



THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



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THURSDAY • June 4, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Armia Jean Shawver of La Grande

Union, Wallowa counties hope to enter Phase 2 this week

■ Union County meets contact tracing requirements, has one active case of COVID-19

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union and Wallowa counties both have formally submitted requests to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown to enter Phase 2 of reopening, and will know Thursday if they are able to.

They are among 28 counties statewide that as of Wednesday had applications for entry into Phase 2 submitted, which were marked “under review” on Oregon.gov.

Counties on Thursday, May 28, received a letter from Brown out-

lining the criteria to request entry into Phase 2, which, if approved, a county can enter after 21 days in Phase 1. Union County officials submitted their application Friday, May 29, to move to Phase 2 at 12:01 a.m. June 5. Wallowa County officials also requested to move into the second phase June 5.

“Union County continues to meet all Phase I prerequisites and as documented in the previously

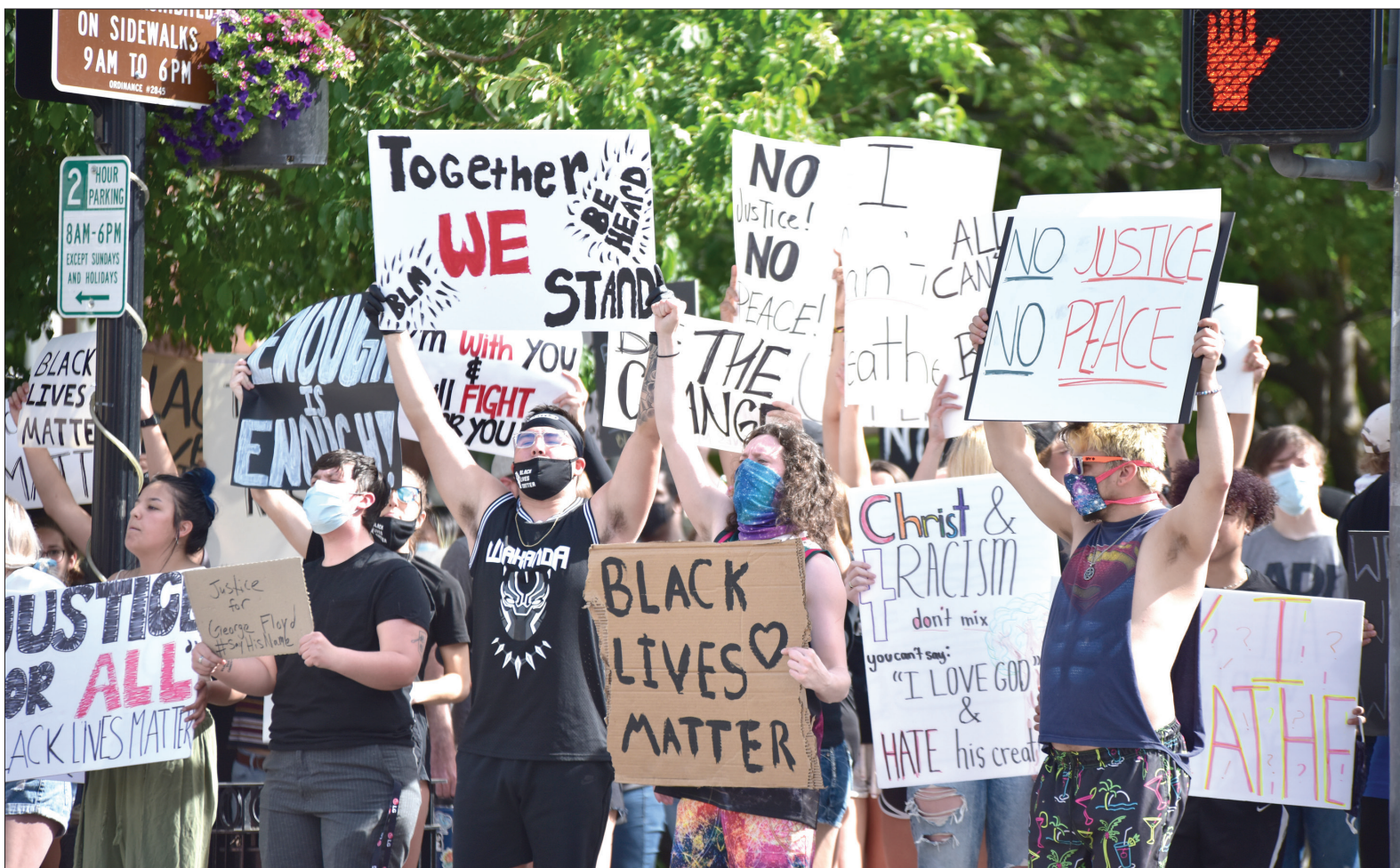
submitted plan is fully capable of meeting additional Phase II criteria,” the county’s letter to Brown stated.

According to Wallowa County’s request, “Wallowa County still meets all the original prerequisites and Wallowa County meets the additional criteria, as set out in your letter (Thursday), required to enter Phase II.”

Union County has seen six

cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. Two of those cases were announced in the initial days after the county entered Phase 1 on May 15, including one the day of, but the county has not seen a new case in more than two weeks, with the last reported case May 18. Currently, the Oregon Health Authority

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Hundreds of individuals — many La Grande residents and Eastern Oregon University students — gathered Tuesday at La Grande City Hall for a racial equality protest. The large group lined most of the block along Adams Avenue and Fourth Street, and at one point many marched to the corner of Island and Adams.

Hundreds protest in La Grande

■ Demonstration goes for hours, remains loud but mostly peaceful

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Hundreds of people gathered Tuesday afternoon outside La Grande City Hall for a racial equality protest, the latest in a string of protests nationwide after the death of George Floyd last week at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis.

The event, which drew people of multiple age groups and ethnicities, was a follow-up to a smaller rally over the weekend. Protesters lined the city hall block along Adams Avenue and Fourth Street, many carrying the signs and chanting the refrains that have rung across the country.

“We’re not doing this as blacks

to be blacks vs. whites. We’re doing this as everybody vs. racists,” said Eastern Oregon University student George Balowski, one of a large throng of EOU students at the event.

Evyv Thayer, a La Grande resident and Arizona State University online student, carried a sign she said was meant to detract from stereotyping.

“There’s a stereotype that every single black is a criminal, and they’re not. There’s a stereotype that all whites are racists, and they’re not. There’s a stereotype that every single cop is bad, and there are good cops,” she said. “It’s the ignorance — when people start looking at the skin tone and focusing on the skin tone. There’s bad people in every race, but when you target one race, you can’t do that.”

Thayer said she grew up in a small town where she experienced racism but also saw people

defend her.

“I was one of two black people. I have seen the racists of racism, but I have also seen a lot of people stand up and speak up for me when I wasn’t able to speak up for me,” she said. “And that’s how I know not every person is racist. I’ve had people stand up for me, put people down because they are coming after me because of the color of my skin.”

She added she cried when she saw the size of the rally, encouraged by the amount of support shown at the protest.

“The amount of diverse people that are here has me so inspired,” she said. “Something is changing. We are watching a revolution happen. People are realizing what is happening in America today, and they are saying enough is enough.”

Balowski gave a similar message of looking past race. “We’re all the same if you put

the racism aside. That’s all it is. I love everyone. It’s so powerful to have all these people behind us, so why would you want to divert that to have less options? We want to get as many people as we can. I love seeing all kinds of faces. If it’s a Mexican rally, I’m out here. If it’s a white rally and my white friends are out here, I’m out here. My white foster parents took me in. They text me every day that, “I appreciate you being strong through this.”

Originally from Detroit, Michigan, where he said he grew up in foster homes before moving to Crane, Balowski said he has felt love in La Grande.

“This city will show you love. You go to the right spots to find it, this city will show you love,” he said. “It’s a red city, you know that, but the college brings the diversity. And the college kids

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Flooding takes a toll on farmers — again

■ Grande Ronde Valley farmers reeling from second major flood in four months

By Dick Mason
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — A cruel encore by Mother Nature is creating turbulence for local farmers.

Many Union County farmers are facing considerable challenges after being struck by a second major flood in four months when heavy rainfall in late May caused the Grande Ronde River and Catherine Creek to jump their banks.

“It has been a double whammy this year,” said Union County farmer Tim Wallender.

Wallender lost between 10 and 15 acres of garbanzo beans and 10 acres of blue grass because of the flooding. Because of road flooding, he couldn’t get to the fields to pump water off his waterlogged acres. He plans to begin pumping water off the land and back into the Grande Ronde River as soon as he can.

It is too late to replant much of the crops he lost with marketable ones, so Wallender is considering his options.

“All I can do is plant a forage crop like oats or barley for my livestock,” Wallender said.

Bill Merrigan, the general manager of Blue Mountain Seeds of Imbler, said the full extent of the flooding in Union County is not known because crop plants are obscuring the standing water on many fields.

“You can’t see it unless you walk right up to it,” Merrigan said.

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Elgin seniors celebrate with parade through town

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

ELGIN — Seniors at Elgin High School received a reverse parade leading up to an original graduation ceremony.

Rather than the seniors walking through town as families, friends and supporters watched, each senior stood at a light pole under a banner displaying their name and photo as others drove through town

toward the high school football field where the ceremony took place.

“It is so unique and we are getting to involve the community in it,” graduate Tymra Anderson said. “It was really well thought out and planned. I am going to miss walking, but the uniqueness of the graduation makes up for it.”

The Union County Sheriff’s Office led the parade of cars down Division Street.

Faculty and staff of Elgin High School rode a decorated bus and cars followed suit, decorated with purple and white balloons and paint. On each side of the street, seniors in their caps and gowns waved until the last car passed. The graduation students took to a bus for a ride to the football field for the ceremony.

Because of social

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Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

Ty Hammond waves to a car going down Division Street as part of the parade through town celebrating Elgin High School’s class of 2020.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 47 LOW Partly cloudy
Friday 77/49 Shower or t-storm

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.

