

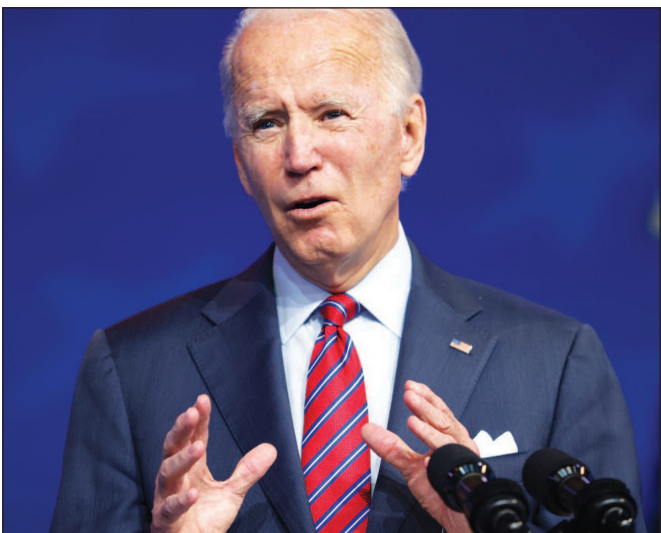
Biden pledges to reopen most schools

By Will Weissert
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden pledged Tuesday to bring the coronavirus pandemic under enough control to open most of the nation’s schools during his first 100 days as president — going much further on the issue than he has in the past, even while warning that the U.S. is facing a “dark winter.”

The president-elect said that promise is dependent on Congress providing sufficient funding to protect students, teachers and campus staff. He made it during an event in Delaware to introduce a team of health experts set to help the new administration combat a virus that has already killed more than 285,000 Americans.

Biden said he plans to dis-



Alex Wong/Getty Images-TNS

President-elect Joe Biden speaks in Wilmington, Delaware, on Friday, Dec. 4, 2020.

tribute at least 100 million vaccines during his first 100 days in the White House and will seek to reopen most of the nation’s schools over the same period.

“It should be a national priority to get our kids back into school and keep them in school,” Biden said. “If Congress provides the funding, we need to protect students,

“It should be a national priority to get our kids back into school.”

— President-elect Joe Biden

educators and staff. If states and cities put strong public health measures in place that we all follow, then my team will work to see that the majority of our schools can be open by the end of my first 100 days.”

Biden provided few details on how he will achieve that goal except to say that officials will prioritize getting vaccines to educators “as soon as possible” after health care personnel and people in long-term care facilities have gotten them. While still a candidate, Biden released a plan in July for resuming in-person classroom instruction

during the pandemic that promised to send Congress an emergency funding package to help schools reopen with a price tag worth up to \$30 billion.

That plan said final decisions on reopening schools would fall to state and local officials but nonetheless promised to enlist federal agencies to establish “basic, objective criteria” for doing so. Those included districts securing necessary funding to reconfigure classrooms for better social distancing, procuring protective equipment and devising plans to accommodate at-risk teachers and students.

His schools pledge was an optimistic note in what was otherwise a speech that included a lot of dire warnings. Biden said that, after nearly nine months of living with

the pandemic, Americans are “at risk of becoming numb to its toll on us” and resigned to accepting “the death, the pain and the sorrow.”

“We’re in a very dark winter. Things may well get worse before they get better,” Biden said. “A vaccine may soon be available. We need to level with one another. It will take longer than we would like to distribute it to all corners of the country.”

Also at Tuesday’s event, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris mentioned the prospect of reopening schools across the country, as did Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious-disease expert, who joined by video conference and is set to become the new administration’s chief medical adviser. Neither provided details on what it will take to do so, however.

RODEO

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Brown, who was the first competitor in the first round on Dec. 3, had an auspicious debut, posting a time of 3.9 seconds and ending tied with Blake Knowles of Heppner, the only other Oregon cowboy competing at the National Finals Rodeo.

Brown and Knowles each won \$20,872.

In the fourth round on Sunday, Dec. 6, Brown had another 3.9-second run, finishing tied for second with Jorgensen and winning \$18,192.

In the fifth round on Monday, Dec. 7, Brown barely finished out of the money, his time of 4.7 seconds just one-tenth of a second behind Will Lummus of Byhalia, Mississippi, who placed sixth and won \$4,231.

Brown posted a faster time in the sixth round on Tuesday, Dec. 8, at 4.5 seconds, but that was almost a full second out of the money. The sixth-place time was 3.8 seconds.

The National Finals Rodeo continues through Dec. 12. The steer wrestler with the lowest average time will win \$70,000.

SKIING

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Judy said Anthony Lakes averaged about 200 skiers and boarders per day during the two weekends.

“Which was awesome,” she said. “There was a lot of excitement. You could see smiles behind the face coverings.”

All visitors are required to wear masks at the resort.

Judy said skiers and boarders were attracted by an early snow base that’s better than the resort has seen in the past few years.

“We heard from a lot of people that first Saturday who said it was one of the better opening days,” she said.

The lodge will be closed, except for restrooms, Dec. 12 and 13, because Union County — where the lodge is located — is in the state’s extreme risk category for COVID-19 through at least Dec. 17. Judy said resort operators hope to open the rental shop, and have limited outdoor food and beverage service, starting Dec. 19.

When the rental shop opens, Baker School District students will be offered rentals for \$15, and a lesson for \$15, she said.

SURVEY

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“Clearly this is not going to be a scientific survey,” Witty said Tuesday. “We’re doing this to gather information for the Board.”

Witty said he hopes to present the survey results during the Board’s Jan. 21 meeting.

The survey is similar to those conducted prior to the November 2018 election in which the District attempted to pass a \$48 million bond that voters rejected. Unlike the previous surveys, this one was produced in-house, Witty said.

This time around, the survey, which is available in English and in Spanish, is much more to the point. Of just 12 questions, four are aimed at determining demographics, such as the respondents’ communities of residence, age range and whether they have children or grandchildren who are enrolled in the Baker School District.

The first seven questions ask respondents to say whether they favor, oppose or are not sure in answering these questions:

- If you knew that secure entry vestibules would be added at Brooklyn and South Baker schools to better control access and increase student safety, would you favor or oppose a bond measure?
- If you knew that the bond would include funds to replace mechanical systems and upgrade electrical service at all schools to provide heating, cooling and ventilation, would you favor or oppose a bond measure?
- If you knew that the mechanical systems in several Baker schools are the original systems installed when the schools were first built and are no longer operating efficiently, would you favor or oppose a bond measure that included funds to replace them?
- If you knew that Baker Middle School is the only school in the district that does not have a kitchen/cafeteria, would you favor or oppose a bond measure that would construct a stand-alone building at the middle school for use as a cafeteria/kitchen and multipurpose room?
- If you knew that Baker School District would receive an additional \$4 million in state matching funds if voters

approve a \$4 million bond — doubling the amount of money that could be used for bond projects — would you favor or oppose a bond measure?

• If you knew that the district would not receive the \$4 million matching grant if the bond measure did not pass, would you favor or oppose the bond measure?

• If you knew that a \$4 million bond measure would cost property owners approximately 68 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation (\$68 per year for a home assessed at \$100,000) over 5 years, would you favor or oppose a school bond measure?

The last question asks respondents to answer this question: What are your reasons for favoring or opposing a \$4 million bond measure?

In addition to a possible \$4 million matching state grant, Witty said the District would add another \$4 million from its Capital Projects fund and money from the Student Investment Account approved by the 2019 Legislature.

The survey will remain open through 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 13.

COUNCIL

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Cannon could earn a raise to \$110,000 if the Council rates his performance as satisfactory or better during an evaluation that, per the contract, will happen in July or August.

Cannon will also be eligible for a merit increase in his annual salary, of a minimum of 2%, based on subsequent performance reviews after the first such review in July or August 2021.

The contract includes a provision for the city to pay Cannon up to \$5,000 in moving expenses.

Cannon has worked as city manager of Saluda, North Carolina, a town of about 700, since August 2015. Saluda is in the Blue Ridge Mountains, just north of the South Carolina border.

In other business Tuesday, councilors agreed to divide the city’s remaining share of federal COVID-19 relief money, approximately \$10,000, between Commu-

nity Connection of Baker County and The Salvation Army.

Warner, who thanked the Council for working with him during his tenure as city manager, which started in June 2016, told councilors the city has received a grant from the Leo Adler Foundation to buy security cameras for Geiser-Pollman Park.

The camera system, which will be installed this spring, will cost about \$18,000.

Police Chief Ray Duman told councilors that he hired

Dallas Brockett as a new code enforcement officer who will start in early January.

Councilors also:

- unanimously approved sending a letter to Oregon’s U.S. senators, Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, supporting the passage of another federal stimulus bill before Christmas.
- unanimously approved sending a letter to Tom Clement for his work clearing underbrush and pruning trees along the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway.

KINDNESS

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The staff at New Directions has seen the effects of the coronavirus pandemic firsthand with an increase in people seeking help.

“It is an honor to serve our community and find new ways of meeting individual and family needs.”

“The crisis calls coming into the crisis hotline have greatly increased and so has the level of severity,” she said.

Selander wants people to know that they are not alone, and if they are struggling she encourages them to reach out for help.

“The impact of COVID-19 is starting to take a toll on people, increased mental health and drug and alcohol substance abuse is also up throughout the nation, state, and county,” she said. “Suicide and drug overdoses have increased during this pandemic and one loss of life is too many.”

Months of life-changing events — from disruptions at school and work, loss of jobs and businesses, and changing business models to fit within the pandemic times — can all cause stress. If an individual is experiencing feelings of depression, isolation, anxiety, and stress, Selander encourages individuals to seek help.

“There are helpful inter-

“Let’s not fall into the trap that everything is a disappointment. If we choose to look for the good, we’ll find the good.”

— **Shari Selander, CEO, New Directions Northwest**

ventions and treatments out there, you don’t need to go through this alone,” she said.

So how do we get through this pandemic and the holidays and maintain a healthy outlook on life?

Selander said it’s important to remember the things we are grateful for in our lives, and stay connected with our loved ones.

“We have a warm caring community filled with good people who truly care,” she said. “I’ve never lived in a place where I’ve seen all of the community partners work together so well for the sake of a community. A little bit of kindness goes a long way.”

To be asked to limit interactions for the holidays and festival cancellations can take a toll on anyone, and Selander suggests acknowledging how we feel.

“We need to get in touch with our own personal mental health state and recognize the things we can control versus what we can’t control,” she said.

Again she mentions grati-

tude, and turning thoughts to the positive instead of the negative.

And it’s OK to talk to a friend about feeling scared, or overwhelmed, or anxious.

“Talk about what it is you’re feeling — someone who can validate your feelings, or help to put you back on track,” she said.

If talking is too hard, she suggests writing it all down — which also creates a record during these times that we’ve never experienced in our lives.

In addition to the pandemic, 2020 also saw a presidential election and social movements.

“It’s been a hard year where it feels to me that our society has been very divided,” she said.

She suggests looking for what we have in common.

“Instead of looking for the differences, we need to look at what unites us and what brings us together,” she said. “People are actually a lot more alike with the same types of needs than they are different.”

And although 2020 has seen countless cancellations, she encourages everyone to try to focus on the positive instead.

“Let’s not fall into the trap that everything is a disappointment,” she said. “If we choose to look for the bad, we’ll find the bad. If we choose to look for the good, we’ll find the good.”

She suggests asking this question: “What do we have that we can be grateful for?”

She acknowledges that times are hard. But she said looking at things in a different perspective can help.

Take, for example, her own experience of moving to Zoom meetings instead of driving across the state to Salem.

These virtual meetings allow her to participate without spending hours on the road away from home.

“Finding the value in what we’re doing differently is really important,” she said.

And yet, she recognizes how this year’s changes can affect people, especially the youngest members of the population.

“I’m most concerned about our youth,” she said.

School delivered in a virtual format, for instance, lacks the structure and routine of a traditional school day. Social time is also restricted with the cancellation of sports and lack of gatherings.

Selander encourages parents and guardians to pay attention to how their children are responding to life, and note changes in behavior that could lead to a decline in mental health.

“They know their children and what’s their normal,” she said.

And children, she said, are well aware of the stress, anxi-

ety and fear felt by the adults in their lives.

“As we talk, we are modeling how to respond to our environment,” she said.

Above all, she says to have hope for better days ahead.

“As we go through the holiday season, let’s focus on the things we have control of and never give up on hope — it’s what will get us through each day,” she said. “As a CEO of many first responders I am grateful for my staff and all other first responders who show up every day for the health and safety of our community, especially in these pandemic times.”

New Directions Northwest telehealth and a walk-in clinic

New Directions has added services to address the higher need this year. One is telehealth, which connects a provider to those who can receive virtual visits from their home, which reduces the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Another new service is the walk-in clinic that provides same-day access to mental health and addiction assessments, individual counseling, family counseling, case management services and more.

“The solution for meeting the needs of increased mental health and substance abuse services was to change our business model so that people

didn’t have to wait to receive services,” Selander said.

The same day walk-in services are provided at the New Directions Northwest building, 3425 13th St. in Baker City. Clinic hours will be Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Fridays from 9 a.m. to noon.

No appointments are needed. More information is available by calling 541-523-7400 or at www.newdirectionsnw.org

CARES Grant

New Directions has received federal funds through Dec. 30 to provide stability grants to Baker County residents who have been impacted by COVID-19. Eligible people are those who are 60 or older, veterans, and people of color.

Available resources include:

- free behavioral health services for anyone experiencing anxiety, depression or isolation
- Funding to offset expenses due to COVID-19 (for example, money can go directly to paying a bill)
- Group activities for those experiencing isolation (limited to 10 at a time; social distancing protocols will be required)

For more information about this grant opportunity, call Maure Albert at 541-523-7400.