

Cases:

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When pressed for her level of alarm amid the outbreak, Brown said in the news conference first and foremost that she did not attend the Round-Up because she was concerned about community spread.

Brown said she was well aware of the regional case spike “as a result of the Pendleton Round-Up,” but she still said “it’s a little early,” noting the Round-Up only ended a few weeks ago.

Deadly month

But the state’s own numbers, along with those from federal and non-government groups, painted a darker picture.

There were 424 COVID-19 deaths in Oregon in September as of Sept. 27, making September the third deadliest month of the pandemic.

September surpassed August’s death toll and could exceed the January total of 476 by the end of the month.

Oregon’s Hospital Capacity Web System, which tracks availability of hospital beds in the state, reported Sept. 27 that only six of 89 staffed adult intensive care unit beds east of the Cascades were available.

The Pendleton Round-Up was canceled in 2020 amid COVID-19 concerns, but plans moved forward in early summer as Brown dropped many restrictions on activities when COVID-19 cases appeared to bottom out at the end of June.

The event went off as scheduled despite a steep wave of cases linked to the highly contagious delta variant that swept across Oregon and filled state hospitals to capacity.

It’s still too early to say if cases foreshadow a new spike statewide and health officials are watching closely for that possibility, Jeanne said.

Brown did not voice any regret in not overriding local officials’ decision to go ahead with the event. The Round-Up brought tens of thousands of people into an area with high infection rates and where just 51% of eligible adults were vaccinated. Many of the visitors came from areas in neighboring states where vac-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Fans cheer during the grand entry Sept. 18, 2021, of the 111th Pendleton Round-Up at the Round-Up Grounds. Gov. Kate Brown on Tuesday, Sept. 28, said she was “gravely concerned” about the spike in COVID-19 cases connected to the Round-Up.

nation rates were also low.

Brown said the state had pressed officials across Oregon to encourage safety protocols, including mask mandates. She pointed to other states where people are gathering en masse without a mandate.

“If you watch an Ohio (State) football game in Ohio, those stadiums filled with 100,000 people, there is hardly a mask there,” Brown said. “That is very different here in Oregon.”

Prior to the mid-September event in Pendleton, Brown said it was up to local officials to ensure the safety of the crowd. As for those who attended, she said they should mask up, follow social distancing guidelines, but otherwise “Let ‘er Buck,” per the Round-Up’s slogan.

But masks were few and far between throughout the Round-Up, even though organizers were offering thousands of them and had posted signs encouraging masking and distancing.

‘It is inevitable’

Fiumara, Umatilla County Public Health boss, has said the number of COVID-19 cases tied to the Round-Up is an undercount, as many people who have tested positive are aware of others who have and are not cooperating with health officials. The reported cases include people who had COVID-19 symptoms prior to the event and yet still chose to come, officials have said.

“When so many people come together in one location, it is inevitable,” Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said in an email. “The same thing has happened each time restric-

tions in Oregon have been lifted.”

No county or state officials voiced any interest publicly in stopping the Pendleton Round-Up from happening.

Until this past week, COVID-19 cases had declined statewide for three consecutive weeks.

But state officials acknowledged in the press conference that cases had flat-lined over the previous week. They cited the Pendleton Round-Up outbreak specifically as one of several factors contributing to this trend.

Last week, Umatilla County reported 505 new COVID-19 cases, the county’s second-highest total since the pandemic started.

On Sept. 28, the county’s average daily cases reached a new pandemic high, topping its previous record set in August, a month when more county residents died with COVID-19 than any other month — 22.

But public health directors for Umatilla County and the Umatilla Indian Reservation voiced alarm in recent days about the speed with which the outbreak has unfolded.

County officials have said they are preparing for the surge to continue for several weeks. In response, tribal officials reinstated pandemic restrictions that hearken back to those from the pandemic’s early stages, including limited social gatherings.

Hospital strain

Brown said she was “very, very concerned” with what this means for hospitals, adding that rural communities generally have less access to health care than counties in Western Oregon.

“Honestly, I’m very concerned about the capacity

of health care workers themselves,” she said. “They have been working day in and day out for the last several weeks providing incredibly valuable patient care, life-saving care. And to have an additional surge on top of it is incredibly frustrating, I’m sure, for them after they have worked so hard.”

Brown in August announced a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for teachers and health care workers with an Oct. 18 deadline, citing the alarming rise in cases driven by the delta variant.

Besides Wheeler County, more than a quarter of health care workers in every county in Eastern Oregon county are unvaccinated, according to state data. All would be fired or forced to resign under Brown’s current mandate.

Last week, Dr. Jon Hitzman, Umatilla County’s public health officer, said if a COVID-19 surge were to follow the Pendleton Round-Up, its peak would occur right around the mandate’s deadline, placing a greater strain on hospitals that already are short-staffed.

In the press conference, Brown said she was “pushing forward on our vaccine requirement for health care workers because we have a really stark choice right now: a vaccinated workforce that can continue to work through our COVID surges like the one we’re likely to see again from the Pendleton Round-Up, or an unvaccinated workforce that’s depleted by quarantines and illness.”

Much of the briefing was taken up with mostly upbeat news of overall drop of statewide cases, approval of booster shots for some Pfizer vaccine recipients, and the usual requests for continued voluntary masking and social distancing.

The rising numbers in Umatilla County led the independent pandemic monitoring group COVID Act Now to raise the county’s risk rating to its highest level: Extreme.

Since first appearing in Wuhan, China, at the very end of 2019, COVID-19 has infected 232.6 million people worldwide and killed 4.76 million, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. In the United States, 43.2 million cases have been reported and 692,058 have died.

said. “I take one challenge at a time.”

But the speaker did not hesitate to place blame for the heightened tension that has marked the House in recent years, noting she’d led the chamber through nine regular and six special sessions.

“I’ve had my challenges with Republican leaders, but not to the level that I’ve had with Leader Drazan,” Kotek said. “I think you should ask her why she has such a difficult time succeeding for her caucus... I have a track record working across the aisle with everybody. My problem lies with her.”

How the interpersonal fracture plays out in the future is not clear. Asked about it Sept. 28, a spokesman for Drazan pointed to her statement advocating for Kotek’s censure.

If Republicans do seek to influence next year’s session with parliamentary delays or walkouts, it might be their last opportunity. A coalition of Democratic allies have begun pursuing measures on the 2022 ballot that would penalize lawmakers for blocking legislative action by walking away, and effectively eliminate their ability to require bills to be read in full.

The coalition, No More Costly Walkouts, has four potential measures in play, and has said it will decide which to put before voters based on official ballot language and polling.

“The coalition will move forward one or more of those but they aren’t ready to make an announcement,” said Patty Wentz, a consultant working for the group. She added the group is “holding firm on the fact there need to be consequences for walking off the job.”

OBITUARY

Margaret Jane Franklin-Martin

March 19, 1948 — Sept. 12, 2021

Oregon City

Margaret Jane Franklin-Martin, MA, educator, devoted wife, loving mother, sister and daughter, succumbed to complications associated with pancreatic and ovarian cancer and passed away Sept. 12, 2021, at Providence Portland Medical Center in Portland. Margaret was born on March 19, 1948, in Walla Walla to John and Gloria Franklin (Powell), and is survived by her husband, Terry Martin; daughter, Dr. Drew Martin; mother, Gloria Franklin; and two younger sisters, Chris (Tim) Pacheco and Jeanne Irving (Franklin).

With a keen interest in pursuing a career in education like her mother, following graduation from McLoughlin High School (Mac-Hi) in Milton Free-water, Margaret headed to Moscow, Idaho, and the University of Idaho to begin her undergraduate studies. She joined the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority and was very active in campus life. Margaret went on to complete her bachelor’s degree at Portland State University and begin her career as an educator in Oregon. Later in life, Margaret completed her Master of Reading Literacy degree at Lewis & Clark College with her daughter, Drew, in tow for many classes.

On March 18, 1979, Margaret married her high school sweetheart, Terry Martin, who had graduated from the United States Naval Academy and was in the process of pursuing a career as a Marine Corps fighter pilot. They moved around extensively during the early years of their marriage to accommodate Terry’s various postings, making homes in Arizona, California, Oregon and Virginia. On Sept. 21, 1982, they welcomed their daughter, Lauren Drew Martin, while Terry was stationed in Monterey, California. The family eventually settled back in Oregon City long term, when Drew reached school age, while Terry completed his commitment to the military.

While Margaret started her career as a teacher shortly after finishing undergrad as a middle school teacher in Milwaukie, she took a prolonged hiatus to raise her daughter and take care of the homestead during Terry’s years of service. After Drew entered high school, Margaret eagerly returned to teaching

as a middle school teacher at St. John the Apostle in Oregon City and then Christ the King in Milwaukie. Margaret completed her career back at St. John the Apostle with a focus on middle school science and math curriculum. She was an avid proponent of STEM education and associated programs and advocated for them in her various positions later

in her career. Margaret was a multimedia artist at heart and an avid crafter in her later years with a particular penchant for making lovely handcrafted, themed wreaths, handmade gifts and holiday decorations. There was not a square foot of her home without a seasonal pop of color and Michaels craft store was like a second home. She enjoyed using natural objects, especially rocks, wheat and pine cones, to create beautiful art and decorations for her home and the homes of her family members. Her creative spirit and unique perspective will be missed.

Growing up, Margaret always loved animals and her family had a variety of dogs and other pets. Later in life she and Terry had three toy poodles, Sparky, Peppy and Boom Boom, as well as her horses, Blitz and Roladon (Donny); in addition to a myriad of feline companions. After the final move back to Oregon City on their 5-acre farm, the Martin household continued to be a beacon for “dumped” cats and dogs in need of forever homes, including Mary Ann, Stormy and Rex and many, many more. After the passing of her horses, Margaret started a herd of wool-breed sheep and angora goats and enjoyed the shearing, cleaning, processing and spinning of their wool and mohair. In her later life, through natural attrition, the animal menagerie was reduced to a handful of well-loved cats, including Leo, Spicy and Jack, then those that survived her, Nikki, Bart and Toby. All of her animals were incredibly lucky to have such a dedicated, loving caretaker that always put their needs first. Her surviving fuzzy felines will miss her constant care, affection and love.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Oregon Humane Society & Cat Adoption Team (CAT) in her name.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Students in Bailey Watson’s first grade class settle in Aug. 30, 2021, for the first day of school at Highland Hills Elementary School in Hermiston. The Oregon Health Authority reported the Hermiston School District as of Sept. 22 had 36 students with COVID-19 and seven staff cases.

Schools:

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“I’m going to do everything in our power to keep schools open,” she said.

While the number of students and staff directly affected by COVID-19 is relatively small in districts the size of Hermiston and Pendleton, a few cases can go much further in a district such as Helix, which has one of the smallest student bodies in the state.

Helix has had nine students and eight staff test positive for the virus since the year began. For staff members, that represented about one-third of their ranks.

Helix Superintendent Brad Bixler said staff didn’t test positive for the virus all at once, which gave the

district the flexibility to bring in substitutes as needed and avoid shutting down classes or the school. With its most recent case coming on Sept. 8, Bixler said Helix is back at full strength.

Bixler said parents have done a good job of communicating with the district and keeping their students home if they think they’ve been exposed or sick. Like its neighboring district to the south, Helix is keeping an eye out to see if Round-Up will have an effect on students or staff.

While the Helix School District’s coverage area doesn’t intersect with Pendleton, a significant amount of Helix’s students and staff commute from Pendleton. Bixler said he’s “crossing my fingers” that Helix won’t see new cases arise from the rodeo.

Fallout:

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When they returned two days later, Minority Leader Christine Drazen, R-Canby, put forward a motion to have Kotek formally censured.

“When she chooses to break an agreement made in good faith, she is harming the institution, creating greater division and impacting our ability to work together in service to Oregonians,” Drazen said. “She must be censured for this conduct.”

The motion, floated immediately after Democrats passed new political maps largely along party lines, was little more than an opportunity for Drazen to air grievances. Supermajority Democrats dutifully voted against disciplining their leader, who has her sights set on the governor’s office. Two Republicans opted to leave the chamber rather than participating. The motion failed on a 33-14 vote.

Drazen herself suggested that she would face reprisals for urging censure. “I recognize that there’s probably nobody who believes that I personally won’t face something for my decision to bring this forward,” she said.

The GOP leader was not alone in decrying Kotek’s decision. Time and again, Republicans rose Sept. 27 to oppose new maps for the state’s legislative and congressional districts, and to complain about the broken agreement.

“Now we can’t trust that deals are being brokered fairly,” said state Rep. Suzanne Weber, R-Tillamook. “And I don’t know how we come back from that when we’ve lost so much of the trust and the

leadership in this state.”

Many Democrats appeared to back Kotek’s decision, and the House speaker was praised on social media for playing a brand of political hardball more common in Republican-led states.

“I supported the speaker’s decision,” said state Rep. Andrea Salinas, D-Lake Oswego, who led the redistricting effort for House Democrats. “The House Republicans were not playing ball.”

But that feeling was not universal, particularly among more moderate members of a House Democratic caucus that has grown increasingly liberal in recent elections.

During the House debate, state Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, rose to announce he would not run for reelection for personal reasons. With that decision revealed, he chided Kotek for breaking faith with Republicans.

“You cannot go back on your word,” said Clem, one of two Democrats who voted against proposed legislative district maps that should maintain their party’s edge in the House. “It was supposed to be bipartisan or nothing. The change in the process is more than I can stomach. ... This is not OK and I just can’t dignify it with my vote.”

Clem said on Sept. 28 that he’d grown tired of increasingly bellicose politics in Salem, where he said members in both parties are willing to go to increasing lengths to achieve their ideological goals. He said Kotek breaking her deal was one example of that, but he also criticized Republicans for attempting to censure the speaker.

“All of us are guilty of doing things,” he said. “You don’t have anything

for currency in the Capitol, so you shake hands and you make a deal. (When you break a deal), especially when it’s public like that, it’s irreparable.”

Fallout from the scuttled agreement also prompted one Democrat to make an announcement many had expected. State Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, will once again pursue the House speakership.

“If the session proved anything, it’s that we need a reset,” Bynum wrote in a Facebook post Sept. “I’m not saying it has to be puppies and lollipops, but I think there’s lots of room for us to do better in terms of how we interact with one another.”

Bynum, who was preparing to challenge Kotek for the speakership earlier this year before reaching her own handshake deal with the speaker, said she’ll once again run once nominations are open. Under normal timelines that would not be until late 2022, but that could change if Kotek decides to step down from the role as she runs for governor. A spokesman said Monday she planned to remain speaker during next year’s one-month legislative session.

“We’re definitely going to have to do some repair work between now and then,” Bynum said Sept. 28 when asked about how the redistricting fight could impact the 2022 session. “Otherwise I think people will decide not to run (for office). It’s terribly frustrating to be caught in the middle of that and to feel powerless.”

For her part, Kotek declined to speculate Sept. 27 about whether the frustrations from the redistricting fight were likely to bleed into future sessions. “I try not to project that far ahead,” she