

**GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ARGUS OBSERVER**  
**Budget plan offers a dose of harsh reality**

An interesting thing happened last week in Salem: The Legislature's chief budget writers released the first draft of the state's spending plan for the next two years — and the plan is built on existing revenue. It doesn't require any tax increases. It sets aside an extra 1 percent for the state's rainy day fund to prepare for a possible economic downturn.

In other words, it's a budget that corresponds to an unusually high degree with reality in Oregon.

Naturally, nobody liked it.

Well, that's not entirely true: Senate Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr., a Republican from Grants Pass, offered praise: "For the first time in my career in the Senate, it is refreshing to get a glimpse at a budget framework that is fiscally responsible and will leave a healthy ending balance."

House Republicans were less impressed, saying the budget draft fails to adequately address rising costs in the state's underfunded Public Employees Retirement System.

State education leaders bemoaned the plan, which includes \$8.9 billion in funding for K-12 schools, an 8 percent increase over the current budget and about \$100 million more than the cost to continue providing current service levels. For higher education, the budget proposes \$3.1 billion in spending, a 7 percent increase over the current budget but 4.4 percent less than the current service levels; higher education leaders said that was unacceptable and would result in tuition increases and program cuts.

The budget from the three co-chairs of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Ways and Means (Rep. Dan Rayfield of Corvallis, Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward of Beaverton and Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose) also seeks to hold the Oregon Health Plan harmless, requiring no changes in eligibility or benefits.

But, aside from K-12 education and the Oregon Health Plan, the plan in general calls for a reduction of about 5 percent in state services.

The irony in the budget is that it foresees a record amount of general fund and lottery revenue for the 2019-21 biennium — and, in fact, the \$23.2 billion budget represents a 10 percent increase over the current biennium. But that isn't enough to keep track with costs, in particular rising PERS premiums and costs associated with the Oregon Health Plan, the state's Medicaid program.

To help deal with those gaps, the budget submitted last year by Gov. Kate Brown calls for finding an additional \$2 billion in the form of new business taxes. But Rayfield said the Ways and Means chairs weren't willing to bet on any new taxes: For starters, he said, there's no guarantee that the Legislature will be able to pass new taxes, and even if it does, the taxes likely would be referred to voters.

"I don't want to belittle the impacts of this budget in any way, shape or form," Rayfield told us. "But we had to create a budget with the resources we had."

The budget from the Ways and Means chairs is meant only as a general framework for state agencies, and doesn't spell out funding levels for specific agency services. The heads of subcommittees now will be tasked with overseeing the budget process for those agencies.

That's an effort Rayfield said will require courage from those subcommittees: In particular, he said, legislators will face a strong temptation to tap into that extra 1 percent the budget seeks to funnel into the state's rainy day fund. Every legislator, he said, "has a pet project. ... People are going to have to make difficult decisions about stuff like that."

But shortchanging that fund may mean additional fiscal calamity when (not if) the economic downturn arrives.



**Protecting the immunity of our community with science-backed policy**

This week, a pivotal component of our state's health is on the line — but it doesn't have to be.

We have the tools to create and sustain a healthy Oregon that protects our children and community by upholding science-backed standards for immunization. Though most Oregonians and U.S. citizens alike support vaccines, our state is one of only 17 that accepts non-medical exemptions for important immunizations.

Because of an increased trend in opting out of immunizations, we've seen the reemergence of highly contagious, preventable diseases. This was exemplified in the recent measles outbreak that made its way to the Portland area and other spots in the Pacific Northwest.

In previous decades, outbreaks like this wouldn't have been noteworthy. Before widespread use of vaccines, measles caused an estimated 2.6 million deaths a year. But as effective use of the measles vaccine increased, it became so rare that measles was declared eliminated from the U.S. in 2000. Now, increasing

non-medical exemptions have reopened the door to measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

But we can do something about it.

Our community can come together with health care professionals and legislators to support health standards that protect all Oregonians. When you choose to forego immunizations for yourself or your kids, it can have unwanted ripple effects on the lives of others around you. For people who can't be vaccinated for medical reasons, others' choices to delay or reject some vaccines entirely is more than just a personal decision. It places them at risk, too.

Infants, individuals who are immunocompromised due to cancer treatment, and other vulnerable populations need our protection from vaccine-preventable diseases. As a nurse and grandmother I am keenly aware of the need to protect these vulnerable populations.

When we dip below the ideal 90-95 percent threshold of people immunized for community immunity, we leave our-



**My Voice ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Cheryl Cosgrove is an occupation RN and a member of the Oregon Nurses Association. MyVoice columns reflect the views of the author only. MyVoice columns should

be 500-700 words. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

selves susceptible to more outbreaks of diseases that can be eradicated — or, like measles, that were previously considered eliminated in the U.S.

Fortunately, measures that uphold evidence-based public health standards are on the horizon. As a nurse, I applaud State Representatives Mitch Greenlick (D), Cheri Helt (R) and Senator Chuck Thomsen (R) for putting public health ahead of politics by introducing House Bill 3063, a bipartisan bill that removes parents' ability to decline required school-age immunizations for reasons other than a child's indicated medical diagnosis. That means an end to non-medical exemptions in Oregon and a big win for our community's immunity safety net.

When we have the ability to prevent disease and suf-

fering for others, it's our responsibility to take action.

My maternal grandmother lived in an era when immunizations weren't readily available. She suffered from polio and it's crippling effects most of her shortened life. She died when my mom was 12, leaving six children without a mother. Her experience was practically unavoidable then. But thanks to safe vaccination standards backed by thorough, long-term research, we can avoid similar tragedies now.

Vaccines are a key part of our communities' health defenses and are critical to ensuring our communities' health now and for future generations.

There are plenty of things we can't control in life, but this isn't one of them.

Immunization is the best bet we have to protect all Oregonians from preventable diseases.

**CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS**

**City of La Grande:** Mayor Steve Clements, City Manager Robert Strope; P.O. Box 670, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-1309; fax 541-963-3333.

**Union County Commissioners:** Donna Beverage, Matt Scarfo and Paul Anderes; 1106 K Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-963-1001; fax 541-963-1079.

**Wallowa County Commissioners:** John Hillock, Todd Nash and Susan Roberts; 101 S. River St., Room 202, Enterprise, OR 97828; 541-426-4543, ext. 11; fax 541-426-0582.

**Elgin City Councilors:** Mayor Allan Duffy, 501 N 11th St., 541-437-1016, mayor@cityofelginor.org; Mary West, 260 N 5th Ave., 541-805-0443, councilor3@cityofelginor.org; Kathy Warren, PO Box 697, 541-786-9611, councilor6@cityofelginor.org; Risa Halgarth, PO Box 525, 541-437-9462, councilor2@cityofelginor.org; Rocky Burgess, 800 N 14th St., PO. Box 854, 541-786-2417, councilor1@cityofelginor.org; David Reed, 1011 Detroit St., PO Box 368; 541-975-3306, councilor4@cityofelginor.org;

Ryan Martin, councilor5@cityofelginor.org

**Enterprise City Councilors:** Mayor Stacey Karvoski, mayorofenterprise@gmail.com; Jenni Word; Dave Elliott; Ashley Sullivan; Micah Agnew; Larry Christman; Chris Pritchard; 541-426-4196; mail to City of Enterprise, 108 N.E. 1st Street, Enterprise, OR 97828

**Imbler City Councilors:** Mayor Mike McLean, Corrine Wilfong, Herman Ortmann, Mark Howell, Rick Vicek, Joan Harding, Jason Berglund; 180

Ruckman Ave.; P.O. Box 40, Imbler OR 97841; 541-534-6095

**Joseph City Councilors:** Mayor Teresa Sajonia; Martin Hamilton; Pearl Strum; Tanya Collier; Michael J Lockhart; Patty Bufford 541-432-3832; P.O. Box 15, Joseph, Oregon 97846; 201 North Main St.; cityofjosephoregon@gmail.com

**La Grande City Councilors:** Mayor Steve Clements, Gary Lillard, Nicole Howard, Corrine Dutto, Mary Ann Miesner, Jim Whitbeck, Justin Rock; through the City Manager's office, 541-962-1309

**SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION**

**SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE**  
NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50  
You can save up to 34% off the single-copy price with home delivery.  
Call **541-963-3161** to subscribe.

Stopped account balances less than \$5 will be refunded upon request.

**Subscription rates per month:**  
By carrier.....\$11.80  
By mail, all other U.S. ....\$15

A division of  
Western Communications Inc.

**THE OBSERVER**  
An independent newspaper founded in 1896  
(USPS 299-260)

The Observer reserves the right to adjust subscription rates by giving prepaid and mail subscribers 30 days notice. Periodicals postage paid at La Grande, Oregon 97850. Published Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (except Dec. 25) by Western Communications Inc., 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

Phone: **541-963-3161**  
Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-422-3110  
Fax: 541-963-7804  
Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com  
Website: www.lagrandeobserver.com  
Street address: 1406 Fifth St., La Grande

**POSTMASTER**  
Send address changes to:  
The Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850  
Periodicals postage paid at:  
La Grande, Oregon 97850

**STAFF**

Regional publisher.....Karrine Brogotti  
Regional audience development director.....Kelli Craft  
Editor.....Cherise Kaechele  
News clerk.....Lisa Lester Kelly  
Sports editor.....Ronald Bond  
Reporter.....Dick Mason  
Reporter.....Francisca Benitez  
Reporter.....Amanda Weisbrod  
Classifieds.....Devi Mathson  
Customer service rep.....Sharon Magnuson

Home delivery advisor.....Amanda Fredrick  
Customer service rep.....Mollie Lynch  
Advertising representative.....Karen Fye  
Advertising representative.....Juli Bloodgood  
Advertising representative.....Amy Horn  
Graphic design supervisor.....Dorothy Kautz  
Graphic design.....Cheryl Christian