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OUR OPINION

Misinformation in the Statehouse

The Ohio House Health Committee took a field trip deep into tinfoil-hat territory Tuesday.

Chief among their guides on this expedition was Dr. Sherri Tenpenny, an osteopathic physician in Middleburg Heights who took the opportunity to spread unhinged theories about coronavirus vaccines. She claimed that vaccines had caused “horrendous side effects,” including death and, somehow, had magnetized those who received them.

“They can put a key on their forehead, it sticks,” she said. “They can put spoons and forks all over them and they can stick, because now we think there’s a metal piece to that. There’s been people who have long suspected that there was some sort of an interface, yet to be defined, an interface, between what’s being injected in these shots and all of the 5G towers.”

She acknowledged that hadn’t been proved.

Of course not. Because it’s not true. These kooky conspiracy theories have been debunked by medical experts far and wide. The vaccines were subjected to rigorous testing before they were deployed. They are safe and effective.

Yet misinformation about the vaccines is so rampant that Ohio Department of Health Chief Medical Officer Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff felt compelled to convene a news conference Monday to dispel some of what were charitably dubbed “myths.” Among them were false claims that vaccines cause infertility or can change human DNA.

“There’s a far-fetched notion floating around on the internet right now that the vaccines contain microchips or other nefarious ingredients that can be used to control you,” Vanderhoff said.

Who comes up with this stuff?

Oh. Wait.

A day later there were Tenpenny and other vaccine opponents spreading nonsense at a hearing on House Bill 248, which would bar people, businesses and organizations from mandating vaccines. It would ban inquiries about vaccination status and outlaw anything approaching a vaccine passport. It would prevent businesses from treating the vaccinated differently from those who aren’t vaccinated.

Even worse, it would extend to all vaccines, not just those that protect against the coronavirus.

It is, in short, a terrible bill.

State Rep. Jennifer Gross, R-West Chester, the bill’s lead sponsor and a nurse, has said she isn’t opposed to vaccines, but wants people to make up their own minds.

“This is not a scientific bill,” Gross said last month.

Obviously.

“This is a freedom bill,” she continued.

The freedom to do what, exactly? Drag the pandemic out even longer? Facilitate the spread of diseases that can be controlled with vaccines?

Then again, Gross has compared the proof of vaccinations that some businesses require of employees and/or customers to the yellow stars that Nazis forced Jews to wear, so her credibility is pretty much nonexistent at this point.

It should go without saying, but the two are nothing alike. A business asking for proof of vaccination is trying to keep its customers and workers safe. The Nazis murdered more than 6 million Jews during the Holocaust.

As bonkers as these conspiracy theories are, far too many people take them seriously, helping explain the vaccine hesitancy that has slowed inoculations to a crawl in Ohio and elsewhere.

As of Wednesday, 46.28 percent of Ohioans had received at least one dose of a vaccine. Lorain County had broken 50 percent, which was better, but still not enough to achieve herd immunity.

Meanwhile, Ohio is struggling to give away roughly 200,000 doses of the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine before they expire on June 23. Lorain County Public Health alone has around 1,300 such doses in its stores.

The vaccination slowdown is bad enough that there is a real possibility the nation might fall short of President Joe Biden’s goal to administer at least one dose to 70 percent of American adults by July 4.

People are still being infected and dying from the coronavirus. Ohio recently passed 20,000 deaths, and things are far worse elsewhere in the world. Then there is the risk of more dangerous variants.

Yet Republicans in the Ohio General Assembly are hosting crackpots and have already given themselves the power to override any health orders Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, might impose to protect the public.

The Ohio Capital Journal reported that after Tuesday’s hearing, the committee’s chairman, state Rep. Scott Lipps, R-Franklin, tried to distance himself from Tenpenny.

“I do believe Rep. Gross requested Dr. Tenpenny to speak, and she got a little off balance, I think she got a little outside the lines of what we were intending or hoping to keep her in,” he said. “I hope that didn’t harm her credibility, but I think some committee members walked away with big questions.”

First among those questions should be why they were listening to Tenpenny in the first place.

OPINION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If you need help with rent, reach out to the county

If you or someone you know is struggling financially due to the pandemic, there is help available for you. Our county has secured \$16 million in federal dollars to help residents pay rent and utility bills.

The Emergency Rental Assistance Program is here to help those facing eviction or facing utility shut off. Through the program you can receive up to 12 months of rental assistance. Utility assistance includes natural gas, electric, water, sewer and trash.

If you are unemployed or experienced a financial hardship you could qualify if you make less than \$42,600. A household of four with an income below \$60,800 could also qualify for assistance. Hardships include personal or family experiencing illness, disability or mental health issues. Other hardship qualifications include an increase in childcare costs, forced work closure and an inability to access or get to work.

To learn more about the Emergency Rental Assistance Program contact the Lorain County Department of Job & Family Services at (440) 284-4423 or email rentalassistance@jfs.ohio.gov.

MATT LUNDY
Avon Lake

Matt Lundy, a Democrat, is a Lorain County commissioner.

North Ridgeville is the heart of county Republicanism

I want to thank Lorain County Republican Chairman David Arredondo for his recent letter to the editor, in which he described the current state of our county Republican Party.

Alas, he forgot to list North Ridgeville as one of the party’s seven areas. In my opinion, North Ridgeville is ground zero for our county party.

North Ridgeville enjoys a supermajority of Republicans on City Council and also is the home of current Republican officeholders Mayor Kevin Corcoran, county Commissioner Michelle Hung, county Recorder Mike Doran, state Sen. Nathan Manning and state Rep. Gayle Manning, along with many other distinguished Republicans who have served in the past.

Our Republican Club, a club that has been active for many, many years, meets

the fourth Tuesday of the month, but is currently recessed for the summer months. Visit our booth at the Corn Festival or contact the club president, Martin DeVries at m.devries@mail.com for more information.

ROSEANNE JOHNSON
North Ridgeville

Roseanne Johnson is area chairwoman of the North Ridgeville Republican Party.

Anti-vaccine bill has no place in the Ohio legislature

The Ohio Capital Journal reported that “House Bill 248, co-sponsored by 16 House Republicans, would prohibit any of the following institutions from mandating, incentivizing, or “otherwise requesting” their employees, customers or students get vaccinated: businesses, hospitals, nursing homes, colleges, day-care centers, and insurers.”

This is a total waste of legislators’ collective time and effort, not to mention a waste of our tax dollars.

Why do statehouse Republicans want to meddle in businesses’ and individuals’ health choices? I thought the Republican Party was the small and limited government party?

Please let your state legislator know your opinion of this proposed legislation: A solution in search of a problem.

J.D. MERCER
Avon Lake

We must all fight to protect voting rights in America

U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., believes by voting against the For the People Act, which would enact federal voting rights, he is saving our democracy. In March, House Democrats approved this legislation without Republican support. In an op-ed he wrote, “I believe that partisan voting legislation will destroy the already weakening binds of our democracy, and for that reason, I will vote against the For the People Act.”

The problem with his logic is that individual states are already passing voting regulations on a partisan basis. States whose legislatures are Republican controlled have passed bills that limit the ability of many people to vote easily. In an effort to limit Democratic votes, they have decreased voting sites, ballot drop

boxes and voting hours. They have also made it more difficult to vote by mail. None of these actions makes voting more secure, as there is no verifiable proof of widespread voting fraud caused by these practices.

The destruction of our democracy does not have to occur just at the national level, as with the attempted insurrection on Jan. 6. It can insidiously happen more quietly at the state level, one state at a time, without our realizing what we have lost until it is too late. The first steps in the demise of our country have already taken place in Georgia and Texas.

Contact Manchin and U.S. Sen. Portman, R-Cincinnati, and your state senators and representatives to express support for voting rights, and vote against any politician who approved suppression of them.

KAREN MANNING
Medina

Chestnut Commons fight comes down to economics

I do not know Dan Reaser, and have never met him, so anything said here is just my opinion formed by the different articles about him over the years.

Why would anyone donate land for a roadway to ease traffic problems unless the greater good would be coming back to him? I suppose a civic-minded person with the intention of bettering the community might. I could also understand a person thinking that his donation might prove beneficial to himself over time. The city in this case could have been duped by the so-called generosity of the donor. His plan to develop both sides of the road makes sense to me, but will that result in the original plan of reducing Chestnut Commons traffic, or will it just move and add congestion at the other end?

It seems Reaser wants the city to make his lots ready for the new businesses that are going to flock in there, kind of like the way they did on the Gateway Road project. If someone wants to develop and move to the location then let them also help with the land development costs. I do think it is pretty obvious that this was for Reaser and only Reaser. It’s kind of like the “gift horse” theory.

DOUG ALLEN
Elyria

Joe Manchin should reconsider his opposition to the For the People Act

Dear Sen. Joe Manchin:

It has only been 56 years.

As Americans, we are pleased to call ourselves one of the world’s oldest democracies. We are actually one of the world’s newest. Democracy, after all, is government shaped by the will of the people. But until 1920, roughly half the people were not allowed to vote, disqualified by dint of gender. And until 1965 — 56 years ago — roughly 10 percent were restricted by color of skin.

So American democracy is not even as old as you are. Its newness — its recentness — is invoked here to help you understand the trepidation with which some of us regard the dozens of bills being pondered and passed in Republican-led statehouses across the country with the intention and certain effect of keeping us from voting. As part of a demographic whose access to that right has never been impeded, perhaps you find it difficult to appreciate the profound distress and sense of historical déjà vu some of us are now processing.

To say nothing of our equally profound disappointment in those who could defend us choosing instead to let us down, failing to meet the moment with the urgency it requires. Sadly, that’s a category into which you fall.

“The right to vote is fundamental to our American democracy,” you wrote in a



LEONARD PITTS

Sunday op-ed in the Charleston Gazette-Mail of West Virginia. You then spent a thousand words explaining why you will not protect this right by supporting the For the People Act, which would end partisan gerrymandering, punish those who try to intimidate voters and streamline voter registration, among other urgently needed reforms. Your argument boils down to: I won’t vote for the bill because it doesn’t have bipartisan support. You lodge no other complaint against it.

But your reasoning is nonsensical. Would you decline to support a For the Chickens Act solely because the foxes refused to sign on?

Yes, you did signal a willingness to vote for a companion bill, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would repair the Voting Rights Act that was gutted by the Supreme Court in 2013. But even here, your support is conditioned upon Republican buy-in; you have flatly ruled out ending — or even carving out a one-time exemption from — the filibuster, a parliamentary procedure that allows a minority party to block legisla-

tion the majority approves.

There has been much speculation on why you’re doing this. Some say you enjoy the attention. Some say you’re not very smart. But the scariest idea is that you are sincere, that you truly believe this radical (and unrequested) commitment to bipartisanship is what’s best. It’s entirely possible, however, to be sincere and yet, sincerely wrong.

And you are. In effect, you ask those of us who face the loss of our voting rights to trust you as you wager those rights on Republican integrity and good faith. But as recent years have proven ad nauseam, those are qualities your colleagues have in vanishingly short supply.

Moreover, if America is what America says, then my ballot is not yours to gamble with. Bipartisanship is very important, yes, but the right to vote is sacred — “fundamental,” to use your word. When you prioritize the former above the latter, you echo all the other times this country has made us the fulcrum of its moral compromises, deemed something else to be of more importance than our rights as human beings.

Sir, the error you are making is seismic and potentially tragic. Reconsider, please.

Leonard Pitts Jr. is a columnist for the Miami Herald, 3511 NW 91st Ave., Miami, Fla., 33172. Readers may contact him via email at lpitts@miamiherald.com.