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Cpl. John Shown with the Oregon National Guard administers a COVID-19 vaccine to Mary Freeman during a COVID-19 vaccination run by Yellowhawk Tribal Health Care Center at Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Mission on Feb. 23, 2021. Officials are trying to piece together Umatilla County's true vaccination rate. Some entities, including the Oregon National Guard, reported vaccine data to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rather than the state, making Umatilla County's vaccination data unclear.

Trying to track the real vaccination rate

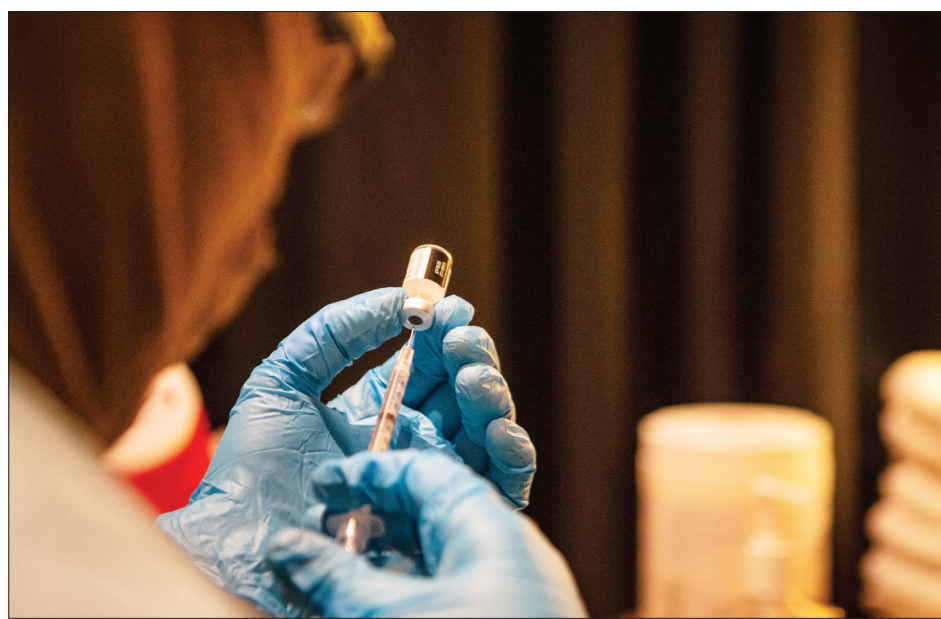
Lawmakers seek accurate data to determine percentage of Umatilla County residents who received vaccines

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

SALEM — Eastern Oregon lawmakers are seeking data that has long remained out of Umatilla County's grasp in a move to correct the county's COVID-19 vaccination rate.

In a letter to Gov. Kate Brown's office last week, lawmakers noted many Umatilla County residents have been vaccinated by Washington health care providers and veteran health services in Walla Walla. Others were vaccinated on the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation at mass vaccine clinics with the Oregon National Guard, which reports its data to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, officials say.

Much of that data has yet to be reported to the state, officials say, which has "unfairly impacted" the county's progress toward reopening as it remains among the lowest ranked counties statewide for vaccinations per capita.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

A member of the Oregon National Guard draws up a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine during a mass vaccination event April 13, 2021, at Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Mission.

"By not counting them, it makes it much more difficult, if not impossible, for Umatilla County to ... reach the state's required vaccination levels," said the letter to Brown's office, bearing the signatures of Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, and Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner. "They are counted on one side of the equation as citizens, but not on the other as being vaccinated."

For months, many residents turned to health care providers in other counties,

states or tribal governments when vaccine supply ran short in the county. Umatilla County's true vaccination status remained unclear, officials said.

But now that vaccine rates play a direct role in a county's reopening status, officials are seeking the data to "move the dial" further toward reopening, Hansell said.

"You want accuracy," said Hansell, who was vaccinated in Walla Walla. "Whether

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BAILEY'S BILL

SB 649 clears latest obstacle

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

SALEM — A bipartisan bill that increases penalties for teachers who sexually abuse students is headed to the House floor. The 10 members of Oregon's House Judiciary Committee voted unanimously on Monday night, May 24, to move Bailey's Bill forward.

But the journey of Senate Bill 649 through the Oregon legislative process has been bumpier than the law's original sponsor, Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, ever could have imagined.

The bill, named for Weston-McEwen High School student Bailey Munck, increases penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim if the offender was the victim's teacher. If approved by the House and signed by Gov. Kate Brown, the legislation fixes a discrepancy. Currently, a coach convicted of sexual abuse receives harsher penalties than a teacher who commits the exact same crime.

"It's been an interesting and arduous journey getting Bailey's Bill through the process," Hansell said after the May 21 hearing.

Bill becomes political tool

"Interesting" and "arduous" refer to obstructions that threatened to kill the bill at different points along the way. The most recent came in the form of two amendments authored by Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene. The amendments would have essentially torpedoed the bill, replacing most of the verbiage with language that actually does the opposite of the original proposed legislation.

During the May 24, Wilde explained he simply was expressing his desire to start a discussion on sentencing reform.

"I think we need to acknowledge each other's legitimate concerns," said Wilde, who is an attorney. "Many in my party believe that we are over-punishing and we do need to address mass incarceration. I believe people in the other party aren't wrong either when they believe that people have committed truly atrocious acts and should go away for a long period of time. I think where we might find agreement on that is restoring some greater degree of discretion to sentencing judges to make appropriate sentences based on the facts of those cases."

That said, Wilde acknowledged

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Port of Morrow suffering from workplace shortage

Supplemental benefits contributing to inability to find employees, letter says

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — Some Morrow County employers are blaming extra unemployment benefits for unfilled positions and say it is time for those pandemic-era supplemental benefits to come to an end.

In a letter to Gov. Kate Brown "on behalf of Morrow County employers," Kalie Davis, director of workforce development for the Port of Morrow, listed 25 employers in the county that had more than 200 job openings total.

"I receive multiple phone calls a day from both employers and temp agencies who are desperate to find anyone that is willing to work," she wrote.

She asked the governor to consider ending Oregon's participation in the federal supplemental unemployment benefits program.

"The benefit of being unemployed should not outweigh the benefit of working," the letter stated.

One of the Morrow County employers that Davis listed in the letter is Threemile Canyon Farms. The Boardman farm reports 17 open positions on its website, including irrigation technician, mechanic, human resources clerk and accountant.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A billboard along Interstate 84 near Boardman advertises jobs at the Port of Morrow on Wednesday, May 26, 2021. Port of Morrow Director of Workforce Development Kalie Davis listed more than 200 job openings across 25 employers in a letter to Gov. Kate Brown asking to end the pandemic-era supplemental unemployment benefits.

