

OUR VIEW

Leaders needed on vaccination

Oregon lawmakers have tried at least a couple of times to make it more difficult for parents to avoid vaccinating their children, unfortunately with little success.

And while those who support the idea may face an uphill battle this year when the Legislature meets, they must keep trying.

Gov. Kate Brown, along with state Sen. Herman Baertschiger, R-Grants Pass, killed the 2019 effort to save the massive new business tax bill Democrats wanted so badly.

At least 28 Oregonians came down with measles in 2019, in part because at least three travelers passed through the Portland airport when they were ill. The measles is particularly contagious. The virus can live in the air for two hours, infecting those who pass through or touch surfaces that have been contaminated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Worse, measles can be a killer. In Samoa in late 2019 an outbreak claimed nearly 80 lives in a country where only 31% of the population had been vaccinated. Herd immunity, which generally prevents measles from spreading much, kicks in only when 93% to 95% of a community is vaccinated. Oregon's kindergarten vaccination rate is 93%, right on the ragged edge of real problems should an infected child show up at school. The overall vaccination rate for adults and children is only 78%.

Meanwhile, Beth Crane, who chairs the Oregon Public Health Association's policy committee, noted recently in an article for *The Oregonian* that even without mass outbreaks measles cases cause problems.

A third of those who caught measles here in 2019 spent time in the hospital being treated for serious complications, for one thing. Here's another: Cancer patients, whose immune systems are often weakened by chemotherapy, are at extra risk for the disease, even if they'd been vaccinated earlier.

Crane writes that some 20,000 Oregonians will be diagnosed with cancer this year.

Brown may well hold the key to vaccination legislation in her hand again this year, though she apparently plans to do nothing about the problem, if a statement released Thursday by her press secretary, Charles Boyd, is any indication. "Governor Brown will not be introducing a bill on vaccination during the short February session. However, especially in light of recent outbreaks of measles and other diseases for which effective vaccines exist, she continues to believe vaccination is critically important to the health of all Oregonians, and that parents should make sure their children receive all the vaccinations they need to live healthy lives."

It's a disappointing, but probably not unsurprising, stand from the woman elected to lead Oregonians to better things.



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Delivering 'fresher' news to readers

This first three letters of "news" is "new." This is no coincidence.

The goal of *The Observer* and our fellow newspapers is to bring to you, our readers, information that is new to you.

In many cases this information is about an event that just happened, that is itself "new" — how a public body voted, the outcome of a sporting event or a wildfire that burned only hours before the paper reaches you, for example.

But we also publish stories about things that did not happen so recently, but perhaps you haven't read about before.

That also is news.

The *Observer* since June of 2012 has published three issues per week — Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. But starting the week of Feb. 4, when we move to delivering *The Observer* through U.S. Postal Service, we're shifting our schedule to publish on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

This will affect the freshness, as it were, of the news we bring to you.

On the balance, this move helps us to provide news that is, well, newer. We're going to take advantage of the revised schedule and not deliver the paper a day later. Saturday's paper will get to you Saturday. The same goes for Tuesday's paper and Thursday's paper.

We often cover the Union County Board of Commissioners, La Grande City Council and other governing bodies. The people serving on those are our elected representatives, and they decide how to spend public money, so we try to keep on eye on them.

The county board typically meets Wednesday morning, and La Grande City Council holds most of meetings Wednesday nights, so we don't have coverage of what happened at those public meetings until the Friday paper. The new schedule means we report about what happened at those meetings in the Thursday paper.

The hang-up comes, of course, with the council's night meeting. Depending on the length of the meetings



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK
PHIL WRIGHT

, we may have a shorter account in Thursday's paper; then a more thorough article as a Saturday follow-up. Still, a shorter account is getting to readers a day earlier.

Our new sister publication, the *East Oregonian*, had to make this kind of transition years ago and found a real benefit to delivering a brief meeting story and then providing a deeper look in a follow-up.

Moreover, technology allows us to deliver news all but instantaneously, and we'll continue to take advantage of that.

As a subscriber you have unlimited access to our website — www.lagrandeobserver.com — and we will continue putting news and information there to let you know what's happening in our community. That includes posting stories about city council meetings before the paper copy lands in your box.

We used that approach in covering the La Grande City Council decision in December to allow the Union County Warming Station to open. We broke the news first online the night of Dec. 4, and two days later in the Friday paper we provided a story complete with reactions of people involved. Going forward, we'll follow that model and continue using our website and Facebook page to push information and bring you the latest local high school sports results, regardless of what day they take place.

In other respects, the impending change to Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday issues allows us to pack fresher news into those papers than we can do now.

Here's why: The EO Media Group's press in Pendleton prints *The Observer* the morning of delivery rather than the evening before. So the newsroom aims to finish the paper no later than 9:45 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and

Fridays.

That morning deadline frequently makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for us to gather information from law enforcement and other sources about events that happened the previous day or overnight in time to publish a thorough story — or even any story at all.

Our new evening deadline in large measure does away with that dilemma.

Let's say a snowstorm ices up Interstate 84 and causes a rash of crashes on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday morning. The 9:45 a.m. deadline makes it a serious struggle to put together a story and photo package for that day's issue.

But after we switch to the evening deadline the first week of February, we would have time to assemble a comprehensive report about that storm and get it into an issue you will be reading before the ice has turned to slush.

Storms also happen on Tuesdays and Thursdays, of course.

But for events that happen on days when we don't publish, we'll do just as we do now, and use our digital sites to deliver fresh news.

No doubt, *The Observer* on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays has become part of your routine, as ingrained as your favorite time and place to sip a mug of coffee.

I do hope most of you belong to that group because it means you value *The Observer*. I and the crew here have sincere appreciation for that.

And even minor shifts in routine can be unsettling. Having recently moved to La Grande as a new editor, I get that. But I see more advantages to the coming changes than downsides. We're going to bring you fresher news — even get it into your hands before darkness falls regardless of the season — to enrich that part of your day when you settle down with *The Observer*.

— Phil Wright is the editor of *The Observer*.

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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 EO Media Group, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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

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