

Our View

Be safe
out on the
highway

Winter is coming. There is a good chance, in fact, that last weekend’s dusting in Union County was but just a preview of Mother Nature’s annual slide into winter. Bad weather conditions, however, in the Burnt River Canyon east of Baker City closed Interstate 84 for about four hours on Sunday, Dec. 13, after several commercial trucks crashed on the snow-slickened freeway, providing an instant reminder that driving habits need to adjust with the changing of the season.

Interstate 84 has a history of bad crashes in winter — the 2012 charter bus crash that killed nine people on Cabbage Hill, the 26-vehicle pre-dawn pileup that injured 12 in 2015 just east of Baker City — are but just a couple of examples.

This early in the winter, the snow — if it arrives — won’t stick around long. Yet, it is probably a good time for residents to begin thinking about the challenges — and benefits — winter weather furnishes the region.

One of the key items for winter weather driving is a simple one. Check road conditions before hitting the road. The Oregon Department of Transportation’s online Tripcheck system is a reliable and easy way to access information regarding local road and highway road conditions.

Often motorists are taken by surprise when they travel onto the interstate and suddenly find themselves battling whiteout or blizzard conditions. The state highway department Trip-check system takes the guesswork out of winter driving.

Speed also often is a factor in winter crashes. The knowledge that simply slowing down can decrease a motorist’s chances of miscue on snow and ice sometimes takes a while to sink in, especially early in the winter when no one is quite used to winter driving conditions. But cutting the speed of your vehicle can mean the difference between a close call and a serious crash.

Another important tip to moving through the winter without a major accident also is a simple one. Motorists should, if they can, try to ensure their vehicle is in good condition. That means clean headlights, good brakes and tires and working windshield wipers. Motorists also should be prepared. That means ensuring there is extra water, a blanket and perhaps some non-perishable food in the car so that if severe winter weather does force a delay, the motorist is ready to wait it out.

These all seem like mundane tips and certainly the subject of careful winter driving isn’t going to be delivered with blaring headlines, though it probably should. That’s because every year someone, somewhere, on Oregon’s highways is killed or severely injured because of mistakes made during winter weather driving. That means the message of safety, of caution on slick or icy roads, just doesn’t get through. And that is troubling.

Winter is coming, but let’s all pay attention, slow down and make sure this season is about the fun of winter recreation in our great region and not about statistics regarding crashes.



Other Views

State task force addresses Universal Health Care



DWIGHT DILL
LA GRANDE

During the 2019 Oregon Legislative Session, Senate Bill 770 was passed, which created the governor’s Task Force on Universal Health Care. The charge of the task force is to “recommend the design of the Health Care for All Oregon Plan, a universal health care system, administered by the Health Care for All Oregon Board, that is equitable, affordable and comprehensive, provides high quality health care and is publicly funded and available to every individual residing in Oregon.”

The United States is the only industrialized nation that does not have universal health care. With the passage of the American Care Act in 2010, millions of previously uninsured were finally able to gain health care coverage. According to an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, there were 49 million Americans without health insurance prior to the passage of the ACA. That number has been reduced to approximately 30 million prior to the current COVID crisis. With a significant rise in unemployment due to the pandemic, this number will undoubtedly increase. Additionally, under the ACA we saw the elimination of denials for pre-existing conditions and young adults were able to remain covered by their

parents insurance until age 26; both of which have been jeopardized by recent attempts to repeal the ACA.

Through the task force on Universal Health Care, we have an opportunity, in Oregon, to develop a health care plan that is affordable, equitable and disconnected from an individual’s employment. Oregon could lead the nation in developing a health plan that aligns us with every other industrialized nation in the world.

Although this health plan would be government funded, it would not be government run. In other words, your health care decisions would be made between you and your health care provider who would then be reimbursed by the state for the services provided to you. Under our current system, your health care decisions are often made, not by your health care provider but rather, by your insurance provider. You would also no longer need to worry about whether or not your health care provider is part of the insurer’s network of preferred providers. Under a universal plan, you could choose any health care provider who meets the requirements to deliver services under the plan.

We have all heard the horror stories of being treated in a hospital setting and when you receive the bill, you discover that some of the providers in the hospital were out of network resulting in your co-payment responsibility being much higher than expected. Under universal health care, you would no longer be faced with what

is referred to as “surprise billing”. In fact, you may well see the elimination of co-pays and deductibles, entirely.

As a member of the governor’s task force on Universal Health Care, I am committed to work with the other members of the task force to develop a system that is fair, equitable and meets the needs of all Oregonians in a cost effective and medically responsive manner. The work of the task force began in August of this year and will continue into 2021.

I encourage everyone with an interest in how this plan is being developed to attend our task force meetings, which are all being held virtually. Public input is welcome at all meetings either in written form or by signing up to give oral input during our meetings. For a schedule of task force meetings and instructions for attending and/or giving input go to www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP/Pages/Task-Force-Universal-Health-Care.aspx.

The task force meetings are all live streamed and anyone is welcome to attend as well as give input into the work of the task force.

The work of the task force is intended to improve the lives of all Oregonians by providing a comprehensive, fair and equitable health care system for all residents.

Dwight Dill lives in La Grande, is retired and serves as a member of Oregon’s Task Force on Universal Health Care.

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