

EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2022

146th Year, No. 55

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Oregon will lift mask mandate March 11

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon will drop its indoor mask mandate on March 11, more than a week earlier than announced last week.

Gov. Kate Brown said Monday morning, Feb. 28, that Oregon, California and Washington would lift their mandates simultaneously at 11:59 p.m. March 11. The new date includes ending mask mandates in schools. The order will affect over

51.2 million people from the Mexican border to the Canadian border, about 15% of the national population.

The move comes on the two-year anniversary of the first case of COVID-19 reported in Oregon, on Feb. 28, 2020, in Washington County. Working with California and Washington was crucial to having a unified timeline for the change in mask policy, Brown said. "As has been made clear time and again over the last two years,

COVID-19 does not stop at state borders or county lines," Brown said in a statement. "On the West Coast, our communities and economies are linked. Together, as we continue to recover from the omicron surge, we will build resiliency and prepare for the next variant and the next pandemic."

The move by the three states comes after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention late last week called for new guidelines to determine risk that would

allow for the loosening of restrictions for 70% of the country's population where coronavirus is posing a low or medium threat to hospitals. However, the map released by the CDC showed much of eastern, central and southwestern Oregon remained in the 30% of population areas that remain at high risk.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee issued similar statements the morning of Feb. 28 with the same date and time for dropping indoor mask

mandates.

The new date is the second time in two weeks health officials have moved up the date for lifting mask mandates.

Brown originally said the mask mandate would end March 31, about when Oregon Health & Science University projected the state would drop below 400 daily patients in hospitals who were positive for COVID-19.

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HOUSE BILL 4002

Overtime ag bill headed for House, Senate votes

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — The full Oregon House and Senate will vote on a bill to end Oregon's agricultural overtime exemption after it passed a final legislative committee.

The Joint Committee on Farm Worker Overtime on Thursday, Feb. 24, approved House Bill 4002 in a 6-4 party line vote after updating it with a new multi-tiered tax credit system for farmers.

"I truly believe it was the best approach we could get," said Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, the committee's co-chair. "I think we all want the best thing for people."

The bill was "well-vetted" and lawmakers tried to accommodate the concerns of farmers while ensuring "a better and more fair" wage system for farm workers, he said.

Proponents of HB 4002 argued farm workers shouldn't be unfairly excluded from overtime wages afforded to other employees.

Many decried the agricultural exemption as a racist relic that violated the constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law.

However, critics countered farmers can't afford higher labor costs and likely will limit weekly work schedules, harming their businesses as well as employees.

"Are we intending for them to get a second job if they're capped?" asked Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis, R-Albany. "Working 30 hours for one employer and 30 hours for another employer is less healthy."

Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, said the 40-hour overtime threshold is "completely unworkable" and will "cause the closure of many family farms."

She said the joint committee's decision shows Democrats were unwilling to seriously consider how the bill will hurt farmers and their employees. Instead, they pressed

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DOWNTOWN PENDLETON



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Michael Swanson, owner of Michael's Fine Jewelry in Pendleton, poses for a photo Friday, Feb. 25, 2022, in the showroom of his downtown Pendleton jewelry store. Swanson is in the process of selling off the store's merchandise and plans to retire from the business.

The state of Main

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The city of Pendleton is excited about the prospects of its business community.

In the city's February newsletter, Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman said although more than 1,000 restaurants closed around the state due to the coronavirus pandemic,

Pendleton lost none. He credited the work the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce and Charles Denight, the associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, did to inform businesses about financial assistance to get through financial struggles.

"Many towns were not so forward-thinking and they are now paying the price," he wrote. "The belief has always been that the American downtowns that

stayed vibrant and busy would undoubtedly be the fastest to recover, and even grow."

Pendleton on Feb. 15 received more good news.

At a meeting, the development commission received a report that showed 87% of South Main Street storefronts were occupied, a two-point increase from the year before. When the study was expanded to include every storefront between Southeast

and Southwest Sixth streets, the 84% occupancy rate was down compared to 2021 but still close to the historical average.

As COVID-19 cases rapidly fall across Umatilla County — and with Gov. Kate Brown's announcement Monday, Feb. 28, that Oregon's indoor mask mandate ends March 11 — the city staff has celebrated the

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Wallowa County equestrian to participate in endurance race in Argentinian Patagonia

By ANN BLOOM
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — If enthusiasm had a scale from 1-10, then Brenda Johnson would be at about a 12.

Johnson is preparing for a 10-day endurance horse race, called the Gaucho Derby, that takes place in Argentinian Patagonia, March 3-13. Riders ride for 311 miles, using seven different horses, relying on a map and a GPS tracker, and must finish in 10 days. There are no trails.

The race is a test of horse and rider endurance, navigation and

survival skills.

She is in an elite group. There were over 400 applicants and only 35 were chosen to compete.

So why is she doing it? She laughs at the question. "Cause I'm crazy!" she said.

She explains, more seriously, that she has always wanted to do it and is, "just doing it to do it."

There are riders from around the globe including Europe, the United States, South Africa and Australia participating.

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Brenda Johnson/Contributed Photos

Wallowa County resident Brenda Johnson is set to compete March 3-13, 2022, in the Gaucho Derby endurance horse race in South America's Patagonia.



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