

OUR VIEW

Issues remain after deadline pushed back

The news that more than half of Oregon's state employees will get an extra six weeks to get inoculated against COVID-19 was welcome, but the question of what happens after the deadline remains unanswered.

Gov. Kate Brown pushed back the earlier October deadline and set Nov. 30 as the final date state employees must be vaccinated. The decision affects more than 20,000 workers.

Yet many people — including many in the health care industry — have no intention of getting vaccinated for a variety of reasons, and that could mean the state will face a new crisis on top of an already spiraling COVID-19 surge.

Now, more than a quarter of all health care workers in Umatilla, Union and Morrow counties remain unvaccinated. All those workers would be fired or forced to resign under the governor's vaccination mandate.

Dr. Jon Hitzman, Umatilla County's public health officer, said last week the situation is like a game of chicken.

"Who's going to relent first?" he asked.

That we've reached this point in what is a once-a-century pandemic is beyond troubling. It is sad.

Yet, here we are. If neither side budges — and so far, the governor hasn't indicated she plans to back down — then the small towns scattered across Eastern Oregon will encounter a new medical emergency because there will be fewer qualified people to attend to those with the virus and people injured or in need of serious care.

In a sense, the area's hospitals are caught in the middle — a not uncommon situation since the pandemic began — as they must comply with the state mandate but, at the same time, need qualified people to operate effectively.

Ultimately, much of the final consequence of this situation is out of the hands of residents of the region. We can sympathize with health care workers, or we can feel they should all follow the governor's mandate but, in the end, it will be an individual decision thousands of workers have to make.

So, the real question is what measures and fail-safes are elected leaders across the region proposing to overcome a sudden loss of thousands of qualified workers? What will be the state's role if the region faces a mass exodus of health care workers? Have local elected leaders reached out to state leaders about the issue? If so, what plan is in the works?

We can't afford to wait around and see who blinks first. We need actionable plans in case we lose a great number of workers.



Learning from each other's stories



REGINA BRAKER

OPINION

It was intermission at a concert some years ago at our rural state university in La Grande. A former colleague greeted me with a big smile and asked, "Did you buy our house in Pendleton? My mother asked if I knew the people who bought it. I told her I don't know everyone here."

I've thought back to that conversation as we've made changes in the house, the most recent to remove a heavy loud-speaker from the attic when we installed a new fan for better air circulation in this summer's heat. My husband and I laughed at the likely fright caused by sound effects emanating from under the roof on spooky Halloween nights.

It connected with my friend's sense of humor and enthusiasm for bringing others into the circle with a lively smile, or by sharing a joke from their phone. They're the kind of professor who looks for ways to support the weakest student in class, even as the strongest work on tasks that challenge them as well.

I experienced their expertise at a summer seminar for teachers where I was invited to participate, as it aligned with my interests as a language professor whose curriculum included second language acquisition strategies and the development of intercultural competence. My friend brought people into the complex work of developing culturally sensitive curricula, signaling to us that there is always more to learn about

those around us as we hear their stories and share our own.

And I am struck by the resilience and wisdom my friend so easily brings to interactions with others. The experiences of a difficult life and optimism in the power of education pave entry with those who see little promise for themselves, extending support and confidence to develop new possibilities for them. This professor started life with many challenges, the first being adoption when birth parents lacked the resources to keep their child. Gradually other doors opened because people were willing to offer stability, new possibilities and bigger dreams.

Early on, the elementary school principal approved my friend's continuing attendance despite a series of changes in residence. School offered respite from upheaval and experiences of poverty, bringing so many positive experiences. Excellence at school as a pathway toward a better future was a lesson enhanced when their mother joined the eldest daughter in attending college. Home life changed in positive ways, and the occasional days of tagging along to lectures were highlights in seeing greater possibilities in the teaching profession. It's funny what we remember, for my friend the campus coffee shop's ginormous cookies.

After the family moved to Pendleton, a local attorney who presented the Rotary exchange program at the high school became a key mentor, suggesting that my friend apply. An internship at his law office brought the financial assistance necessary to a successful application to the program, and the following year my friend was off to Mexico for a

life-changing experience.

Perhaps even more important than the positive adventure of "learning Spanish, meeting amazing people and falling in love with the Mexican people, language, and culture" were the inevitable challenges. In their words, "for the first time in my life I was not a straight-A student and there were many challenges with language, communication and culture shock." These experiences confirmed the wish to become a teacher, the way forward now clear in a desire to teach Spanish. Following opportunities to work in ESL and a teaching position in Spanish, graduate studies culminated in hiring as a professor of Education.

My friend is now paying it forward, directing the Oregon Teacher Pathway program in its mission to diversify the teacher workforce by paving smoother high school to college transitions, and bringing professional development to preservice and in-service teachers and community members as director of the Center for Culturally Responsive Practices.

Their work extends to community service and outreach through volunteer activities, including advising students in the Education Club at EOU in its work with local food banks, and providing tutoring and mentoring of local children. My friend has come full circle, and the wide ripple effect from their life to others continues to expand, even as another academic year begins.

Regina Braker, of Pendleton, is a retired educator with journeys through many places and experiences who enjoys getting to know people along the way.

YOUR VIEWS

CityFest thankful to be a part of Eastern Oregon

The Greater Hermiston CityFest was an amazing event. The event had three objectives: bring regional churches together, 63 churches and organizations participated; learn how local churches can better serve their communities; and provide a message of hope.

Nearly 5,000 people attended the event at Butte Park in Hermiston to enjoy the events, which included activities for kids, a BMX demonstration, amazing motorcycle jumping with aerobatics, national known entertainment and a message of hope from Andrew Palau.

Events leading up to and including festival week involved another 1,500 people.

An event of this caliber would not have happened without the tremendous support from many. We thank the cities

of Hermiston and Umatilla. They were so supportive of the event, in so many ways. Of course, without the close and professional collaboration of the Luis Palau Association, and their dedicated and capable staff, the event just would not have happened. Andrew and Wendy Palau were amazing.

In addition, we appreciated the support of Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston and his officers for helping to keep the event safe. Umatilla Electric Cooperative and Good Shepherd Health Care System provided needed parking. The Hermiston Parks and Recreation staff were very helpful. Plus, over 300 volunteers served in many positions to help the events of the week run smoothly. Actually, there are so many to thank, for their contributions of time, their skills, or equipment, we would fill up a page acknowledging them. Thank you.

Lastly, an event free to the public, with nationally known artists and

entertainers, and all the technical personnel that goes along with an event of this magnitude, requires significant funding. We want to thank all those who financially contributed to make the event happen. They apparently understood the opportunities and benefits that an event like this brought would bring to region.

We hope that this is just a start of greater community involvement by our churches. We already have the "I Love My City" activity in Hermiston. Hopefully that movement will expand, not only in Hermiston, but into other local cities across the region. We also know that hundreds heard and responded to the message of hope that our world so desperately needs.

We are humbled and grateful to belong to such a caring and generous region who values hope for everyone.

Mary Corp and Phil Hamm
CityFest co-chairs
Hermiston

EDITORIALS

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