

Union County sheriff takes aim at Brown, mask mandates

Cody Bowen publishes letter encouraging citizens to 'stand up' in this 'free country'

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Frustration.

That is the theme echoed throughout Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen's personal letter to Gov. Kate Brown regarding the recent statewide mask mandate for public schools. Bowen listed his reasons for concern and called for local control on decision making in a letter to Brown on Friday, Aug. 13, and posted on social media.

"I believe that as Americans, we have a right to choose," Bowen said. "This isn't a law and it hasn't been voted on by the people."

Bowen, a parent himself, advocated for parents making their own decisions on whether children in school should wear masks. In the letter, Bowen wrote he hopes to open a dialogue and speak on behalf of the people of Union County.

The letter states he believes the mandate is unconstitutional and he is against threatening the live-

hoods of teachers. Bowen is referring to the potential fines and loss of teaching licenses for teachers and staff who do not enforce the mandate. This has been a hot topic of debate at recent school board meetings in the area, with concerned parents and community members voicing their opposition.

"They know what's right, but they're scared that if they stand up, then teachers might lose their jobs," Bowen said. "They're trying to do what's best and I don't envy any of the superintendents because they're in a terrible spot."

At the Union and Imbler board meetings, a majority of members on the board expressed their opposition to the mandate. However, with the risks facing the schools and teachers, little ground was made in negotiations between parents and board members.

The La Grande and Union school boards both voted in favor of wearing masks this school year, amid pushback from parents. Imbler makes its decision on Tuesday, Aug. 17. Bowen supports parents' choice to send their children to school in masks, but he opposes forced mask use.

In the letter, Bowen implored Gov. Brown to listen to her constituents and stop ignoring the east-

ern side of the state. Bowen also stated that as sheriff, the mandate is not a law and not something he can enforce. That being said, Bowen has a vested interest based on his constituents and his own personal opinion.

Bowen was elected to the Union County sheriff's position in 2020. According to Bowen, calls to his office from the community were a major reason in his decision to write the letter to the governor. Bowen said he does not expect other sheriff's offices in the region to make similar statements, but would appreciate the support.

"I don't think it's one individual person's job to put their neck on the line, but if I have to be the guy that does that and stand up for what I believe is right, then so be it," he said.

Brown announced in late July that masks will be required for anyone inside of a school in Oregon this year.

"The science and data are clear: the delta variant is in our communities, and it is more contagious," Brown said in a statement at the time. "My priority is to ensure our kids are able to safely return to full-time in-person learning this fall, five days per week and with minimal disruptions. With many children still ineligi-



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen stands in the sheriff's office in La Grande Feb. 19, 2021. Bowen on Friday, Aug. 13, sent a letter to Gov. Kate Brown opposing her mandate for students and staff in public schools to wear masks to help curb the spike in the coronavirus.

ble to be vaccinated, masks are an effective way to help keep our kids safe in the classroom, the learning environment we know serves them best."

During the outbreak in 2020, the decision to require masks was in the hands of local school districts. Most districts followed the Oregon Department

of Education's lead, by "strongly advising" masks and following the governor's recent decision, some school leaders expressed surprise at the governor's announcement and voiced their interest in making school health decisions at the district, rather than the state, level.

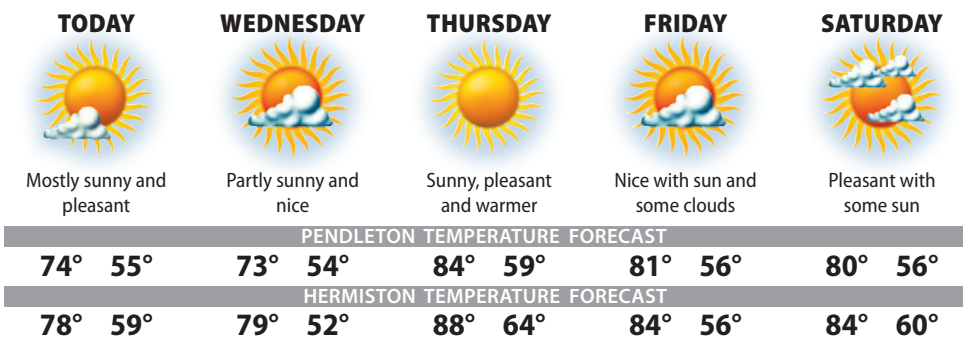
In a statement from the Oregon Department of Education, officials said they are working to create a rule requiring face coverings in all indoor school settings — both public and private — for all individuals age 2 and older. This includes students, staff, contractors, volunteers and visitors.

Officials say the rule will take effect upon adoption, but the exact date is unclear. Summer school and students and staff in other summer programs will also be required to wear face coverings when the rule is instituted.

The rule will include provisions for eating, drinking, playing a musical instrument that requires using the mouth and certain sports — including swimming, gymnastics and wrestling.

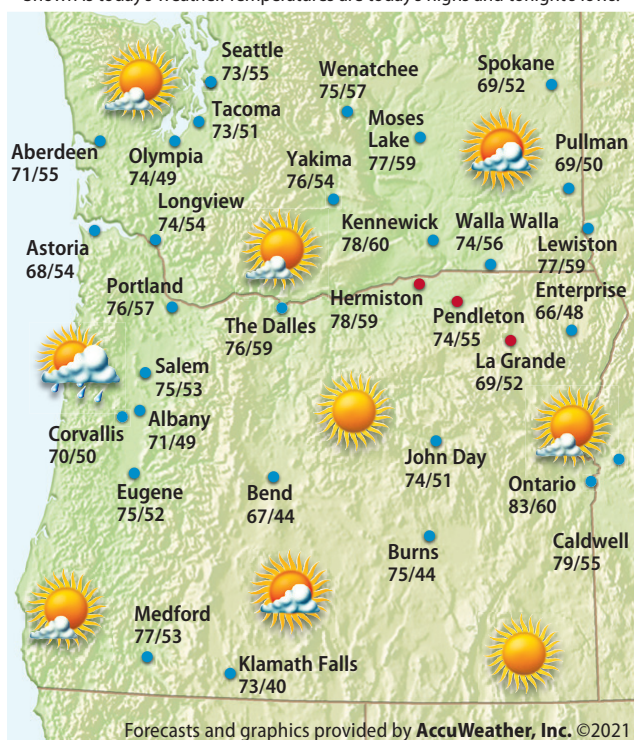
— Oregon Public Broadcasting reporters Jeff Thompson and Elizabeth Miller contributed to this report.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



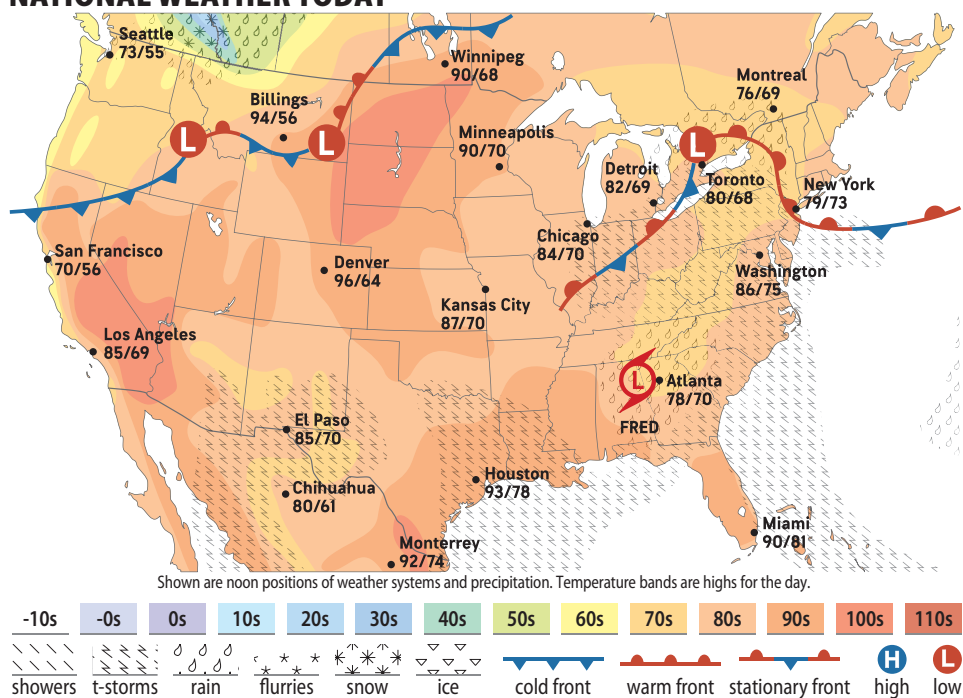
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.				
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW		
Yesterday	96°	64°		
Normals	89°	58°		
Records	108° (1933)	39° (1909)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"			
Month to date	0.01"			
Normal month to date	0.16"			
Year to date	4.37"			
Last year to date	8.68"			
Normal year to date	8.47"			
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.				
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW		
Yesterday	99°	61°		
Normals	91°	57°		
Records	105° (2008)	40° (1935)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"			
Month to date	0.00"			
Normal month to date	0.09"			
Year to date	1.93"			
Last year to date	1.66"			
Normal year to date	5.23"			
WINDS (in mph)				
	Today	Wed.		
Boardman	W 7-14	N 4-8		
Pendleton	W 8-16	NNW 7-14		
SUN AND MOON				
Sunrise today	5:58 a.m.			
Sunset tonight	8:00 p.m.			
Moonrise today	4:47 p.m.			
Moonset today	12:26 a.m.			
	Full	Last	New	First
	Aug 22	Aug 29	Sep 6	Sep 13

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 109° in China Lake, Calif. Low 34° in Afton, Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Wyden to host online town hall

East Oregonian

PORTLAND — Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, will host an online town hall to discuss his River Democracy Act with rural Oregonians.

The virtual meeting is scheduled for 1 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 31.

The act was introduced alongside Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, in February 2021 and is aimed at protecting nearly 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon. It also focuses on expanding recreation access to promote local economies, protecting drinking water, limiting wildfire and sustaining endangered fish and wildlife.

"I very much look forward to throwing open the digi-

tal doors of democracy on Aug. 31 to hear from rural Oregon's county commissioners, river enthusiasts, small business owners and more so the River Democracy Act continues on its path to provide clean drinking water for families, build an even stronger outdoor recreation economy in every nook and cranny of our state, and improve wildfire resiliency."

Upon introducing the act in February, only 2,173 out of 110,994 total miles of rivers and streams in Oregon are protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Wyden initiated the public process in October 2019 to acquire recommendations from Oregon residents on

ivers that deserve protection. Oregonians submitted approximately 15,000 nominations by January 2020. During the past year, Wyden has met with county commissioners to discuss the list of protections and address any concerns.

Wyden has hosted over 900 in-person town halls statewide, following his pledge to hold at least one town hall in each of the state's counties at least once a year. Since the start of the pandemic, Wyden has continued hosting the town halls virtually.

The virtual town hall meeting will be hosted by People's Town Hall on Facebook Live at <https://bit.ly/3x-T11am>.

IN BRIEF

La Nina likely to bring relief to Northwest farmers this winter

SALEM — Portions of the Pacific Ocean cooled considerably in July, affirming a La Nina weather system likely will form this fall, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Thursday, Aug. 12.

NOAA's Climate Prediction Center pegged the odds of a La Nina prevailing in November, December and January at 69%.

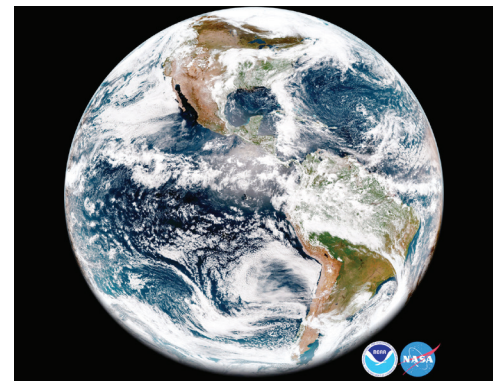
Most likely, the La Nina will be weak, according to NOAA, though the agency estimated the chances of a moderate La Nina at 1-in-3 and a strong La Nina at 1-in-10.

La Ninas occur when cooling sea-surface temperatures trigger atmospheric changes that shift incoming jet streams northward.

La Nina winters often are cooler and wetter in Washington and much of Oregon and Idaho, while California and other southern-tier states are warmer and drier. La Nina could mean a good snowpack for Northwest irrigators, but worsen the drought in the Southwest.

The U.S. Drought Monitor reported that 95% of Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Washington were in drought.

One-quarter of the West was in an "exceptional drought," the worst classification. Cali-



NOAA/Contributed Photo
A La Nina weather pattern is likely to cause a cold, wet winter, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021.

fornia and Utah are the hardest hit states.

An El Nino shifts jet streams southward, intensifying winter storms in the southern tier of the U.S. and leaving the Northwest warm and dry. NOAA sees almost no chance that an El Nino will form this winter.

An La Nina prevailed last winter, as Washington built up a good snowpack that's helping irrigators weather a dry spring and hot summer.

The La Nina faded last spring and since then ocean temperatures have been normal. NOAA expects the neutral conditions to prevail for the rest of the summer.

— EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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