

# Opinion

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## Letters to the editor

### County broke faith over Martinez's old jail

The Architectural Preservation Foundation of Contra Costa County has worked with the city of Martinez and Contra Costa County for four years to create a viable plan that would preserve the historic 1903 jail, a structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In January, the foundation was advised that the promised preservation efforts were still in place. Then, in early February, discussions were unilaterally halted by the county with no explanation. At the next Board of Supervisors meeting they voted to accept bids for the jail's demolition after county staff erroneously reported "there was no viable proposal presented." County government is not acting in good faith or with transparency.

The county has neglected this historic structure into a contrived demolition. They're depriving future generations of history. The Board of Supervisors needs to come clean about what's going on here.

— Annette Nunez, Architectural Preservation Foundation of Contra Costa County, Martinez

### Supervisor must keep promise on solar policy

Last fall David Haubert was in a tight race with Vinnie Bacon for District 1 supervisor. Bacon unequivocally opposed the massive Aramis industrial solar project proposed for land restricted to agricultural uses in North Livermore Valley unless Alameda County first adopted a comprehensive solar policy.

Bacon's message resonated with voters. Haubert responded by copying Bacon's position. Haubert won and recently voted to approve the Aramis project. The project is a visual assault on North Livermore Valley, irreversibly destroying North Livermore's scenic corridor.

Countless persons over the past 50 years sought to preserve the beautiful vistas, open space and wildlife habitat of east Alameda County, safeguarding it for future generations. With his vote in favor of the Aramis project, Haubert is ushering in the destruction of the remaining open space and agricultural land of Alameda County. David Haubert needs to uphold his promise of a solar policy before destroying the Tri-Valley.

— Susan Springer, Livermore

### State should race to install speed cameras

Re: "New push for speed cameras in California" (Page A1, March 16):

Anyone who has driven the motorways in England knows that speed cameras work. They are every couple of miles on the motorways. We spent six weeks in Great Britain driving the motorways (M roads) and not once did we see a speeder pass us. On the secondary roads (A roads) we sure saw speeders, but there are no speed cameras on those roads that we saw.

California should embrace these great devices for manag-

ing speeders. We should start with them on the freeways only. This way there would be no argument about "revenue generation" for local government. I strongly suggest we put the first ones on the Highway 4 "race-track" from Pittsburg to Oakley where 80-plus mph is common.

— Michael Stewart, Oakley

### State health care offers savings, choice

On March 14, Cynthia Earl wrote that California is incapable of running health care and she opposes Assembly Bill 1400, the California Guaranteed Health Care for All Act ("State incapable of running health care," Page A12, March 14).

She expresses fear that she will lose her Kaiser health care. There is nothing in AB 1400 that would prevent Kaiser from being a provider of health care. Kaiser, which is an excellent provider of health care, also operates as an insurance company. It is only in its capacity as an insurance company that Kaiser would be affected by AB 1400. Californians will still be able to choose their doctors.

Federal Medicare has proved that huge amounts of money can be saved by having one entity administer health care funds. As a taxpayer who wants our state to save money and get health care to everyone, I encourage support of AB 1400.

— Jonee Grassi, Richmond

### Don't scapegoat solar for high PG&E rates

"Here's why your PG&E bill is set to get higher" (Page C7, March 13) partially blames rooftop solar for high bills: "While solar users generate power that decreases their bills, they still rely on the state's electric grid for much of their power consumption — without paying for its fixed costs like others do." This is twisted logic.

Rooftop solar generates energy locally, not from far away through vulnerable, expensive, wildfire-causing transmission lines. It greatly reduces the need for transmission lines and other fixed costs. Many studies show this, including one this month in Minnesota, where there's far less sunshine than in California. Rooftop solar is great for energy resilience, great for the climate and saves solar owners money. It does decrease PG&E revenue, so we repeatedly see false claims against it. We need much more rooftop solar along with incentives to put it on every roof.

— Doug McKenzie, Berkeley

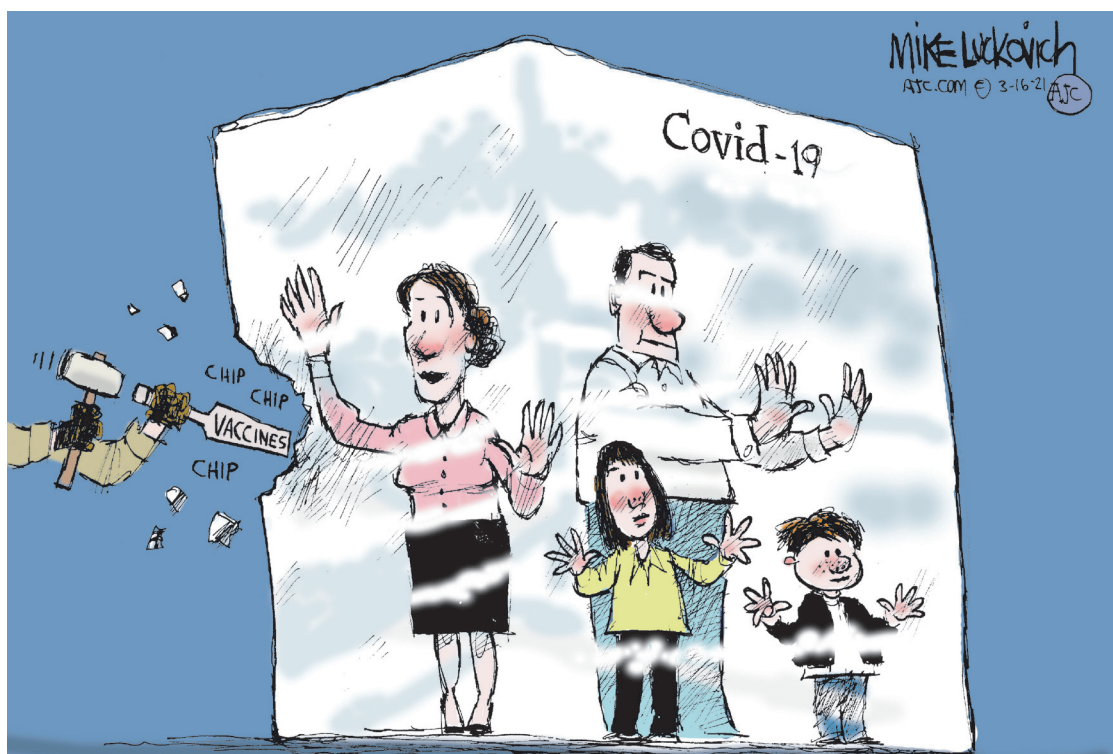
### Bill would save residents harmed by oil drilling

Right now, nearly 7.5 million Californians live within one mile of an active oil or gas well. Low-income communities and communities of color face disproportionate health and safety impacts.

It's time to pass SB 467, a new bill that bans dangerous drilling practices and institutes commonsense health and safety setbacks in California.

— Carol Crooks, Oakland

## Cartoonist's view



MIKE LUCKOVICH — ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

## LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

# Newsom's COVID fibs should face scrutiny with actual data

It's bad enough that Gov. Gavin Newsom tells politically motivated whoppers about California's coronavirus success. It's appalling that his administration endangers lives by blocking release of data needed to analyze the state's response.

Lack of transparency has been a Newsom hallmark during the pandemic. Oh sure, we get daily reports from the state Department of Health on the number of cases and deaths. So when the governor claims he's running "the most robust vaccination program in the country," we know that's bogus — that California ranks 43rd of 50 states for the percentage of residents fully vaccinated.

But the more complex questions focus around the administration's decisions on shutdowns and reopenings. To be sure, Newsom and health officials had to take tough and quick action with little information when the pandemic arrived. But, in the ensuing weeks and months, those decisions should have been publicly tested against the emerging numbers so rules could be adjusted accordingly.

That didn't happen. Health experts and journalists who sought data to analyze the efficacy of Newsom's pandemic response were repeatedly blocked. A key obstacle was Newsom's health secretary, Dr. Mark Ghaly, who champions the governor's COVID-19 response and hinders outside analysis of its effectiveness.

When health experts from Stanford, UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC San Francisco and UC San Diego in June filed a formal request for data, Ghaly refused, citing confidentiality. Never mind that the health experts were seeking records without identifying information.

Ghaly's bogus argument is the same one Alameda County tried



Daniel Borenstein

to pawn when this news organization sought similar data — an argument that a local judge rejected but that has yet to be challenged for the statewide numbers.

It's long past time to release the data so that Californians can know whether, for example, the lockdowns were warranted, or essential workers were properly classified and provided adequate health protections.

To pry the statistics loose, state Sen. Steve Glazer, D-Orinda, has introduced Senate Bill 744, which would require counties and the state collect meaningful data and make it publicly available. Legislators should promptly pass it and force the governor to stop giving lip service to transparency.

Expect screaming from county health officials around the state and Ghaly, who will try to hide behind federal privacy requirements to block meaningful analysis of their coronavirus responses. But Glazer's bill was crafted to ensure that patient privacy would be protected. He and the researchers are seeking release of anonymous data about cases — such as occupation, living conditions, health factors and outcome — without any personal identification.

Why does this data matter? So we can save lives.

"Policymakers and the public are largely flying blind about the spread of the disease, relying on guesswork and intuition when science should be leading the way, and leaving essential workers and vulnerable individuals at greater risk," according to Glazer's summary of his bill.

As we've come to understand, some of the biggest coronavirus outbreaks have been in low-income areas, especially Latino households, where people are living in close quarters. Dr. Ra-

jiv Bhatia, assistant professor of medicine at Stanford and former deputy health officer for San Francisco, says the transmission of the virus into those households came largely from the workplace, from people who were classified as essential workers.

The data would show which jobs are particularly troublesome and help determine whether sufficient steps are being taken to protect the workers. And it might trigger a reevaluation of whether the reopening risk is worth it for some professions.

For example, some questioned early on why Newsom quickly reopened construction job sites. His administration insisted doing so would not endanger worker safety. It was a politically driven decision with no data provided to support it.

Some evidence suggests that keeping builders operating was dangerous. Santa Clara County early on found outbreaks at a dozen construction sites. And one community group in heavily Latino East Oakland found that 68% of construction workers it tested on its own had COVID-19.

There was significant early focus nationally on meatpacking plants because the number of cases was so large that it couldn't be ignored. But locally, after the Tesla automotive plant in Fremont was allowed to reopen, more than 400 coronavirus cases were reported. We only learned that months later from the Alameda County data ordered released.

This is the sort of data that Newsom, Ghaly and all the county health officers should have been collecting statewide and making publicly available for the past year. It should not take legislation like Glazer's, but that seems the only alternative.

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## MENTAL HEALTH

# COVID isolation challenging those with psychiatric issues

By Jack Bragen

The challenges brought about by the coronavirus pandemic have tested the mettle of millions of Americans. We face the disease itself with its recent variants. And we face an economy in which many jobs have been on hiatus or have disappeared entirely due to business closures.

We hope to solve the pandemic but the virus keeps mutating into new strains on which the current vaccines might not work as effectively. Times of uncertainty like this only come about once or twice in most people's lifetimes.

The threat and the hardships posed by the virus only compound the troubles of people with psychiatric issues. When

the pandemic hit, our lives, already hard, became harder.

The shutdowns have added more holes in the supposed safety net. Government and social service agencies on which we rely as lifelines have radically restricted their services. Many agencies and organizations have become almost non-accessible.

Agencies have eliminated nearly all in-person contact and have restricted communications to phone and internet. However, some of these same agencies have changed their phone systems making it much harder to reach anyone. In the not so distant past, consumers could reach people by dialing an extension number. We could also generally reach a live receptionist during normal business hours. This belongs to

the past.

Concerning internet contacts, the door is open a bit more. Many mental health service providers offer Zoom meetings. However, if you don't have working computer equipment, you are left with very few options to get help.

People with mental illness are highly reliant on social service agencies. When these agencies become less accessible, it harms us. I personally am dealing with a great deal of depression. This could be partly osmosis since people in general are having a hard time. And it could partly be caused by the increased difficulties getting various forms of help.

During these times, people are being expected to have a greater degree of resiliency and self-reliance. If we can't come

up with that, we face consequences such as loss of housing and/or income benefits. Or, with the extra expenses of masks and delivered items, the increased likelihood of going overbudget. For people who live on disability, becoming overdrawn is not an option. The expense incurred in an overdraft for those who do not have family to help fix a crisis could lead to instant homelessness.

We've been expected to shelter in place. This concept can be frightening. It conjures up ideas about "doomsday." While a doomsday movie could be entertaining, anything that remotely resembles it in real life will bring about far worse symptoms to anyone who suffers from psychosis.

The difficulty of not being able to see family members in

person has magnified emotional impact on people with mental illness. It is easy to underestimate the effect of this.

I, for one, really miss family gatherings. They were often the only way I had of seeing many relatives. When you have parents and siblings who are either getting older or moving on with their lives, you want to see them. But you can't see them because you might carry COVID-19, which could cause them to become deathly ill.

These times are some of the most challenging that human beings have seen. And if you are mentally ill and can get through these times in one piece, it says a lot.

Jack Bragen is a fiction, commentary and self-help author who lives in Martinez.

**Letters to the editor:** Letters of up to 150 words should be submitted online at [www.eastbaytimes.com/letters-to-the-editor](http://www.eastbaytimes.com/letters-to-the-editor).

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