

Vaccines: Legislators must balance public health concerns with parental rights

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Smith said the proposed legislation has sparked many a conversation in Capitol corridors and offices.

"It's the number one topic all legislators are talking about," Smith said.

"It is an emotional issue for people on both sides," Hansell said. "Two values are in conflict — parental rights versus public health — and I feel strongly about both."

Smith posed the dilemma to his 5,000 Facebook friends on Tuesday. He wrote, "Please share your opinion: Before the legislature is the question should immunization be manda-

tory for all Oregon children? Why?" A few hours later, he had more than 100 replies. Opinion was almost evenly split between yeas and nays.

Here is a sampling of comments:

"We in this country take for granted the fact that our children aren't exposed to diphtheria, mumps, chicken pox, measles, influenza and polio ... I have come across mothers in other parts of the world who would give their life to protect their children."

"My government should not be involved in my personal healthcare choices for my child."

"Vaccinate or keep them home."

"Government is getting too intrusive."

"There are immunocompromised children who can't get vaccinated and rely on herd immunity to keep them healthy. Why should those parents constantly worry if their cancer stricken child is going to get measles?"

"Absolutely. For the same reason wearing a seatbelt is mandatory. For the safety of others as well as yourself."

"Government doesn't get to decide how we raise our children," wrote one man, but also added, "Parents should be held accountable for harm done to their children or others when a simple vaccination would have prevented it."

Smith was left scratching his head.

"The responses are all over the board," he said. "When you have a split district, what is the correct thing to do? I'm trying to measure protection of society versus parental rights."

Hansell said he will likely vote against the bill unless some parental "off-ramps" are added.

During a recent roadshow of the Joint Ways and Means Committee to Eastern Oregon, he listened to constituents troubled about increasing government control.

"They were concerned," Hansell said. "Where does government oversight or

intrusion, as some would call it, stop?"

Currently, parents can opt out of vaccinating their children for both medical and non-medical reasons. Oregon students lacking waivers or up-to-date shot records aren't allowed to attend school after Exclusion Day, this year on February 20.

In Umatilla County, 178 students were excluded, though most, if not all, were readmitted after getting shots or bringing proof of vaccinations or a waiver.

The bill comes in response to a recent measles outbreak in Washington's Clark County with 73 confirmed cases. Most

victims were young and unvaccinated. Four Oregon cases were linked to the outbreak.

Dr. Richard Lehman, of the Oregon Health Authority, didn't weigh in on the bill directly, but said a high vaccination rate protects communities against such diseases as measles.

"Measles is such an incredibly infectious disease. In order to protect a population, you need about 94 percent to 95 percent of people vaccinated to get that herd immunity," he said.

"When there are a bunch of vaccinated folks around an infected person, measles has no place to go and it will die out."

Crime Lab: Facility on track to open in May

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the reception staff will control the secure entrance with a video system to see and talk to anyone wanting in and the front glass is bullet resistant.

The east side of the building houses the labs and the new vehicle bay.

The general lab area provides five work stations, there is a separate area for fingerprint collection, and another for chemical analysis for controlled substances. Davis also pointed out two side-by-side rooms for screening large items, such as bedding. He said that's a boon because staff can work on material from a suspect and a victim at the same time in separate spaces.

Work is nearing completion on the vehicle bay, also on the east end. The bay has a hydraulic lift to allow work under vehicles. Davis said the bay is a significant addition and when not in use will double as storage for the crime scene van. The bay leads to the room for firing weapons into a ballistic water tank. Davis said that's a better place to shoot a gun than the general lab area.

Staff have to pass through a "bio-vestibule" to get from one side of the building to the other. Gerard said that serves as a "clean room space" to protect the



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Armondo Rodriguez, of Pasco, takes a measurement while working in the fingerprint processing room at the Oregon State Police crime lab on Wednesday in Pendleton.

labs against contamination.

A trailer-sized air exchange unit outside the building also helps keep the lab clean, and a natural gas generator provides backup power to the building. In the off chance electricity goes down and the gas does not flow, the generator works off two large exterior propane tanks. In essence, the backup has its own backup.

"The goal is to never, ever lose power here," Gerard said.

He also said the lab

requires "a crazy amount of equipment" and ensuring the myriad connections were right the first time meant plenty of planning and coordination with state police prior to installing anything. Miner said that work is reaping rewards.

Davis said the larger and better footprint allows for staff expansion, should that ever occur. But the new lab is not adding forensic disciplines, such as DNA analysis and comparison. The forensic division handles all

DNA extraction and comparison at its lab in Clackamas. Likewise, toxicology work remains there and at the Springfield lab.

Gerard said May 1 is the construction end date. Davis said he and the rest of the staff won't move in for a few weeks after, but they are thrilled about the new digs.

On a practical note, he said, he had to take some measurements in the building to see if the furniture they will bring in the move is going to fit.

"I ENVISION KIDS COMING OUT OF THERE WITH ART AND DESIGN GOALS — THAT THE DATA CENTERS AND NIKES OF THE REGION WILL WANT TO HIRE."

Jim Doherty, Morrow County Commissioner

Energy: Solar array

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Commissioners approved an updated agreement that will include the capacity for solar and battery power at that facility. The previous agreement included plans for a wind energy project, but no plans for solar and battery had yet been finalized.

Morrow County commissioners approved an updated Strategic Investment Program agreement at a meeting on Wednesday, which allows for the addition of up to 150 megawatts of solar electricity, and 150 megawatts of battery storage. That's in addition to a capacity of 450 megawatts of wind energy. PGE will shut down a 450-megawatt coal-fired plant near Boardman at the end of 2020, around the time the wind farm is scheduled to start operating. Work on the solar array and battery storage is set to begin in 2021.

Though it didn't change from the original SIP agreement, Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty said he was most excited about the benefit it would have for local schools. The agreement states that for the 15 years that the SIP agreement will last, \$1 million will be given to Morrow County schools — \$600,000 to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs, and \$400,000 to art and music programs.

"For Morrow County, that became a reality today," he said.

A SIP agreement means that after the first \$25 million in taxable income, the companies will pay some portion of their income to local entities, in lieu of paying property taxes. The county has a 15-year SIP agreement with Wheatridge. If built to its full potential, the project could lead to nearly \$5 million in annual SIP payments to the county.

Doherty led a team of people who spent several years studying solar energy and battery storage before approving the amended agreement, learning how battery storage operates and is taxed.

He said PGE approached the county about putting in solar and battery storage. But there was no facility in the United States with a facility comparable to what was being proposed for the Wheatridge project.

A facility in Arizona was the closest they could find, with 30 megawatts of solar energy, and 10 megawatts of battery storage.

"It was a start, so we went out there, and came back with a number to NextEra," he said.

The battery portion of the project is taxable, Doherty said.

"I still hazard that it'll be a year or two into this that we'll find out whether we got it right," Doherty said. "That emerging technology has businesses getting out a couple years ahead of the tax abatement program. The value has already come down considerably."

But he said they got a dollar figure they were comfortable with.

Doherty said the potential for renewable energy in Morrow County is vast — he counted about six solar projects and as many wind projects in the same area as Wheatridge.

"The important thing is that folks are seeing returns coming back to them," he said.

Doherty said that aspect of the agreement started with visits to Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, whose district covers the northwesternmost part of the state, including a portion of the Portland-Metro area. Doherty said when he first began looking into a project getting funding for STEM in the area, he heard Bonamici, an advocate for STEM, speak, and presented some of his own ideas to her.

"She said she and her staff would love to follow through with this," he said.

Morrow County School District Superintendent Dirk Dirksen said they are very excited about the programs that can be funded.

"We're looking forward to them breaking ground so we can get started making plans for how we'll add programs after school and on Fridays," he said. Morrow County schools have a four-day week, so there would be opportunities to add a variety of classes. Dirksen said that could mean anything from robotics and computer science to coding, career technical education, or arts programs.

Oregon Governor Kate Brown issued a statement about the agreement.

"I am so pleased to see that as Oregon looks to its future in renewable energy infrastructure, we are also planning ahead for the future of the Oregonians who will drive innovation in this field for generations to come — our students," she said.

Doherty said he hopes that the funding will open up a world of new opportunities for Morrow County students.

"I envision kids coming out of there with art and design goals — that the data centers and Nikes of the region will want to hire," he said.

Depot: Shock wave rattled Hermiston

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in 2015, told the *East Oregonian* in a 2010 interview that she was waiting in a car at to go home when the blast caused her to hit the ceiling. She was in a dress and high heels, but immediately reported for duty and visited the still-hot crater in the sagebrush with photographer Jimmy Drake to document the scene.

Linda Gilleese told the *Hermiston Herald* in 2008 that the front axle of one of the vehicles landed 20 feet from her desk at her office nearly a mile away.

In Hermiston, shock waves from the blast rippled through the city, shattering plate glass windows downtown and knocking merchandise off store shelves. Some residents who had been outside reported seeing a flash of light in the direction of the Depot about 15 seconds before the concussion reached them.

N.W. O'Donnell, the local manager of Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Co., called the company's Pendleton office after hearing the boom, and was surprised to hear the explosion a second time through the phone as the sound reached Pendleton 30 miles away.

Emotional shockwaves came next, as word of the explosion traveled, leaving the families of hundreds of ordnance workers to spend a sleepless night waiting to hear if their loved ones were among the victims. Brown remembers hearing her mother Minnie crying as a local minister brought the news after midnight.

The loss of the Fraser



Photo contributed by the U.S. Army, File

A Umatilla Ordnance Depot worker loads a 500-pound bomb similar to the ones that exploded on March 21, 1944, into an igloo.

family patriarch hit them hard. Kenneth had always done whatever it took to support his family through the Great Depression, but even when he worked long hours he took time to play games like Chinese checkers with his children and train them to do quick mental math.

"He was a very intelligent person — very math-minded, and he loved reading when he had time," Brown said.

The United States was at war, and the blast at a military installation brought to mind fears of sabotage. The military acted quickly, and the *Hermiston Herald* reported that all guards employed at the Depot were called into work immediately, taking "complete charge of the situation" and remaining on high alert the rest of the night.

The following Friday, a joint funeral service for five of the victims was held at the Pentecostal Tabernacle,

presided over by Rev. S.E. Graves. Altogether, five women lost their husbands and 13 children lost their father.

Fraser's family held their own memorial in Irrigon. Brown, who at age 90 is the last surviving member of Fraser's immediate family, said her mother's grave at Hermiston Cemetery has a plaque in his honor.

Little mention of the blast was made in subsequent editions of the *Hermiston Herald* — two brief notices the next week stated that contributions were being made to the families of victims, and that while there had been fear that the accident would put a damper on recruitment, "actual reports were that more and more workers were seeking employment at the Depot."

The paper also praised the engineers for the U.S. Army who came up with the igloo design. The 1,001 cylindrical igloos with triangle fronts at the Depot

were built off-center from each other to keep any explosion from setting off a chain reaction. The sandy soil and other design elements also kept the disaster from being magnified.

The 1944 explosion would turn out to be the only fatal accident at the Depot during its decades of use. Today, a simple white cross marks the spot, and a ragged chunk of the igloo serves as a memorial on the portion of the Depot that has been turned into a National Guard training facility.

A partnership of local government bodies known as the Columbia Development Authority hopes to gain ownership of the rest of the property sometime soon.

Don Russell, chairman of the CDA board, said the CDA plans to turn the section of the Depot with the igloos into a wildlife preserve managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. He said historical preservation is one of the last pieces being negotiated for the transfer, and the site of the explosion will likely end up featuring a plaque telling the story.

Brown, the spunky girl who delivered newspapers in boys' clothes and won scholarships for college, became a teacher after her mother encouraged her to pursue a higher education. Now retired and living in Hermiston, she said she has been to several past memorials for the victims of the explosion in honor of her father.

"He did a lot of things in his life," she said.