

BILL

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people my age,” Hope Williams, a volunteer with Students Demand Action in Oregon, said in a statement after the vote. “We want to feel safe at home and in our communities and that starts with securely storing firearms to prevent gun violence.”

Students Demand Action, together with Moms Demand Action, constitute Everytown for Gun Safety.

“Even in a pandemic, our communities are continuing to endure gun violence every day,” Elizabeth Klein, a gun violence survivor and volunteer for the Oregon chapter of Moms Demand Action, said.

“And, unintentional shootings and gun suicides have continued to rise over the past year. Secure storage is an effective and easy



EO Media Group, File House Bill 2510 in the 2021 Oregon Legislature would require the storage of firearms with trigger or cable locks, in a locked container or in a gun room. The bill is headed for a vote in the Oregon House.

way to help prevent these tragedies.” But Oregon’s gun

rights advocates staunchly opposed the bill. “This bill will subject

hundreds of thousands of law-abiding citizens with potential criminal and

civil liability overnight for actions that are perfectly legal today,” Paul Donhefner, legislative committee chairman for the Oregon Hunters Association, said in testimony to the committee.

Kevin Starrett is director of the Oregon Firearms Federation, which bills itself as a no compromise group on gun rights. It even disparaged Republican lawmakers working on regulation of firearms sales at gun shows in 1999, a year after the group’s founding. The bill did not pass, but voters approved a related initiative measure in 2000 by a 62% majority.

Starrett had harsher words for lawmakers during his committee testimony.

“Gun owners in Oregon have been remarkably well-behaved,” he said. “But if you keep rewarding criminals and punishing the law-abiding, don’t expect them to stay that way.”

DRIVES

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the blood will be tested for numerous irregularities, including COVID-19 antibodies. Portions of any blood with these antibodies can be used to treat people being treated for COVID-19, Reines said.

Most of the blood drawn at community drives stays in the region in which it was donated. However, sometimes it is sent outside the region when there are emergencies, Reines said.

Union County residents will have two more opportunities to give blood at Red Cross community drives in La Grande in the next two and a half months.

The first will be on April 15 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Presbyterian Friendship Center, 1204 Spring Ave. The second will be June 15-16 again at The Church of Latter-day Saints Church, 1802 Gekeler Lane. The June 15 session will run from noon to 6 p.m., and the June 16 blood draw will operate from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information on donating blood go to www.redcrossblood.org.

RETURN

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start of the school year, 20 staff and 26 students have tested positive for COVID-19, and 32 staff and 167 students have shown primary symptoms.

In all, he said, between staff and students, 480 people in La Grande schools have had to isolate or quarantine for at least 10 days.

“I just want you to know that it’s great we have students in school, but there’s risk involved,” he said.

“There’s work we have to do to keep us safe, and that’s the reality, that’s the truth.”

Mendoza said he and the school board have been committed to returning all students to full-time, in-person learning as soon as it was safe to do so.

When the state updated Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance, the La Grande School District dispersed a survey asking students and families if they would desire a full return. He said the survey results plus consultations with the Center for Human Development, Grande Ronde Hospital, Union County Board of Commissioners and Union County Emergency Management all support the full return.

Mendoza also stressed he listens to what local public health officials say about keeping schools safe and stopping the spread of the virus.

“If they ever tell me that they think we have to shut down, I don’t usually tell them they’re wrong and that I’m not going to do that,” he said. “I usually just go forward with their suggestions so we can reduce the risk and reduce the spread of COVID.”

But data from the survey and those consultations, Mendoza said, delivered the message to move forward with having students return to regular school days.

“We’re definitely excited about that,” he said, and asked pediatrician Dr. Zachary Spoehr-Labutta for his take on La Grande stu-



Alex Wittwer/The Observer Vicky Huffman, a paraeducator at La Grande Middle School, acts as a crossing guard for students as they leave class Friday, April 2, 2021. The La Grande School District announced its students would be attending school every weekday starting April 12.

dents returning to classes.

“Based on the currently available data, I support this measure wholeheartedly,” the doctor said.

He explained he receives emails weekly from school districts nationwide regarding how implementation of key COVID-19 safety practices have turned out in their districts.

“Not surprisingly, those that adhered to key practices kept their COVID numbers low, and those that did not, their COVID numbers were significantly higher,” he said.

He said the understanding of the virus and key safety measures make it feasible for Union County to move to having middle and high school students back on campus classes every weekday. He also advised parents to give those students some concrete advice: Tell them if they can reach out and touch someone in school, they are too close.

Mendoza also said while students are returning to school, maintaining key safety practices is a priority. Staff still must maintain 6 feet of physical distance between one another and continue to physically distance from students to the greatest extent possible, and close contact rules still apply. He also emphasized the need for vaccinations, which could have the most significant effect on returning to

normalcy in schools.

Scott Carpenter, the school district’s director of education, during the virtual town hall explained elementary grades will continue classes 8 a.m to 1 p.m. each weekday. Middle and high school students starting April 12 will attend classes 9 a.m. to 1:25 p.m. in two blocks of periods that alternate, with periods 1-4 one day and 5-8 the next. Keeping the later morning start prevents elementary school students from riding buses at the same time as middle and high school students, he said, and lunch will be “grab and go,” 1:30-2 p.m., when the school day ends.

Going back full time “carte blanche,” Carpenter said, would cause a “major disruption” to people and systems throughout the district. Still, this change increases instructional hours from 10-15 a week to closer to 25 a week, he said, and gets students in the habit of returning to school each weekday. He also said students have the option of using the district’s online education academy.

Now the next big target, Carpenter said, is full school days in the fall.

Also, the Oregon Health Authority reported a second Union County resident this week died from COVID-19. The OHA on Thursday, April 1, reported a

48-year-old woman in the county tested positive March 17 and died on Tuesday, March 30, at St. Luke’s Medical Center in Boise, Idaho. She had underlying conditions and became Oregon’s 2,385th COVID-19 death and the county’s 22nd.

The Oregon Health Authority two days ear-

lier reported the county’s 21st COVID-19 death, an 80-year-old man who tested positive on March 22 and died Monday, March 29, at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande.

The number of cases overall in Union County continues to tick up, with four new cases Thursday and six more Friday, bringing the county’s total to 1,382.

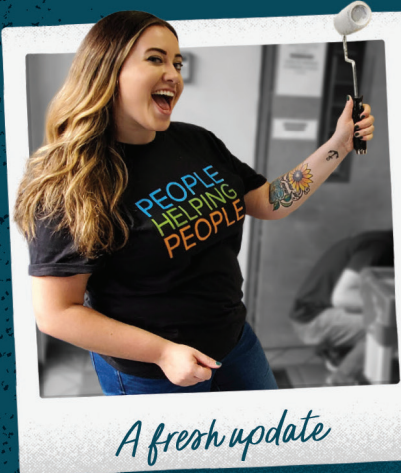
1.1 Billion Dollars...

That was the combined compensation package for 62 health care company CEOs in 2018. Meanwhile, 1 in 5 Americans struggle to pay for medical debt and medical problems contribute to 66.5% of all bankruptcies. Our health insurance system is broken.

Let’s work on fixing it.

Health Care for All Oregon
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