

The Register-Guard

Opinion

Guest View: Police brutality, COVID-19 and climate change

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Posted Jun 6, 2020 at 12:01 AM

Following the unjust deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, people across the nation have taken to the streets to voice their grief and outrage. In Eugene, thousands gathered to protest the racial disparities and police brutality affecting black communities. As we come together to show our solidarity in addressing these injustices, public-health officials have issued a warning to be prepared for a second wave of COVID-19 cases to spread throughout the country. This is an extremely important issue to take into account for those supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, especially those who identify with the black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) community.

According to the Center for Disease Control, the percentage of African Americans who have been hospitalized for COVID-19 is almost two times higher than that of white populations. Latinx populations and Native Americans also have more cases per capita compared to whites. The numbers vary due to a lack of data and effective response from the federal government.

Communities that are most vulnerable to COVID-19 also are at an increased risk of being negatively impacted by climate change. The public and mental health of BIPOC communities is closely connected to the health of our environment. Those who experience the worst impacts caused by climate change contribute the least to the problem. In the current public health crisis, recent studies have begun to identify links between air pollution and the number of COVID-19 deaths, highlighting the disproportionate numbers that exist among vulnerable populations.

These disparities are due to historically racist land zoning and management policies, lack of access to health care, environmental inequality and unsafe working conditions.

Instead of addressing the social justice and health crises at hand, the Trump administration is capitalizing on the public's outrage over the killing of unarmed black men and women. He has prioritized the protection of industry and corporate entities' economic gain over the health and well-being of those most affected by COVID-19.

The clean air and water we depend on also has been put on the line, further adding to the negative health impacts on BIPOC communities. The Trump administration has issued a number of environmental rollbacks. He has limited state and tribal authority under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act to regulate water quality and reduced the amount of time needed to review natural gas permits that may affect them. On top of that, air quality regulations are being reduced, giving fossil-fuel industries the green light to produce dirty energy.

To ensure a just recovery from COVID-19, a just transition to a sustainable and healthy future and an end to police brutality and racially charged violence, our elected officials need to support legal efforts to recognize the impacts caused by slavery and racism on legislation that provides the framework for justice, equality and healing.

We the public need to recognize as a collective that the institutions we use to govern ourselves were built on genocide and slavery. As non-white allies, we need to center the voices of those on the front lines of the BLM movement. As a community, we need to keep ourselves safe, connected and stay home.

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