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Good day to our valued subscriber Ruth Uhrig of Elgin

Gun storage bill heads for vote at Legislature

House to decide whether stricter requirements are necessary to keep children safe

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Another gun regulation bill is headed for a legislative debate and vote, this time in the Oregon House.

House Bill 2510, approved Tuesday, March 30, by the House Health Care Committee, would require the storage of firearms with trigger or cable locks, in a locked container or in a gun room.

An offense would be a Class C violation, which carries a maximum fine of \$500, unless someone under age 18 obtains access, in which case it is a Class A violation with a maximum fine of \$2,000. No jail time is imposed for violations.

The committee vote was 6-4. All Democrats voted for it, and all Republicans against it.

On March 25, the Oregon Senate voted 16-7 to approve a bill making state buildings — including the Oregon Capitol — off-limits to firearms carried by concealed handgun licensees. Senate Bill 554, which went to the House, leaves it up to local governments to decide that question for their own buildings.

Oregon is among the states with no laws regulating gun storage, according to the pro-regulation Giffords Law Center. Laws in California and Washington apply to some aspects of storage.

When the House Health Care Committee heard the gun storage bill March 11, nearly 400 pieces of testimony were submitted for and against House Bill 2510. Some people submitted more than one.

“We cannot gun-proof children,” Dr. Benjamin Hoffman, pediatrician at Doernbecher Children’s Hospital at Oregon Health & Science University, testified. “We must child-proof guns.”

Between 1999 and 2019, he said, Oregon averaged 3.5 deaths by firearms per 100,000 people, compared with the national average of 2.3 per 100,000. For youths under 19 during the period, he said Oregon averaged 6.3 deaths per 100,000, compared with the national average of 5 per 100,000.

“Gun violence is one of the leading causes of death for

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LG schools: ‘All in’

Students return to classrooms April 12

By PHIL WRIGHT
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Students in the La Grande School District are heading back to in-person learning every day of the week.

Days will remain short through the school year, however, and students enrolled at La Grande Virtual Learning Academy can continue with online learning.

School district Superintendent George Mendoza announced in a virtual town hall meeting Thursday night, April 1, the move back to more regular classes starts Monday, April 12.

“K-12 is all in, we’re going, every day, for the rest of the school year,” he said.

That also means there is no school Friday, April 9. Mendoza explained staff need the time to prepare for the influx of students and to organize lesson plans, as well as to reconfigure classrooms and bring in furniture. Also, he said, the school needs to deal with the logistics of providing meals to more students.

Getting to this point, Mendoza said, started March 19, when Gov. Kate Brown announced an update to the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance that lowered the physical distancing rule for students in schools from 6 feet to 3 feet and removed the 35 square feet per person requirement for counties that meet Oregon’s COVID-19 moderate risk levels. Mendoza said this was not a mandate from the state to increase the number of students in schools, but instead will now be a local decision.

“What that did for our school district is it increased the opportunity or propensity for us to have students back, every day, all in, K-12,” he said.

Union County also remains in the moderate risk level, which gives the La Grande School District a green light to allow its students in its buildings at the same time. But Mendoza also showed how COVID-19 has been affecting students and staff.

The district has 2,188 students, Mendoza said during his presentation, and since the

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

A student with La Grande Middle School boards a school bus in the afternoon following class on Friday, April 2, 2021. School district Superintendent George Mendoza announced middle and high school students return to in-person learning each day of the week starting April 12 based on local data and guidance from health officials.

“K-12 is all in, we’re going, every day, for the rest of the school year.”

— Superintendent George Mendoza, on La Grande students returning to in-person classes

Community blood drives have big impact

Local drives produced 338 units in March, with 180 units in 2 days

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A year ago health officials feared the COVID-19 pandemic could trigger a blood shortage.

The concern was legitimate because opportunities for conducting blood drives were dwindling. The American Red Cross found that putting on blood drives at schools and businesses no longer was a viable option because students were taking classes virtually and many employees were working at home, greatly reducing the potential donor base.

This left the Red Cross with only its community drives as a blood donation source. People coming to these blood drives have increased, allowing the Red Cross’ blood pipeline to remain strong.

“Our community blood drives have been amazing,” said Jacob



Dick Mason/The Observer

American Red Cross phlebotomists Jeffery Zillman, left, and Robert Vincent talk with blood donor Lou Gerber on March 31, 2021, during the blood drive at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in La Grande.

Reines, who lives in Caldwell, Idaho, and is an account manager for the Red Cross’ Idaho-Montana district, which includes Union County and other portions of Northeast Oregon.

The blood drives Reines is referring to include the Red Cross-operated La Grande Community Blood Drive, which conducted a draw on Tuesday, March 30, and Wednesday, March 31.

The drive collected 180 units of blood, putting it on pace to have its most successful year in at least two decades. To date, the La Grande Community Blood Drive, coordinated by Sheldon and Linda Strand, has drawn 338 units after a pair of two-day draws at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1802 Gekeler Lane.

Reines said strong collections

in Northeast Oregon are helping the entire Idaho-Montana district to be strong in terms of its blood supply. Donations in La Grande have been so successful, Reines said, that its drives now are often two days instead of one.

Regulars coming to these blood drives include Lou Gerber and his wife, Robin, of La Grande, who again donated this week. Lou Gerber made the 30th blood donation of his life and Robin made her 31st.

“It is really important to do something to help others. It does not cost anything and it is easy,” Robin Gerber said.

She is now about one unit away from reaching the 4 gallon donation mark for her lifetime and her husband is about two units away. A unit of blood is about a pint.

The Gerbers have been coming together to community blood drives for years. Robin noted in the 1990s, the married couple would have lunch dates at blood drives, enjoying midday meals while donating blood.

The Gerbers were among about 180 people who gave blood in La Grande this week. All of

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

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	44 LOW		58/31
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TUESDAY SOUP SUPPER

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