

# Politicians, activists push back on restrictions

By **Jim Cornelius**  
Editor in Chief

Since the reimposition of business closures and restrictions due to a surge in COVID-19 cases in November, a groundswell of resistance has developed among business owners, local politicians and activists.

A dozen mayors and mayors-elect across Oregon created a "Main Street Mayors" coalition that urged small businesses to reopen January 1, despite the state COVID-19 restrictions.

In a press release, the coalition stated that, "Main Street Mayors is supporting members of the coalition operating in counties labeled 'Extreme Risk' who will voluntarily comply with state requirements for 'High Risk' counties starting on January 1, 2021. This will allow restaurants and gyms to open at significantly reduced capacity."

Mayor Stan Pulliam of Sandy has been the point man for the coalition.

"People are packing into malls and grocery chains supporting corporate America, and yet we can't sit down at a locally owned restaurant to support a local business owner and their employees while enjoying a meal with our families in a safe and responsible way," he stated. "The double standards must end."

Cork Cellars Wine Bar & Bistro in Sisters opened on January 1, employing the COVID-19 safety protocols that they had in place before the renewed restrictions were imposed (*see related story, page 1*).

The effort has been promoted and supported by a community organizing activist network titled People's Rights, Oregon 5. The group has been meeting at Aspen Lakes Golf Course in Sisters. Matt Cyrus, whose family owns Aspen Lakes, confirmed that the golf course rents its facilities to the group and told *The Nugget* on December 30 that they had met at Aspen Lakes the previous evening.

The organization's pointman, BJ Soper of Redmond, did not respond to *The Nugget's* phone calls as of press time. Soper has been involved in constitutional rights activism for several years, including taking a group to Burns during the Malheur Wildlife Refuge takeover in 2016. He said at the time that he did not support the takeover led by anti-government activist Ammon Bundy, but he sympathized with the group's frustrations and was outraged by the death of occupier LaVoy Finicum in a shooting by

police along a highway in Eastern Oregon.

Bundy was an originator of the People's Rights network, but Soper recently told Oregon Public Broadcasting that the network's leadership is not centralized and told reporter Emily Cureton in a text that "Ammon has *nothing* to do with Oregon."

People's Rights describes itself on its website ([www.peoplesrightsoregon5.com](http://www.peoplesrightsoregon5.com)) as "People and citizens of the USA that recognize that we have rights, and are willing to unite to defend those rights and each other. We are an inclusive and welcoming group to all people regardless of race, age, nationality, religion, or political beliefs."

The group, which has promoted anti-lockdown "We Will Not Comply" rallies in Central Oregon, is opposed to mask mandates and supports and promotes businesses that have defied state-mandated restrictions. On its website is an "Oregon Business Owners Guide"

(available on this page: [www.peoplesrightsoregon5.com/local-news](http://www.peoplesrightsoregon5.com/local-news)) that argues that:

"There is no statutory law that requires you, your employees, or your customers to wear a mask, get their temperature taken or stay six feet apart. There is no law that requires you to serve your customers outside or reduce the number of people in your business establishment. In fact, if you require your customers to wear a mask or restrict their movement or entry if they are not wearing a mask, you are at risk for violating several federal and state laws."

The growing pushback against restrictions, particularly on the part of local politicians, drew a strong rebuke from Governor Kate Brown, who issued a statement on December 31:

"It's unfortunate and irresponsible that some local politicians are choosing to willfully mislead business

owners into jeopardizing public health and risking fines, instead of working with their communities to help stop the spread of COVID-19 so that we can reopen businesses, schools, and more quickly return to normal life.

"Let me be clear: Local elected officials do not have the authority under Oregon law to disregard my emergency orders or to authorize anyone else to do so. Any businesses that reopen in violation of state risk level requirements for their county will be subject to fines and enforcement.

"Undoubtedly, those same local elected officials who are encouraging businesses to fully reopen and flagrantly disregard public health are unlikely to have the backs of businesses when faced with fines and penalties, nor are they likely to be willing to be held responsible for the public health impacts their actions create." (*See full text of Governor Brown's statement on page 8.*)

Businesses that violate emergency orders are subject to fines, revocation of licenses and potential closure.

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