

## OUR VIEW

# Probing wave of pharmacy closures

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat representing Oregon, has some questions about the causes for a wave of pharmacy closures, most notably those in 56 Bi-Mart stores, including the stores in Baker City, La Grande, Pendleton and Hermiston.

The senator is right to ask those questions.

And although the answers he might get likely won't resurrect any pharmacies, perhaps Wyden's efforts can stave off future closures, particularly in rural areas such as Union County and Umatilla County, where residents have fewer options for filling prescriptions.

Wyden, who is chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, wrote a letter to Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, a federal agency. Wyden cited the Bi-Mart pharmacy closures, noting that pharmacies across Oregon have reported as a problem the "direct and indirect remuneration" fees imposed by Medicare Part D plans and pharmacy benefit managers — which Wyden describes as "middlemen."

"I am deeply concerned that the rise of these fees has contributed to the permanent closure of 2,200 pharmacies nationwide between December 2017 and December 2020," Wyden wrote in his letter to Brooks-LaSure.

The pharmacies are the casualty of a sale involving the Bi-Mart Corporation and Walgreens, one of the nation's largest pharmacy chains. Walgreens, as part of the purchase agreement, will buy all of Bi-Mart's pharmacies. Walgreens will operate many of Bi-Mart's already existing pharmacies, but not at some stores, including Baker City and La Grande's, according to Don Leber, Bi-Mart president of marketing and advertising.

Wyden also wrote these fees "can be deployed as anti-competitive tactics" by the pharmacy benefit managers — companies that manage prescription drug benefits on behalf of health insurers, Medicare Part D plans and large employers, among other clients.

Wyden is calling on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to review pharmacy closures in the U.S. over the past five years, including the nature and effect of PBM payment practices, and to use the agency's authority to regulate their fees.



# Supporting children and families as we return to in-person school



REBECCA JONES GASTON  
OTHER VIEWS

With children across Oregon in school full-time for the first time since the pandemic began, they are spending significant portions of their days with teachers and other education professionals.

Educators, who are mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect, have a unique opportunity to get to know the children and families they see daily. They are there to share and experience a child's victories, strengths, and challenges as they learn, grow and interact with friends at school.

As mandatory reporters, when educators have a reason to believe a child is experiencing abuse or neglect, they are required by law to report that concern to the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline by calling 855-503-SAFE (7233).

But what should an educator or other caring adult do when they see a child and family who is in need or crisis, but do not believe that a child is being abused or neglected?

Our data tells us that many people turn to the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline when they want to help but are not sure how.

This year approximately 53,000, nearly half, of the calls to the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline were not reports of suspected abuse or neglect. These are calls from educators and other members of our community who recognize that a child and family might need assistance because they are struggling with hunger,

housing instability, job loss, mental or physical health issues or other stressful situations.

Often these calls come to us because the callers are not sure where to turn for support.

There are many different resources and supports available in our communities to help children and families meet their needs. Sometimes, the best way to support child and family wellbeing and safety is to help them get plugged-in to the resources they need:

- Local supports in your community:
  - Dial 211 or text your ZIP code to 898-211 to get connected to local food, housing, child care and other supports in your community.
  - Family Access Network advocates are in school and are located in schools and connect families with local resources: Call 541-693-5675 or visit [FamilyAccessNetwork.org](http://FamilyAccessNetwork.org).
  - NeighborImpact connects families to food resources, child care resources, utility and rental assistance: Call 541-504-2155 or visit [NeighborImpact.org](http://NeighborImpact.org).

- Mental and behavioral health supports:**
  - Youthline: Call 877-968-8491, text teen2teen to 839863, chat at [www.oregonyouthline.org](http://www.oregonyouthline.org).
  - LinesForLife.org/get-help-now.
  - Lines for Life Suicide Lifeline: Call 800-273-8255 (24/7) or text 273TALK to 839863 (Monday through Friday, 2-6 p.m.)
  - Oregon Behavioral Health Support Line: Call 800-923-4357 (24/7)
  - Military Helpline: Call 888-457-4838 (24/7) or text MIL1 to 839863 (Monday through Friday, 2-6 p.m.)

Resources to help educators provide mental health and social support for children and families are available at [www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Pages/Mental\\_Health\\_Students\\_Families.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Pages/Mental_Health_Students_Families.aspx).

### Food support:

- Find a food local pantry by visiting [foodfinder.oregonfoodbank.org](http://foodfinder.oregonfoodbank.org).
- Find a local food pantry by visiting [NeighborImpact.org/get-help/get-food](http://NeighborImpact.org/get-help/get-food).

### Government programs and support:

- Learn about government programs and community resources for older adults and people with disabilities by contacting the Aging and Disability Resource Connection of Oregon at 855-673-2372 or [www.adrcoregion.org](http://www.adrcoregion.org).
- Apply for government food, cash, child care assistance and the Oregon Health Plan online at [ONE.Oregon.gov](http://ONE.Oregon.gov) or by calling 800-699-9075.
- Of course, when an educator or other caring adult suspects a child is experiencing abuse or neglect, that person should — and may be required by law to — report that concern to the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline by calling 855-503-SAFE (7233).

We all want children and families in Oregon to be healthy, safe and happy. Child abuse and neglect is preventable when communities come together to support children and families, and there are many organizations, nonprofits, and people who can help support families and prevent a family's crisis from becoming a child's safety issue.

*Rebecca Jones Gaston is the director of the Child Welfare Division of the Oregon Department of Human Services.*

## YOUR VIEWS

### Coach Salas should have done something for the greater good

I was thinking recently about the last few weeks of results in football for the local teams. While I didn't see them play, I was impressed by the Stanfield Tigers. While they didn't have a strong wins and losses record, they played both Weston McEwen and Heppner very competitively all the while playing with as few as 13 players.

I read the human interest story in the paper and learned that coach Salas had resigned his position rather than get a vaccination for COVID-19. The article was filled with stories of coach Salas and the life lessons he imparted to his players and the character building he thought was so important for young people he coached.

Unfortunately, coach Salas failed to display and show by example on of life's

most important lessons.

Being able to do something that you personally don't agree with but coming to a decision for the greater good would have been a life lesson that the coach had within his grasp. He missed a golden opportunity for this teachable moment.

I hope as the pandemic subsides, we will see coach Salas on the sidelines again.  
**George Koffler  
Hermiston**

### What is Gov. Kate Brown expected to do against illegal marijuana grows?

I read your opinion concerning illegal marijuana grow operation ("State of Oregon created its illegal pot crisis, now it needs to stop it," Thursday, Oct. 21) and as I read the editorial, I could not help to wonder what kind of help these beleaguered counties are expecting from Gov. Kate Brown.

Oregon is the first state in the union to decriminalize heroin, MDMA, methamphetamine, LSD, psilocybin, methadone, oxycodone and cocaine. It's not like you are going to go down to your local drug store and ask the pharmacist for a gram of methamphetamine or 40 hits of LSD.

The only way to acquire these drugs is through the illegal means. So, if the state of Oregon condones the sale of heroin, meth and other illicit drugs through drug cartels, what kind of assistance are you expecting from Brown? Marijuana is more of a socially accepted drug. You can grow it for your personal use or buy from a licensed distributor. I just think the only avenue that will get Salem involved is the loss of tax revenue. I don't even know if that is enough because they do not collect taxes from the cartels selling the other illegal drugs. Just my thoughts.

**Joe Mesteth  
Hermiston**

### EDITORIALS

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### LETTERS

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### SEND LETTERS TO:

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