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WEEKEND EDITION

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COVID-19

Oregon to lift masking rules March 19

Gov. Kate Brown is also ending the two-year-long state of emergency

By DIRK VANDERHART
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon's masking rules now have a firm expiration date: March 19.

As COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations plummet across the state, the Oregon Health Authority will lift requirements for masks in indoor public spaces and schools earlier than expected; the mandate had been scheduled to lapse by March 31.

At the same time, Gov. Kate Brown announced Thursday, Feb. 24, that she will rescind her COVID-19 state of emergency declaration on April 1. By then the declaration will have lingered for more than two years, allowing the governor to take unprecedented actions to stem the spread of the virus.

"I am really excited that our numbers are down," Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage said. "Of course, you can only hope that we can get back to how we were before the pandemic."

Taken together, the moves are the most significant curtailment of COVID-19 restrictions that Oregon has seen since the arrival of the virus in March 2020. Brown previously revoked masking and distancing requirements last summer as cases dropped, only to reinstate them weeks later as the delta variant of the virus took hold.

Despite those fluctuations, the governor has repeatedly extended the emergency declaration that has allowed her to wield broad powers. Brown cau-

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MERA project nears completion

No estimate yet on size of tree harvest on Mount Emily

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The first section of a contested forest management project at Mount Emily Rec-

reation Area is nearly finished. Phase one of the Red Apple Forest Management project, which is aimed at improving forest health and conducting logging, is set to be completed after a month of work by ReedCo Forestry. The project intends to limit future wildfires in the 300-acre Red Apple area at MERA.

"They're wrapping up and looking to get out of there by the

end of this week," Union County Parks Coordinator Sean Chambers said.

ReedCo Forestry, a Union County business, was awarded the project bid on Jan. 5, following a lengthy public debate over the proposal.

The project's time frame was very dependent on the winter weather, with frozen grounds creating a better work condition for

the forest management. According to Chambers, winter conditions throughout the month were ideal, making the project go on without any hiccups.

"It stayed good and cold, so the ground was hard and maintained snow cover," he said. "It was really great conditions."

After the project was delayed

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A NEW HOME



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

The building housing La Grande School District's maintenance, facilities and grounds shop, seen through a window on Thursday, Dec. 23, 2021, is more than 100 years old. The structure will be torn down along with the adjacent Annex building if a new athletic and academic center is approved by voters.

La Grande School District's shop facilities will relocate to Adams Avenue location if voters approve bond

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande School District's shop for maintenance and grounds work may have a new home in the next couple of years.

The shop's facilities, based at an old building constructed about 110 years ago, will be moved from the La Grande Middle School area to the Adams Professional Plaza on the 1800 block of Adams Avenue if voters approve a \$4.485 million bond in the May election. Money from the bond would be spent on the replacement of the school district's aging Annex building with a new academic and athletic center.

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Adams Professional Plaza, photographed Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2022, could be the site of the new maintenance and grounds work shop for the La Grande School District within the next year or two.

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group



Imprisoned by the past

New law proposed in Senate could vacate previous criminal verdicts at the expense of victims

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

SALEM — Legislators are pushing through a broad reform bill that would retroactively allow criminals to appeal their case if

the verdict wasn't reached unanimously. That could mean regional district attorneys would be open to dozens if not thousands of formerly closed cases that could stretch back decades.

Senate Bill 1511, which would

allow those previously convicted of crimes with a less than unanimous jury to appeal their decision, is based on the recent Ramos vs. Louisiana Supreme Court ruling that found that non-unanimous juries were unconstitutional.

Oregon, along with Louisiana, were the only two states in the nation to allow non-unanimous juries. The Oregon law was put into effect in 1934, and had racist and xenophobic origins according to numerous testimonies for SB 1511.

The Supreme Court of the

United States denied the retroactivity clause by a 6-3 ruling on May 17, 2021 in the case of Edwards vs. Warden Vannoy, with Justice Brett Kavanaugh writing the majority opinion. However, Kavanaugh also wrote that the states could make their own retroactivity laws, which is what Oregon aims to do with SB 1511.

Baker County District Attorney Greg Baxter said the law for non-unanimous juries was followed

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page A4.



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TUESDAY TITLE III GRANT BRINGS \$2.5M FOR STUDENT SERVICES

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