

**ALYSSA LUNA  
STARTS FOR IRRIGON  
BASEBALL TEAM**

**SPENCER COMMITS TO  
PENDLETON SCHOOL  
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# EAST OREGONIAN

MAY 1 – 2, 2021



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## Local districts decide whether to test this year

**Hermiston opts out of state testing for current school year**

By **JADE MCDOWELL and ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

UMATILLA COUNTY — Oregon schools are getting unprecedented flexibility in how they

conduct state testing this year in the face of a year marred by the COVID-19 pandemic, but Umatilla County's two largest school districts are taking different tacks in how they are approaching the test.

Hermiston School District has announced it will opt out of state testing for the current school year.

School districts usually have students participate in state assessments in reading, math and science each spring. But Superintendent

Tricia Mooney said this year the district will forgo those assessments in order to maximize the in-person instructional time students have left instead.

"This is really about supporting our kids and supporting our teachers," she said.

Usually, state testing takes between one to two weeks for students to complete. Even with much shorter tests this year, it would still mean time not in front

of a teacher for students who just returned to in-person classes. Mooney said testing often creates anxiety for students, as well, and the district doesn't want to add to what has already been an anxious time.

"We need to focus on making connections and building relationships and instructing students," she said.

Mooney said that doesn't mean teachers aren't still assessing their students' learning in the classroom.

Educators are still monitoring individual students' growth and understanding. But state assessments have in the past been a way for districts to compare groups of students — checking whether one elementary school in the district is lagging behind the others, for example, or spotting trends between grade levels. "We already know this year's fifth graders didn't have the same oppor-

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**EO SPOTLIGHT**

# Making a statement

County officials decry political overtones associated with vaccines

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer wants to send a clear message — he's a Republican man choosing to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

In response to the county's low vaccine rates, officials recently convened to discuss new ways that they could encourage residents to get a shot. Shafer, who has voiced frustration in the past regarding the politicization of vaccines, volunteered to endorse the shot by having a photo taken of him while getting his second jab.

"I want people to know — don't be afraid of the vaccine," he said. "I'm getting it. And one of the things is that the Republican males seem to be one of the worst at getting vaccinated."

Shafer and Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock, each of whom are Republicans, decry the political overtones associated with vaccines. They say declining demand for shots alongside rising cases are hindering the county's progress during the pandemic, and that political division is playing a role.

"At no time in our history has a vaccine been this political," Shafer said. "And, for the life of me, I can't figure out why. I don't know if some people are thinking that it could be because a Democratic governor and a Democratic president are pushing this. But I keep thinking, even President Trump was saying, 'Get vaccinated. I did.'"

Murdock says COVID-19



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

**Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer receives his second dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine from registered nurse Kelsi Reyes during a vaccination event in Pendleton on Friday, April 30, 2021.**

vaccinations "should have nothing to do with political party," adding, "I would not trust my health to partisan politics."

Murdock says that he and Commissioner Dan Dorran buck the national trends, saying "it's not universal."

"The polling seems to show older Republican men seem to be the group who least likely want to get the vaccination," Murdock said. "But I'm an absolute contrast to that. I'm old, I'm a Republican and I couldn't wait to get mine fast enough."

The notion that Republicans are largely declining vaccines in the county echoes national trends that critics say are driven by right-

wing pundits who flout coronavirus precautions as a Democratic effort to undermine the party and impinge on civil liberties.

**Poll: Vaccination rates lag in areas that supported Trump**

A recent national poll conducted by Monmouth University found nearly 2 in 5 Republicans said they would avoid getting the vaccine if possible. The findings are similar to a separate survey from Quinnipiac University, which found 45% of Republicans say they don't plan to get a vaccine.

According to a *New York Times* survey of nearly every

U.S. county, vaccination rates and interest was lower on average in counties where the majority of residents voted to reelect former President Donald J. Trump, leaving some areas with more vaccines than there is demand.

That trend appears to be present in Umatilla County, where voters largely favored Trump and where vaccine rates have long ranked lowest in Oregon, despite reporting some of the highest infection rates in the state in recent months.

And this week, the county health department asked the state to briefly withhold vaccine

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**LOCAL ELECTIONS 2021**

## Special library district has full slate of candidates

Three candidates vying for four-year term

By **TAMMY MALGESINI**  
*East Oregonian*

UMATILLA COUNTY — Voters will have an opportunity to cast their votes for three candidates for the Umatilla County Special Library District Board of Directors.

A trio of three candidates — incumbent John Thomas, Caleb Barron and Sharone Pettus McCann — are each vying for a four-year term. Two candidates from the field will gain a seat on the board.

The other board position currently on the ballot is the remaining two years of the term previously held by Kara Davis, who left Dec. 31, 2020, when moving out of the area for a new job. Candidates for that single position are Jubilee Barron, Gaby Gonzalez and Fatima Machado.

**John Thomas**

Thomas is just finishing up his first term on the district's library board. He served as board president in 2019-20 and was selected as vice president in January 2021 when Davis resigned her position.

A Pendleton resident, Thomas has resided in Eastern Oregon since grade school, except while pursuing his undergraduate degree in the

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## Perennial Wind Chaser Station might be back on the table

By **BRYCE DOLE and JADE MCDOWELL**  
*East Oregonian*

HERMISTON — The developer for a proposed natural gas plant outside Hermiston is reviewing an offer from a potential buyer who expressed interest in continuing the project.

Perennial Power Holdings said in a statement that it is "re-examining its options" on the Perennial Wind

Chaser Station, which the company had previously stated it was planning to stop pursuing.

"Following steps we had taken to examine various legal and regulatory requirements required to terminate our Site Certificate for the Wind Chaser power generating project, we had a new potential buyer step forward," the statement said. "We are currently reviewing this offer."

Perennial-WindChaser LLC, a

subsidiary of Perennial Power Holdings, received a site certificate from the Energy Facility Siting Council in 2015 to build a 415-megawatt natural gas plant outside Hermiston. After the company broke ground on a road on the site in September 2020, Friends of the Columbia Gorge and Columbia Riverkeepers filed a joint lawsuit against the project, claiming, among other things, the company had not properly met requirements to keep its

site certificate because it did not have a required storm water permit yet when it started work.

A hearing on a motion to dismiss the lawsuit filed with the Multnomah County Circuit Court had been scheduled for April 6, but was canceled on April 5 at the request of Perennial, which told the court it planned to drop the project. That hearing has now been

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### COVID-19 NUMBERS IN UMATILLA COUNTY



TOTALS FOR WEEK ENDING 4/29/2021

<b>RISK LEVEL HIGH</b>	<b>NEW CASES OVER 2 WEEKS 127</b>	<b>TOTAL CASE GOAL 40</b>	<b>OR LESS OVER 2 WEEKS</b>	<b>POSITIVE TEST RATE 5.1%</b>	<b>POSITIVE TEST GOAL 5%</b>
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