

Brown

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step. And that’s just how Oregon is tackling this epidemic: piece by piece, day by day.

As we look toward the future — a future where this virus remains a fact of life for months to come — and we focus our energy on building a safer and stronger Oregon, we must lift up our most underserved communities in the process: our rural and tribal communities, as well as our low-income communities and communities of color.

Here is where you come in.

We have the opportunity to come back from this pandemic stronger by lifting up those who have historically been left behind. Because we can only grow stronger as a state if we build a better Oregon for everyone.

This won’t be easy. But as President Teddy Roosevelt put it, “Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

To get you started, I will leave you with three tips for leading a meaningful life:

Number one: Vote. Every few years, we get the chance to overthrow the government — and we do it at the ballot box. Voting is your right as an American, and it’s not available to everyone around the world. So use it. Your vote is your voice, and every voice counts.

Number two: Keep learning. This isn’t the finish line for your education, it’s the launchpad. Learning means exploring new people, exploring new ideas, and listening to contrary viewpoints. Your mind might be changed; you might even find common ground. There is more to be

gained from building bridges than building walls.

Number three: The world is your home, so commit yourself to home improvement. There is no shortage of projects. So, plant trees. Reduce hunger. Build community. Advocate for change. Mentor young people. Recycle. Shine your light into the world.

Class of 2020, you have faced disruptions we never could have imagined even a few months ago. And yet, you have stuck with it. You persisted. And you achieved this important milestone. Take this moment to celebrate everything you have overcome.

The road ahead may twist and turn, but I have faith in you. And so does the entire state of Oregon.

Congratulations Class of 2020. I am so very proud of you.

Appeal Tribune

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Deadlines

News: 4 p.m. Thursday
Letters: 4 p.m. Thursday
Obituaries: 11 a.m. Friday
Display Advertising: 4 p.m. Wednesday
Legals: 3 p.m. Wednesday
Classifieds: 4 p.m. Friday

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Main Statesman Journal publication

Suggested monthly rates:

Monday-Saturday: \$22, \$20 with EZ Pay

Monday-Saturday: \$17.50, \$16 with EZ Pay

Wednesday-Sunday: \$18, \$16 with EZ Pay

Monday-Friday: \$17.50, \$16 with EZ Pay

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Sunday only: \$14, \$12 with EZ Pay

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Published every Wednesday by the Statesman Journal, P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309.

USPS 469-860, Postmaster: Send address changes to Appeal Tribune, P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID: Salem, OR and additional offices.

Send letters to the editor and news releases to sanews@salem.gannett.com.

Pay

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I’ve called as many as 600 times and gotten a busy signal.”

Even with a new phone number set up for applicants to the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, he has called that line 200 or 300 times, only to sit on hold for an hour and a half.

“And then other times you sit on hold for 45 minutes or an hour and it hangs up on you,” Harley said.

National Guard making calls

The acting director of the Oregon Employment Department, David Gerstenfeld, could not say Wednesday, June 10, how many gig or contract workers have actually gotten paid through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, or even how many



The State of Oregon Employment Department in Salem on May 22, 2020. MADELEINE COOK / STATESMAN JOURNAL

people had applied for those benefits.

“As soon as we have that, we will share it,” Gerstenfeld said. “But we weren’t able to get it completed this week.”

Gerstenfeld was able to provide a dollar figure, saying the state has paid out about \$69 million in that type of benefits.

Paul Iarrobino, who is largely self-employed, consulting and producing events in Portland, hasn’t seen a dime of that, ei-

ther. He said his application for benefits has languished in the tax section of the employment agency.

“I feel like I’m in purgatory and then no one can tell me why I’m there,” Iarrobino said.

Part of the issue with gig and self-employed workers, specifically, Gerstenfeld said, is that the state has to verify every calendar quarter that they aren’t eligible for regular unemployment

insurance benefits.

Workers may have applied for those regular benefits early on in the pandemic and gotten rejected. But when the new quarter started, the state now has to check again that they’re not eligible for regular unemployment benefits before shepherding them through the new federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program.

The agency is also dealing with outdated technology and has been working to hire enough people to handle the onslaught of claims.

Volunteers from other state agencies as well as National Guard members are reaching out to applicants to update them on the status of their claims, Gerstenfeld said.

“Volunteers made hundreds of calls yesterday as we train them to reach out to people waiting to hear about the status of their benefits,” Gerstenfeld said. “They’re

jumping in at full speed today to make many more calls. Citizen soldiers and airmen have been trained to provide support and are making outbound calls today.”

The National Guard members are focusing on people waiting for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance.

Gerstenfeld also said that federal and state confidentiality laws prevent him and the agency from issuing broad, public guidance to gig workers about whether they’re considered employees or independent contractors — a designation that in turn could help them understand which program to apply for.

“Unfortunately, it’s something I can’t give a real clear public answer to,” Gerstenfeld said.

Asked whether he was having trouble getting information from rideshare companies Uber and Lyft, Gerstenfeld said again that he couldn’t comment on specific companies.

But if a business hasn’t given the state information or hasn’t been paying unemployment insurance taxes, it’s still possible for workers to get benefits, he said.

“We do sometimes have to wait a certain amount of mandated time to give the business an opportunity to respond to us,” Gerstenfeld said. “But it doesn’t prevent us from making payments if the business doesn’t respond at all.”

Gerstenfeld has been at the helm of the agency for a little over a week, after the ouster of former director Kay Erickson on Sunday, May 31. Gov. Kate Brown asked Erickson to resign.

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Traeger

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that far. Having good competition just really always helps me in every sport.”

She capped her OSAA season with the Class 5A state championship, which she won with a throw of 138-9 at Mt. Hood Community College.

“Three-sport athlete, and totally invested in everything she does,” Silverton track and field coach Erik Cross said. “Between her sophomore and junior year, she progressed as an athlete. She got stronger, and she just figured it out.”

After the OSAA season, Traeger competed in the USATF National Junior Olympic Championships, where she placed first with a throw of 140-3.5 on July 28, 2019.

“I ended up winning that meet, and I think that helped me say in my head, ‘Oh, I can actually do this,’” Traeger said. “I can win national meets



Silverton’s Riley Traeger competes in the 5A girls javelin during the OSAA 5A/6A State Track and Field Meet at Mt. Hood Community College on May 24. AMANDA LOMAN/FOR THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

like this.’ That moment was really big for me.”

Colleges interested in Traeger

Traeger was in talks with three Pac-12 track and field programs —

Oregon, Oregon State and Arizona.

In the end, Oregon checked the most boxes for her, and she decided to become a Duck.

“My very first visit was at Arizona, and I didn’t know what to expect, but I went there and the coach was super awesome. U of O was my second visit, and after going there, I mean it wasn’t a super hard decision, it would be hard to pass up,” Traeger said. “I just think I could be the most successful at Oregon. Being close to home was important to me. I know my dad is just one of those people who is going to try to come to as many meets and support me as much as he can. That would be hard if I was out of state.”

Joining the Ducks’ track tradition

legues,” said Traeger, who doesn’t know yet what she’ll study, but she’s leaning toward either business or law. “I think that’s awesome how if I were to go to nationals at some point, I would have such a big group most likely. They work so hard, and they are so supportive of each other.”

The legends of the past called historic Hayward Field home, but now there is a new Hayward Field on campus.

Due to the pandemic, the new venue has not yet been used, which gives Traeger an opportunity to be on the first Ducks team to call it home.

“I can’t wait. I’ve been seeing pictures on Instagram and Twitter about the progression,” she said. “I’m just curious to check it all out, and be a part of that, to be in the first group to compete

there is unreal.”

Cross is excited for the opportunity Traeger has with Oregon.

“It’s an incredible program historically, and the facilities that she’ll have access to will just be top notch,” he said. “I just think she’s going into a great situation.”

Traeger’s legacy at Silverton

Wold has known Traeger a long time; he was her teacher in sixth grade, before becoming her basketball coach in high school.

“I got to know her as a 12-year-old, and started to build that relationship, and I’m really grateful for that,” he said. “She’s an unbelievable athlete, ultra-competitive. It’s been fun to watch her mature, grow and kind of channel that competitiveness in the right way, being a senior captain and all-league performer. Really lucky to have her four years in the program.”

Cross agreed that Traeger brought a leadership quality to the teams she competed for at Silverton.

“She was bringing a leadership last year. She had been doing the other throwing events regularly, and she picked those up to benefit the team,” he said. “She was really growing into this leadership role, and on her other teams as well, she was demonstrating that.”

Pete Martini covers high school and college sports for the Statesman Journal. You can contact Pete at pmartini@StatesmanJournal.com, 503-399-6730 and follow @PeteMartiniSJ

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