

EDITOR'S DESK

Imagining a post-pandemic world

Remember at the beginning of quarantine, when we used to talk about what we would do when “this is all over,” as if one day we would be in complete lockdown and the next we would be throwing a gigantic party in the streets?



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

That’s not how pandemics work, of course. They slowly fade out over time. But as COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to steadily decrease in the United States to numbers not seen in more than a year, and a growing portion of the population is protected by vaccines, it is worth talking about what pandemic habits we should keep once this is truly “over.”

The first thing I hope we keep is the idea of staying home while sick as much as possible. I think we all know that feeling of frustration when we wake with a tickle in our throat and a snuffle in our nose after noticing someone near us had those same symptoms a couple of days earlier. I cringe now when I think of the times I showed up to the office with a cold when I could have worked from home.

A 2018 report by the Integrated Benefits Institute found that employee illnesses cost U.S. employers about \$530 billion each year. Short-sighted managers who insist employees come in while sick often



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A sign advising of the mask requirement adorns the front door at Neighborhood Books and Gifts in downtown Hermiston.

cause a chain effect that creates an outbreak among multiple workers and customers, all of whom lose productivity in the process. Germs also spread through schools, churches and social groups as people decide it’s not a big deal to show up somewhere nonessential in an obviously contagious state.

Let’s not do that anymore.

In the same vein, I hope we start thinking more about easy ways to slow the spread of illness in our communities. How many times have we all gone to some sort of open house or meeting, for example, and shook hands with everyone there before grabbing a cookie with our unwashed

hands? I won’t complain if in the future it becomes standard practice to keep a bottle of hand sanitizer by the cookie tray.

As much as I’ve heard some people scoff that preventing COVID-19 is as simple as washing your hands, during what has supposedly been a very heightened sense of awareness of germs, I still see people constantly practice bad hygiene habits in public. They sneeze or cough without covering their mouth, wipe their nose with their hand or rub their eyes with the same hands they just used to grab a public door handle.

I hope there is less uncovered sneezing and more hand washing in

the post-pandemic world than in the pre-pandemic one.

Another thing we’ve learned from the pandemic is that for many jobs, you don’t have to be sitting in an office to be working. I’ve missed working in an office, with the camaraderie and mentorship that happens more naturally face to face. I hope that continues after the pandemic. But I also hope that it becomes much more culturally acceptable for people to be able to work from home when their child is sick, or the roads are icy, or a repair person will be stopping by sometime that morning.

It also makes sense to continue some of the increased accessibility that has been provided during the pandemic. I think it’s great how many elected bodies now livestream their meetings on YouTube, where they are then archived and accessible later for people who aren’t able to make it in person. The same goes for streaming concerts and graduations and other events that a grandparent in the next state might want to see.

Most things about the pandemic have been bad, but not all. If you picked up a new hobby, if you cook healthier food now, if you have developed a regular video chat habit with a family member you didn’t talk to as often before, don’t give it up.

When this is all over, it wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing if everything didn’t go back to just how it was before.

COLUMN

Time for dialogue on dam removal issues

Northeast Oregon is home to some of the most rich and fertile farmland in the state, producing products like potatoes, onion, carrots, peas and numerous other variety of crops for consumption here at home and for export around the globe. This region also leads the world in irrigation technologies and water sustainability.



Fred Ziari

The four lower Snake River dams play a vital role in sustaining this corner of the state, and our regional stakeholders have a long history of working together to preserve and enhance local salmon populations. That’s why I was disappointed to learn that after joining the governors of Washington, Idaho and Montana in a collaborative effort to rebuild Columbia Basin salmon, Gov. Kate Brown filed a lawsuit over the federal government’s management of the four lower Snake River dams.

I’ve been involved in the fish versus dams debate for nearly three decades, and lawsuits have gotten us nowhere. The only way forward is through working together toward a collaborative long-term solution. I hope Brown will set aside her lawsuit and work to make the four-state process a success.

The agriculture sector relies on the four lower Snake River dams for hydropower, transportation and irrigation. The dams are a signifi-

cant part of the federal hydropower system, which provides as much as 95% of the clean, reliable and affordable power essential to families, farmers, ranchers and businesses in rural Oregon. According to a recent three-year study of Snake River dams completed by the federal government, removal could result in an energy price hike in rural Oregon of up to 50%, which adds up to several hundred dollars per year for each rural family.

Farm operations and related agriculture industries and manufacturing are the backbone of our Umatilla and Morrow counties’ economy, employing nearly 40% of local residents and producing crops and products that are barged down the Columbia River for export to world markets.

However, the federal study determined that removing the dams would make the Snake River unnavigable for barge traffic, resulting in higher production costs for farmers who would have to transition to rail or truck transport. Under this scenario, freight transportation by rail could increase by as much as 86% — a level that is too high for existing rail capacity.

The transition from barge to surface transportation would also result in more traffic congestion and the need for road and rail infrastructure improvements. Truck and rail transportation create higher emissions per ton than barges, which would result in a net increase in CO2 emissions of approximately 17% — tak-

ing us in the wrong direction as the state is working to meet its clean energy goals.

With an average annual rainfall of less than 8 inches per year, our region is also dependent on the river for local water supply. Removal of four Snake River dams in Washington state would have an especially long-term adverse impact on operations of existing Columbia River pump stations in the lower McNary and John Day pools in Northeast Oregon, as 50 years of sediments will be now deposited in the irrigation intakes downstream. This negative impact is in addition to much more expensive or even nonexistent barging for our products as well as higher energy costs.

Over the last 30 years, the Eastern Oregon irrigation community had a respectful and open dialogue with our past governors (Roberts, Kitzhaber and Kulongsoski) and we ask Gov. Brown to commit to the process by listening and understanding our local agricultural concerns as well as all river stakeholders so that she can develop a collaborative approach to protecting salmon without harming the rural economy.

We are committed to a respectful, open minded and solution-oriented dialogue with Gov. Brown and her staff.

Fred Ziari is an irrigation engineer who for the last 39 years has worked on water management issues in Hermiston and the Pacific Northwest.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Investing in families provides many benefits

After living in Hermiston for 20 years, I have noticed how much our small town has grown in multiple aspects. I have seen Hermiston better their schools, open new businesses and create a community, but I have also seen levels of crime, homelessness and cost of living increase. With President Biden’s proposed American Family Plan, I can see these unwanted characteristics of Hermiston minimize.

Biden’s American Family Plan suggests providing free universal preschool. As I’m sure you all know, preschool is seen as a luxury and not an accessible option for all families. After studying at Oregon State University with a focus on child development, I have seen the positive influence early education has on society. Early childhood education has been seen to positively impact their adulthood in many aspects, such as reducing risky behaviors, achieving school readiness, and better employment outcomes.

In addition to universal preschool, Biden also introduces the idea of extending tax cuts that will benefit a vast majority of the Hermiston population. It also supports the idea of providing direct support to children and families. These two ideas will decrease the homelessness rates in Hermiston as well as help with the costs of living.

In my class on family policy this term, we have examined how providing direct help does not discourage work as many may assume, but lessens financial stress on individuals. Although these policies may seem a far reach, it is an effort to invest in our families, which will only benefit our community.

Yulaidi Ornelas
Hermiston

Editor’s Note

Do you have a point you’d like to make or an issue you feel strongly about? Submit a letter to the editor or a guest column.



Printed on recycled newspaper

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer’s name and city of residence will be published.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.