

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

A lottery for shots? Too bad it came to this

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New Mexico is the latest state to offer incentives to people who agree to be vaccinated to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The Vax 2 the Max Sweepstakes offers \$10 million cash prizes and other incentives to persuade the skeptical to receive lifesaving shots. The move makes New Mexico the latest state to use sweeteners in hopes of getting people vaccinated.

In Ohio, GOP Gov. Mike DeWine came up with five weekly drawings of \$1 million to win over people who hadn't signed up, as well as a second drawing for college scholarships

for residents 12 to 17 years old who get vaccinated. Ohio was first, but a number of other states are joining in — attempting to nudge people who, for whatever reason, just haven't received their shots.

More than 51 percent of adults in the U.S. have both doses of their vaccines, with another 62.4 percent on the receiving end of one shot. But that's really not enough, and vaccination rates declined sharply in April. With that troubling history as a backdrop, state governors and others decided people needed an extra push.

In New Mexico, Department of Health figures as of Tuesday showed more than 55 percent of residents had completed their vaccination series — close to the goal of 60 percent to open the state. It's one of the best records in the nation.

But getting to 70 percent or beyond will not be easy, given the politics of vaccination.

The problem is, there should be no politics to this. And that's what's so disconcerting about these incentives. Even in our Casino Nation, getting a vaccination should be part of the compact that comes with being an American (and world) citizen: We're all in this together, and a two-second inoculation is not too high a price to pay.

But clearly, appeals to the public good are beginning to fall on deaf ears.

Which leads us to ...

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's cash sweepstakes will include all who have received vaccinations, though some states limit incentives to recent vaccine receivers. Here, vaccinated folks just have to choose to be involved in the giveaway. To lure in newbies to get the shots, though, a variety of gifts — such as fishing or hunting licenses, in-state travel packages, day-use passes at New Mexico museums or state parks — are being offered.

Opt in, and you are eligible for five weekly drawings that begin in the middle of June, with each weekly drawing awarding one \$250,000 winner in each of the state's four public health regions. That's a cool million a week, with a \$5 million grand prize in early August drawn from the pool of vaccinated New Mexicans who choose to be in the sweepstakes. Fittingly, perhaps, the New Mexico Lottery will conduct the extravaganza (learn more at vax2themaxnm.org/sweepstakes). Here's to the winners, though we would argue those who stuck out their arms without complaint or a nudge got the real prize weeks and months ago.

If a \$10 million investment gets us to 60 percent, 70 percent or 80 percent, it's easy to argue the money is well spent. But in the meantime, perhaps it's worthwhile to consider how we've gone from a nation of Liberty Gardens to one in which a significant portion of the population refuses to sign up for free, lifesaving shots without financial or material incentives. The people who sacrificed their lives overseas during World War II, or grew their own food so our soldiers could eat while fighting in the Pacific and in Europe, must be wondering what happened to their descendants. All of us deserve better than a real-life episode of *The Price Is Right*.