



SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

THE OBSERVER

Weekend Edition

SATURDAY-MONDAY • June 6, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Loren Wagoner of La Grande

COVID-19 by the numbers*

Worldwide cases: 6,535,354
Worldwide deaths: 387,155
U.S. cases: 1,862,656
U.S. deaths: 108,064
Total U.S. tests: 19,811,243

Oregon cases: 4,570
Oregon active cases: 2,210
Oregon deaths: 161
Total Oregon tests: 143,118
Union County cases: 6
Union County active

cases: 1
Union County deaths: 0
Total Union County tests: 496
Wallowa County cases: 2
Wallowa County active

cases: 1
Wallowa County deaths: 0
Total Wallowa County tests: 165
*As of 2:30 p.m. Friday, June 5.

Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Military Department.

Sheriff race will pit Bowen vs. Rasmussen

■ May 19 primary election for sheriff was marked official Thursday

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The race for sheriff in Union County will officially be between the incumbent and one of his deputies.

Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen maintained his margin over challenger Bill Miller in the May 19 primary election — which the county certified Thursday — to secure the No. 2 spot in the Nov. 3 election and will face

deputy Cody Bowen, who won the primary with close to 42% of the overall vote. Rasmussen pulled about 26% of the vote, and Miller was near 25%.

“I am looking forward to a campaign focusing on the needs of the citizens of Union County,” Rasmussen said in an email to The Observer.

Union County clerk Robin Church certified the election after a two-week period to allow for signature verification on about 200 ballots and for ballots from residents who were out of the county. Little, though, changed in the numbers from the unofficial May 19 tally. Miller did gain on the sheriff but finished short with 2,548 votes. Rasmussen’s official count was 2,681, giving him an edge of 133 votes.

Bowen’s total was 4,305, and fourth-place Shane Rollins finished with 785, or about 7.5% of the vote. More than 200 residents turned in ballots that did not cast a vote for sheriff.

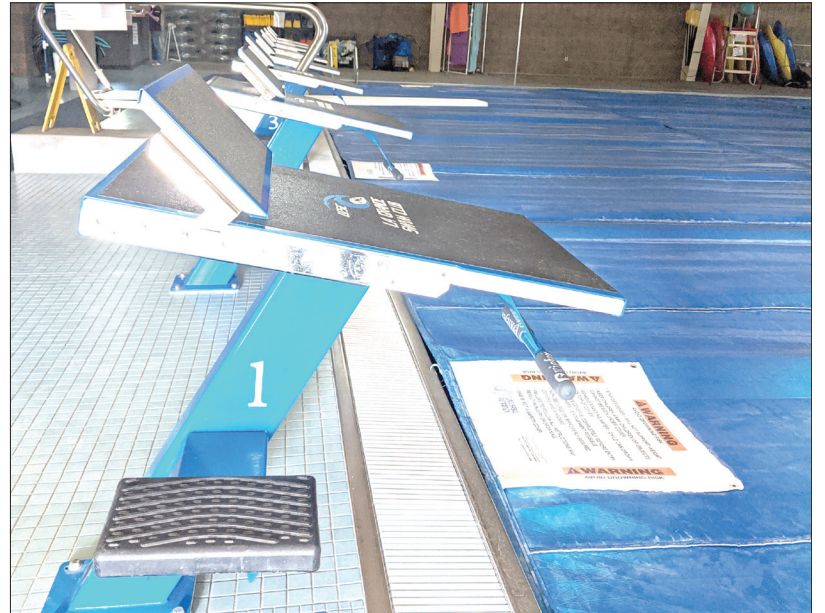
Bowen, who said that before election day he had anticipated Miller would beat

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Observer file photo

La Grande Church of the Nazarene pastor Kevin Goss adjusts computer settings for the camera the church began using in March to livestream its services in response to government moves to reduce gathering sizes during the COVID-19 outbreak. Come Sunday, the church will reopen under Phase 2 and hold a service in its building at 10:30 a.m.



Contributed photo by Amanda Welch

Union County’s transition into Phase 2 of reopening during the coronavirus pandemic means swimmers again can take to the water starting June 15 for laps and therapy at Veterans’ Memorial Pool, La Grande.

Union County moves into Phase 2

■ Wallowa, Baker counties also among 26 that get OK from governor on Thursday

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County has entered Phase 2 of reopening.

Gov. Kate Brown sent a letter Thursday afternoon to the Union County Commissioners, allowing the move into the next phase effective Friday morning.

It was among 26 counties statewide, along with Wallowa and Baker counties, that received the OK to proceed with reopening Thursday — several did so Friday and others will Saturday or

Monday. Three more counties were given approval Friday.

Phase 2, however, seems to be where the state will remain for the foreseeable future as the guidelines for Phase 3 state it won’t be an option until a “reliable treatment or prevention” or a vaccine is available, according to the state’s guideline page.

That statement also was in Brown’s letter to the counties that are in Phase 2 and is Union County Commissioner Paul Anderes’ biggest concern.

“The goal is unrealistic,” he said, noting he was cautious of the way to word his concerns. “We’re talking potentially years and years out for a cure or a vaccine even with the government fast track. This is not a fast process. I don’t

know that the state leadership can keep the state locked down for that length (of time).”

Anderes called the move “the logical step to normalization” but said he believes it won’t be the last piece of Phase 2.

“Without trying to put words in the governor’s mouth or Oregon Health Authority, I think we’re going to see subsequent versions of Phase 2,” he said. “As questions come up on specific businesses, we’re going to get more clarity as we move on.”

Included in the second phase of the reopening plan is further easing of restrictions for restaurants, bars, breweries and more, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Larger indoor and outdoor gatherings are allowed. And

some venues will be able to open for the first time since they were closed back in March.

Churches, movie theaters, pools and some outdoor entertainment facilities may resume, though the number of individuals who can be at a gathering varies.

In the reopening guidelines from the OHA, gathering sizes are capped at 50 for indoors and 100 for outdoors. But for “venues, restaurants and bars, indoor and outdoor entertainment facilities and fitness-related organizations,” the number is 250 people, provided specifications on social distancing measures are set.

Under this guideline, the capacity is based on allowing

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Fire season being held at bay — for now

■ Fire officials say outlook for fire season in Northeast Oregon ‘above average’

By Katy Nesbitt
For the EO Media Group

PENDLETON — Spring rains are holding the wildfire season at bay for the time being while local fire agencies are gearing up for summer’s eventual high temperatures and lightning storms.

Joe Hessel, Northeast Oregon regional district forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry, said the outlook is for an “above average” fire season.

“We are in a good spot right now with a better than average snow pack up high and precipitation this May has helped,” Hessel said. “We were dry a month ago.”

The state will likely be declared around mid-June or so, Hessel said, with a lot of the activity starting mid-July through mid-September.

“We have a warmer and drier outlook through the summer months,” he said. Darcy Weseman, public

affairs officer for the Umatilla National Forest, suggested that because of the above normal fire risk predicted for later this summer wildland/urban interface landowners should take measures to protect their property.

“With much of the greater Umatilla area experiencing ever increasing drought conditions and the summer’s forecast of above normal temperatures and below normal precipitations, now is the time to tackle that defensible space project on your property,”

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U.S. Forest Service Photo

The Granite Gulch Fire in the Eagle Cap Wilderness was the largest by far on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in the summer of 2019.

LG School District budget picture may be on solid ground

■ Uncertainties remain, and proposal calls for putting \$225,000 into reserve funds

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande School District will encounter uncertain financial waters in 2020-21 but there is a realistic chance it will emerge in solid condition.

School Superintendent George Mendoza told the

district’s budget committee Wednesday night that, despite the funding shortfall the state has suffered because of the coronavirus pandemic, he believes there is a good chance Oregon’s school districts may not suffer a cut in state funding in 2020-21. State programs, according to some esti-



Mendoza

mates, Mendoza said, are expected to lose about 10% of their revenue in 2020-21 because of the pandemic, which forced the state to shut down many businesses for two months, costing it significant income tax revenue and crippling the economy.

This means the state’s

school fund is expected to lose about \$900 million in revenue, but Mendoza said he thinks legislators will find a way to replace the money so schools will receive all of the funding allocated to them when lawmakers approved a \$9 billion education budget for the 2019-21 biennium.

“I believe that the Legislature will backfill the state school fund,” Mendoza said. The superintendent

stressed, however, nothing will be certain until the Legislature meets this summer to make decisions regarding state funding.

“Until the Legislature meets, we will not know,” Mendoza said.

The superintendent said that in meetings with organizations, including the Confederation of Oregon Administrators, he has

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
42 LOW
Rain and drizzle



Sunday
56/42
A few showers

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



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TUESDAY COMING COMMENCEMENTS

Online at lagrandeobserver.com