

## Protest:

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Jared Uselman, the president of the Pendleton Professional Firefighters IAAF Local 2296, said he was working on negotiations with the state over vaccination requirements when he was blindsided by the governor's order.

"I don't think that vaccination is wrong, I don't oppose it by any means," Uselman said. "But I do oppose people not having a choice."

His stance was all about vaccination mandates, he said.

"I have a sense of responsibility to advocate and protect the rights of my members, both the vaccinated and the unvaccinated side," Uselman said.

Uselman, who wasn't intending to speak at the rally, felt the conversation was moving away from the mandate and more into conspiracy theories when he decided to jump in and talk about supporting those who wish to get vaccinated but felt that the state was overreaching.

"I don't support coercion by the government," he said.

He added as a first responder he understood he signed up to work in a potentially dangerous profession and noted the firefighters he represents have followed all hygiene and sanitary procedures to limit the transmission of COVID-19 and would continue to do so. But, he said, through open dialogue and understanding they should be able to make good medical decisions on their own and not be ordered to do so by the governor.

The overwhelming majority of experts agree the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective against the varying strains. And, while breakthrough cases still happen, the vaccines drastically reduce serious cases of illness and death. The Pfizer vaccine, now marketed as Comirnaty, passed stringent scientific and health standards to gain FDA approval on Aug. 23.

"The public can be very confident that this vaccine meets the

## Umatilla County sheriff comments on mandates

Despite the mandate being statewide, Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said the vaccine and mask orders do not provide statutory authority for sheriffs to enforce the governor's most recent orders on anyone.

"We are not a regulatory authority," he said, before adding the determination of whether someone gets the vaccination should be a choice between the individual and their doctor.

Rowan said he believes Brown's orders to be unconstitutional and since COVID-19 is not a declared emergency by the state, he doesn't see any repercussions for not following them. He said the expectation for the mandates was not to enforce them, but to educate people about them.

"The mandates don't provide authority to me to do anything," he said.

The governor's office did not respond Friday by deadline to a request for comment. So far, Brown has not made a public statement asking sheriffs to enforcement any recent mandate.

— East Oregonian

high standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality the FDA requires of an approved product," said Dr. Janet Woodcock, the acting FDA commissioner, in a press release.

But some don't feel comfortable with the state pushing it on people.

Jim Williams, a farmer who attended the rally in support of his daughter who is a nurse and is expecting to give birth in December, said she was worried about the vaccine affecting her baby and was frustrated she had to choose between getting the vaccine or losing her job.

Williams, who had COVID-19 in the past, said the best solution to the pandemic was to use common sense and not put yourself or others at unnecessary risk.

"If someone chooses to get it, great," he said, "just don't push it on me."

According to the most recent data from the Oregon Health Authority, 59% of all licensed healthcare workers in Umatilla County have been vaccinated for COVID-19, tied with

Curry and Douglas counties and near the bottom of Oregon's 36 counties.

As of Aug. 27, there is only one available staffed adult intensive care unit bed across all of Region 9, which encompasses Baker, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties. With 4.2 million people residing in Oregon, according to 2019 census data, there are a total of 51 available ICU beds across the entire state. Many are being transferred across state lines to hospitals in California or Washington as beds fill up.

The shrinking number of beds has meant those with life-threatening health concerns, such as being in a car crash or having a heart attack or stroke, might not be able to receive treatment. In Roseburg on Aug. 19, one man who tested positive for COVID-19 died while waiting for a bed, according to Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Umatilla County on Aug. 27 reported 74 new cases of COVID-19 along with the 114th and 115th deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic began.

## Round-Up:

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Board of trustees Chair Kat Brigham said Hamley's, a tribally owned business, needed to shut down for two weeks after Pendleton Whisky Music Fest because of the number of staff who came down with COVID-19 after the event.

"I will encourage my entire family not to go near the Pendleton Round-Up this year," said Shawna Shillal-Gavin, the chair of

the CTUIR Tribal Health Commission and a tribal member who has lost a son and brother to the virus.

Brigham said opinions about the 2021 Round-Up were varied among tribal members, with some showing concern while others wanted to participate like normal. Curtis Bearchum, a member of the subcommittee of tribal members working with the Round-Up on the health plan, said



Brigham

people needed to take into account personal responsibility and how difficult the mask mandate is to enforce.

Jill-Marie Gavin, an at-large board member and Shillal-Gavin's daughter, floated the idea of limiting the Indian Village to just vaccinated people or CTUIR members, an idea the Round-Up was willing to consider at the behest of the tribes. Brigham said the board would meet again to discuss the issue further, taking an official position ahead of the Round-Up. The first day of the Round-Up is Sept. 11.

## Troops:

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The soldiers would provide support to the hospital through clinical and nonclinical roles. The hospital chain — which serves Baker City, Ontario and Boise — also requested six soldiers to assist with operations in Ontario. It was not known how many soldiers were requested for the Baker City location.

Wallowa County on Aug. 25 requested Oregon National Guard support, according to Brooke Pace, director of communications and public relations at Wallowa Memorial Hospital. The request came 12 days after Brown's announcement about deploying Oregon National Guard soldiers to hospitals during the recent surge of COVID-19.

In Grant County, several members of the Oregon National Guard already started assisting operations in the Blue Mountain Hospital District. The hospital is among only 11 hospitals in Oregon to receive support from the nearly 500 national guard members currently activated. Officials with the Oregon National Guard indicated roughly 20 more hospitals will be bolstered by an additional 1,000 guard members by next week, with numbers varying based on need.

Soldiers' tasks include assisting in support roles, such as entrance screeners, janitorial services and security for the hospital, as well as providing logistical relief for overworked health care staff who have been on the front lines of the pandemic for nearly two years.

"We have staff burnout. They have been working very

long, stressful hours, and we are looking for ways to help our staff out as they face this next wave of COVID-19," said Mark Snider, public relations and digital strategy coordinator at Saint Alphonsus Health System in Baker City.

Soldiers with the Oregon National Guard served in support roles rather than direct clinical roles in Josephine County in Southern Oregon, which has experienced the fastest growing outbreaks of COVID-19 in the United States within the past two weeks.

"The goal is to help these hospitals with nonclinical support staff," said Maj. Chris Clyne, public affairs officer with the Oregon National Guard.

Mardi Ford, director of communications and marketing at Grande Ronde Hospital, said the situation at the hospital is fluid. While is has not needed support from the National Guard, that situation could change.

"Yes, we are short staffed, but at this point we have contingencies locally and at the state level for bringing in support and are in the process of working through all of that if needed," Ford said in an email.

According to Ford, the situation in Union County is not as dire as it is in Southern Oregon, which has seen one of the largest spikes in hospitalization in the United States in the past two weeks, but that the hospital was monitoring the situation in case it changes.

"Right now, we are managing. But it requires daily — often hourly — oversight," Ford said.

Hospitals in Eastern Oregon have reported staffing issues and are looking to add several dozen workers to their ranks. As of Aug. 26,

Grande Ronde Hospital had 63 positions available on its career webpage, while St. Anthony had 57 open positions. Ontario had 41 open positions, Wallowa Memorial Hospital had 31 and Baker City St. Alphonsus Medical Center had 28 open positions.

More than 1,600 new cases

of COVID-19 were reported in Northeastern Oregon since Aug. 11. Region 9, which encompasses Morrow, Umatilla, Wallowa, Union, Baker, Grant and Malheur counties, has just five staffed intensive care unit beds available. Jackson and Josephine Counties in Southern Oregon reported having only one ICU

bed available.

As hospitalizations increase throughout the state, the stress it puts on normal operations at hospitals — which transfer patients based on availability — is immense. Grande Ronde Hospital in Union County reported last week it had to transfer a patient to Montana because

there wasn't enough space available at the hospital, which has 25 beds.

"As the volumes continue to rise statewide and as facilities elsewhere in the state become overrun and start looking for other locations to transfer patients," Snider said, "they turn to smaller locations like Baker City."

## Wickers

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Roger was not vaccinated against COVID-19, Gail said. Neither is Gail, who is recovering from COVID-19 and whose son also contracted the virus. She remains uninterested in getting the vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective at preventing serious disease, hospitalization and death from the disease.

Umatilla County continues to break grim pandemic records amid the delta variant crisis flooding hospitals across the county, Oregon and the nation. The county reported four COVID-19 deaths Aug. 25, a single-day pandemic record, one more death on Aug. 26 and two more on Aug. 27. For two straight weeks, the county has reported a pandemic-high seven COVID-19 deaths.

Umatilla County has reported 115 COVID-19 deaths since the pandemic started in March 2020.

### A life together

Gail knew from the moment she saw Roger's photo online that they were supposed to be together. He had gentle eyes. He was patient, hard working and had a great sense of humor. And he had faith in God, which was essential to Gail.

The couple met through a dating website. In July 2002, Gail left home in La Grande and flew down to visit him in San Diego, where they fell in love over walks on nearby beaches. On one of their first dates, he played The Beatles' "Blackbird" for her.

"Every time I hear that song," she said, "I think of him."

Two months later, he came to La Grande and met her five children, who instantly adored him, she said. Within six months, the couple began what would be an 18-year marriage.

After living briefly with Roger in Southern California, Gail knew she needed to be closer to her children. So Roger sold his beloved Toyota Land Cruiser so they would have enough money to make the move to Hermiston. Bearing their first and only child, Blake, they packed up a U-Haul and headed north in May 2004.

With funds from the sold Toyota, the Wickers drove around Hermiston, searching for work and a place to live. After living briefly in a motel, they moved into Sundial Apartments. Luckily for them, employees at the complex were so impressed with

Roger's professionalism they offered him a job as manager. He accepted.

Roger eventually found work at the Bishop's Central Storehouse for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, where he remained for 15 years and where, it is believed, he would eventually come into contact with the virus that would take his life.

On a sunny winter day in 2009, the couple found their home. Blissfully oblivious to the holes in the wall, the cat pee-stained carpet and the dented garage door that would prevent them from getting a loan for months, Gail looked around and knew the house was where they belonged.

"There were many things wrong with the house," she said. "But my eyes just didn't see any of that. It was like a dream. I just had a feeling and I didn't see anything that was wrong with it until we came back."

Roger quickly grew close to Gail's family. He became close friends with her ex-husband. He showed his skills as a handyman while repairing utilities for friends and family. Today, the deck he was repairing in their backyard remains unfinished.

And he always found time to travel with Gail. A Holiday Inn Resort in Newport on the Oregon coast, near the sea cliffs and where they could view a lighthouse on the horizon, was one of their favorite places to travel. The couple had plans to buy a recreational vehicle and travel together. Roger only needed to work two more years to pay off their mortgage.

"We just had a wonderful life, traveling, going places," she said.

As with any family, the little moments are what Gail holds closest: watching movies; eating ice cream (his favorite flavor was salted caramel); Roger wrestling with Blake on a futon in the living room.

And her house and Facebook are full of images with every memory: standing in a cave on a San Diego beach; walking a beach with metal detectors; playing in a rock and roll band in a living room; dancing with Gail in the street at a car show in Walla Walla.

"He was gentle, loving and kind," she said. "He had a manner about him that was just so soothing. He just had a calming, soothing effect on anybody he spoke with. He was loved by so many people."

She added: "It'll be a great meeting when we all meet in heaven together."

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