let's watch and see how it works, because it obviously hasn't worked for the past 25 years.

Ken Koser
Prairie City

'Regarding the 21-inch rule'

To the Editor:

The article regarding the 21-inch rule had a few errors and ambiguities that I thought I could clear up to help get the public to better understand what's going on.

1. The new rule defines old trees as over 150 years, not 100. (See the Record of Decision, page 4.)

2. As described in the article a "guideline" allows more flexibility than a "standard." A standard must be followed precisely. A guideline must be followed unless the agency can show that deviation from the guideline is "as effective in achieving the purpose" as implementing it exactly as written. (36 C.F.R. § 219.15(d)(3)). In this case the purpose that the agency must adhere to is "to maintain and/or enhance a diverse array of LOS conditions." LOS stands for "Late and Old Structure."

3. The article states that Klavins said "the Northern Blues Collaborative's support of amending the 21-inch rule "drove a wedge" between members. The Northern Blues Forest Collaborative never formally supported amending the 21-inch rule. The minutes from all the meetings are up on the collaborative's website. Admittedly, some people in the collaborative thought the amendment was a good idea. But some didn't — notably, Klavins himself. Given these diverging views, the collaborative as a whole never took a formal position. But that's the point of a collaborative: to host a forum where people of differing perspectives can hear each other out, and seek mutually agreeable solutions. Where we can't find consensus on action, we seek better mutual understanding. The facts: The collaborative only discussed the proposed amendment on two occasions. In March 2020, just 10 days after the amendment process was officially begun, the Forest Service gave the collaborative an overview presentation. In May 2020 we discussed the reactions to the public science forum that had occurred just days before. It's not been on the agenda since.

I hope that the Blue Mountain Eagle will publish these corrections in the printed edition, and next time someone makes claims about formal collaborative positions, seek comment from the collaborative itself.

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Bend

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USPS 226-340

Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

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PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY BY **EO Media Group**

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER — send address changes to Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845-1187

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