

# VODKA

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Eastern Oregon produces several vodkas, including Glacier 45 vodka, which is distilled in Baker City, and 276 Vodka produced by Oregon Grain Growers Distillery, Pendleton. Both are quality vodkas, according to O'Dell.

Across the state, about 5,000 bottles of Russian-made liquor were for sale in 281 liquor stores, according to the OLCC. Those vodkas have since been removed from store shelves. Oregon liquor stores also are prohibited from fulfilling any customer "special order" requests for Russian-manufactured liquor.

Vodkas with Russian-sounding names such as Smirnoff and Stolichnaya that are produced outside of Russia aren't subject to the ban, according to the OLCC



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Oregon-made vodkas sit on the top shelf at La Grande Liquor and Smoke Shoppe, La Grande, on Tuesday, March 1, 2022.

press release. Stoli Group, the distillery that makes Stolichnaya, offered up a statement on its website that said, "Stoli Group has had a long history of fighting

oppression from the Russian regime," and condemned the Russian military actions in Ukraine. Stoli is produced in Latvia, while Smirnoff is produced in Illinois.

The move to ban Russian vodkas can be seen as largely symbolic as very few Russian vodkas are imported to the United States. A small number of bars have gone



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Empty shelf space where Russian Standard was formerly sold at La Grande Liquor & Smoke Shoppe, La Grande, is photographed on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. The Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission moved to ban the sale of all Russian vodkas after the Russian military invasion of Ukraine on Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022.

viral online for pouring out Stoli brand vodkas, despite the vodka being produced in Latvia, a NATO member country.

A list of the vodka brands that have been pulled from the shelves can be found on the OLCC website.

But even if the OLCC

didn't outright ban the sale of Russian vodka, O'Dell said it would be something he personally would have liked to see pulled from store shelves.

"I would be advocating to do it," O'Dell said. "Me, the person, would be advocating to do it."

# READING

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Bobby Levy, R-Echo, she said. She also has support from the nonprofit literacy group Oregon Kids Read and the Oregon chapter of the nationwide advocacy group Decoding Dyslexia.

The primary reason students struggle to read is not because of any cognitive deficits or learning disabilities, but because they have not learned phonological skills — that is, how sounds connect with letters — according to the Journal of Educational Psychology.

Yet students across the United States struggle with reading proficiency, in large

part because their teachers were not instructed in how to teach reading in ways that line up with science and best practices, according to the Journal of Learning Disabilities. This is because of decades of political and ideological battles over reading science and how students should be taught, according to James Kim, an expert on literacy intervention at Harvard University.

Oregon is no exception to low reading proficiency among students. For years, schools in the state have struggled to increase reading proficiency among fourth and eighth graders.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress is often called the

nation's report card. It measures students' grasp of math and reading.

In 2019, the most recent year for which data is available, just about one-third of Oregon fourth graders and eighth graders tested at or above proficient in reading. This mirrors nationwide scores for fourth and eighth graders, too.

Proficiency is defined as having competency and knowledge of subject matter and an ability to apply it to real world situations.

With the \$31 million, Smith Warner wants to pay teachers to undertake training in a program called Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling, which was created

by literacy expert Louisa Moates. The training involves learning the science of how the brain learns to read and how it develops phonological awareness — understanding how sounds connect with letters — learning how to identify students with dyslexia, and using research to come up with targeted instruction for students who are struggling.

Teachers in Portland, Beaverton and Lake Oswego have already been offered such training by their districts, and Smith Warner wants it available at schools statewide.

The training would be over six to 12 months, and would be administered online through Eastern

Oregon University.

The training played a large role in helping Mississippi fourth and eighth graders make historic gains in reading during the last few years.

In 2013 the Mississippi Legislature mandated that new teachers pass an exam on reading science to be licensed to teach in elementary schools. The state had some of the lowest reading scores in the country.

At the urging of a Mississippi governor's task force, college professors who taught education as well as elementary school teachers around the state began to undertake Language Essentials training. By 2019, the state's fourth and eighth

graders increased their reading scores by more than 10% over the previous year. That was the largest gain of any state.

In Oregon, the \$31 million sought by Smith Warner would pay for substitute teachers to fill in for teachers taking time off for the training.

Funds would also go to paying for tutoring in the Ignite! Reading program, which involves individual instruction over Zoom for 15 minutes a day, five days a week, until a struggling student is caught up in reading. The tutoring would reach about 4,000 Oregon students with the greatest need, according to Smith Warner.

# BORDER

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that it could include Eastern Oregon and other rural portions of the state.

"Imagine for a moment Idaho's western border stretching to the Pacific," Darrow wrote at the end of the letter.

Almost seven years later, many Oregonians are imagining just as he hoped they would, which means the the Greater Idaho movement is gaining momentum.

"We are gaining support," Darrow said. "This is an exciting time."

Those who have taken note include The Atlantic magazine, which refers to Greater Idaho as "Modern America's Most Successful Secessionist Movement" in a story that appeared in its Dec. 23, 2021, edition.

Darrow is not surprised by the growing momentum, especially when he reflects on the response his letter received in the days and weeks after it was first published. He said about 40 other rural Oregon newspapers printed the letter after he sent it to them.

"Some newspapers even called me up and requested a copy so they could run it," he said.

Today, the letter, which stated that Eastern Oregon should be part of Idaho because its people are ignored by Oregon's west-side leaders, is viewed as so integral to the Greater Idaho movement that a copy is reprinted on the website of a leading group pushing for Greater Idaho — Move Oregon's Border, whose leader is Mike McCarter, of La Pine.

Darrow credits McCarter with doing much of the heavy lifting, which has given Greater Idaho the momentum it now has.

"I put into words what people are feeling, and Mike puts legs under it," he said.

"Even though this has been talked about for 100 years, Grant's letter piqued the interest of a lot of people in Eastern and Southern Oregon," McCarter said.

McCarter credits Darrow's letter with leading to the initial meetings in La Pine of what is today Move Oregon's Border.

"Grant is an integral part of this," McCarter said.

## Union County provides a boost

Darrow said McCarter played an instrumental role in getting Measure 31-101 on the Union County ballot in 2020. The measure, which voters approved with a little more than 52% of the vote, requires the county commissioners to meet three times each year to discuss promoting Union County interests relating to the county becoming part of Idaho.

A total of 7,401 cast ballots in support of the Union County measure. Darrow believes that everyone who voted for Measure 31-101 are supporters of Greater Idaho. He said Union County is not alone in its support of Greater Idaho. Darrow noted that Malheur, Baker, Grant, Harney, Sherman, Lake and Jefferson counties have all passed similar measures. He also said Klamath, Douglas and Josephine counties will likely vote on comparable measures in May.

He said the measures are making it possible for people to civilly voice their frustration. Darrow explained that when people believe they are disenfranchised they can react either violently or peacefully. Measure 31-101 and similar initiatives are providing people an opportunity to do the latter.

"These are pressure valves that allow people to

react in a positive manner," he said.

Darrow collected more than 700 signatures of registered voters to get Measure 31-101 on the ballot in Union County.

"I could not believe it when we got on the ballot," he said.

Darrow said based on what people told him, most everyone who signed the Union County petition supports Greater Idaho, but he knows of several who did not.

"One woman signed it because she wanted to see it get on the ballot so that she could vote against it," Darrow said.

Such responses did not bother Darrow, who said his ultimate objective is to give the people a chance to decide about Greater Idaho.

"That is what citizen government is all about," he said. "It is about dialogue."

Darrow said that while he was collecting signatures for Measure 31-101 he told people, "I am not here to argue or convince you. I am here to give you a chance to vote."

## A plea to legislators

Since the passage of Measure 31-101 Darrow has been urging the Union County Board of Commissioners to request in writing that State Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, and State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, work to get Oregon legislators to discuss Greater Idaho.

Darrow said he is not requesting that formal discussions about Greater Idaho begin at that state capital. Darrow said it could be something as simple as the formation of a committee to try to determine why interest in Greater Idaho is growing.

"Getting people at the state level to talk about it is the next step," he said. "We

need to get more dialogue, to get everybody talking about it. We have to get it out there."

Darrow said he has a firsthand understanding of the growing sense of frustration people in North-eastern Oregon have about the state's urban-rural divide because he worked as a chimney sweep in Union, Wallowa and Baker counties for 44 years before retiring in September 2021.

"I would work in 12 to 15 homes a week," he said.

The chimney sweep has detected a growing sense of disenchantment with Oregon's government during the past decade, noting they believe, like Darrow does, that the needs and concerns of Eastern Oregon are largely ignored by the Legislature.

"We have become nothing more than window dressing," he said.

Darrow in his 2015 letter to the editor expressed this point even more starkly.

"It would appear to any rural resident or outside observer that most of Oregon's urbanites view Oregon's rural residents as nothing more than third-world inhabitants occupying their weekend and vacation playgrounds in what they advertise to the world as Oregon's unique diversity," he wrote.

## Regulations are choking businesses

Darrow objects to things such as the way state government is imposing more and more regulations and fees that make it increasingly difficult for Oregonians to start and operate businesses in Oregon.

"It has gotten so bad that I could not afford to start a career as a chimney sweep

in Oregon today," he said, adding that every time government puts in a new regulation or fee it adds to the red tape citizens must deal with. "It gets to be absolutely crazy."

Darrow does not know what Greater Idaho will lead to, noting that it may push to something beneficial to rural Oregon that might not involve moving Idaho's borders west.

"It could morph into any direction," he said.

He believes the Greater Idaho campaign could lead to a positive change in how the Legislature perceives rural residents, the creation of a new state or Greater Idaho

The Cove resident is sometimes asked by people who know how much he dislikes Oregon's urban-rural divide, why he doesn't move to Idaho.

"I tell them, 'That is what I am trying to do,'" Darrow said.