

VACCINE

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“We’re working on it, and we’re making progress,” Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, said on Monday, Jan. 10.

Although the county’s initial vaccinations starting on Dec. 18 and continuing for the next week or so were limited to Saint Alphonsus Medical Center, the arrival of the Moderna vaccine, which doesn’t need to be stored at ultralow temperatures, has allowed the Health Department, which can keep the Moderna vaccine on site, to start inoculations as well, Staten said.

She said the Health Department and Saint Alphonsus are partnering to inoculate people who belong to one of the four groups listed in phase 1a of the OHA’s vaccination priority plan.

Those groups are (categories within each group are not listed in order of priority for vaccination).

- Group 1: hospitals, urgent care, skilled nursing and memory care facility health care professionals and residents, tribal health programs, EMS providers and other first responders

- Group 2: other long-term care facility residents and congregate care sites including health care professionals and residents, hospice programs, mobile crisis care and related services, secure transport, individuals working in a correctional setting

- Group 3: outpatient settings serving specific high-risk groups, in-home care, day treatment services, non-emergency medical transport

- Group 4: health care professionals in outpatient, public health and early learn-

Vaccines in Baker County

- Dec. 18 — 34 doses
- Dec. 19 — 1
- Dec. 20 — 0
- Dec. 21 — 25
- Dec. 22 — 1
- Dec. 23 — 32
- Dec. 24 — 0
- Dec. 25 — 0
- Dec. 26 — 1
- Dec. 27 — 2
- Dec. 28 — 7
- Dec. 29 — 10
- Dec. 30 — 78
- Dec. 31 — 11
- Jan. 1 — 0
- Jan. 2 — 0
- Jan. 3 — 1
- Jan. 4 — 0
- Jan. 5 — 6
- Jan. 6 — 4
- Jan. 7 — 46
- Jan. 8 — 140
- Jan. 9 — 7
- Jan. 10 — 0*
- Jan. 11 — 1*
- Jan. 12 — 5*

* some doses not yet reported

ing centers, death care workers, including mortuaries

Staten didn’t have an estimate for how many Baker County residents are in one of the phase 1a groups, and according to Jonathan Modie, a spokesman for the OHA, the state agency doesn’t have a county breakdown either.

Statewide, officials estimate there are about 500,000 people in the phase 1a groups.

Staten said Health Department staff has been trying to get in touch with residents who are eligible for a vaccination under phase 1a. She said some people have also called the Department to see if they’re eligible.

Residents and staff at Mead-

County preparing to expand inoculations

By Jayson Jacoby
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Nancy Staten is bracing for a major expansion of Baker County’s effort to vaccinate residents against COVID-19.

Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, said there was no advance notice of Gov. Kate Brown’s announcement Tuesday, Jan. 12, that starting Jan. 23 the state plans to begin offering inoculations to residents 65 and older, as well as to teachers and other school employees, and residents with underlying medical conditions.

Those groups comprise considerably more people than the phase 1a category whose members, mainly in health care, have been offered vaccines, Staten said.

She said the county’s goal is to finish with phase 1a residents by Jan. 21. About 50% of its eligible people have taken the vaccine, Staten said. She expects a higher percentage of residents 65 and older will decide to be vaccinated.

Making the vaccine available to people 65 and older, along with teachers, will re-



Staten

quire the county to set up multiple places where inoculations will be given, Staten said. Whether the county can start on Jan. 23 depends in part on how many doses of vaccine it receives from the state, she said. The county will announce the locations and times for vaccination clinics, she said.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 4,275 Baker County residents are 65 or older — about 26.5% of the population.

Staten said each person who gets the first shot will have to be scheduled for the second required dose, given about 28 days later.

Staten said the county will need to partner with Saint Alphonsus Medical Center and, she hopes, local pharmacies, once they’re able, to administer vaccines as quickly as possible.

Saint Alphonsus has vaccinated its eligible employees along with more than 160 other residents in phase 1a between Dec. 23 and Jan. 7, said Priscilla Lynn, the hospital’s president and chief nursing officer.

“We are working closely with the county health department) to define the role of the hospital in the next phases of vaccinations,” Lynn said.

owbrook Place were offered vaccinations on Jan. 8.

A total of 43 residents — 94% of residents — received their first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, said Suzanne Miller, executive director at Meadowbrook Place.

Ten employees were also vaccinated, Miller said.

She said she has tried to educate employees about the process by which the vaccine was tested and approved, but she has had to overcome resistance in some cases driven by social media

claims of unproven concerns such as the vaccine causing sterility in women.

“We’ve got a really good video I’ve been showing” that dispels false claims about the vaccine, Miller said.

That video was provided by the Consonus Pharmacy, which also brought the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine from Portland and administered the shots at Meadowbrook.

Miller said a clinic to give the second inoculation is set for Jan. 29, with another clinic planned during February.

She said residents and staff had “very minimal” side effects from the vaccine, mainly temporary soreness at the injection site.

Nicole Howerton, administrator at Memory Lane Homes in Baker City, said the Health Department was scheduled to vaccinate residents and staff at that care facility today, Jan. 14.

Howerton said on Tuesday that she expects 11 of the 12 residents will take the vaccine, along with two employees.

The only employee who declined to be vaccinated has

had reactions to other vaccines, Howerton said.

She said several employees, herself included, do not plan to be inoculated today.

Howerton said two employees who have declined the vaccination are pregnant and concerned about possible effects, although medical experts say pregnant women who are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine should take it.

Howerton said she’s “hesitant” about being vaccinated in part because it’s so new.

She said she will consider being vaccinated in the future, after more data are available about the vaccines.

Despite her personal reluctance, Howerton said she’s pleased that the vaccine is available for residents and staff at Memory Lane Homes.

“I’m glad it finally made it here,” she said. “I think it’s going to make everyone feel more comfortable.”

Although today’s vaccinations won’t change the COVID-19 precautions that have been in place for months at Memory Lane Homes, including three temperature checks per day for residents, distancing, mask wearing and frequent sanitation of surfaces, Howerton said she hopes that as more people are vaccinated, the rate of new virus cases will decline and restrictions will ease.

She’s especially eager to see residents have visits with their families.

Residents have been lonely during the months of the pandemic, Howerton said.

“It’s terrible,” she said. “We need to get these guys back with their families.”

No vaccinations have been administered at Settler’s Park Assisted Living in Baker City.

Bentz: Trump should be held accountable ‘in the proper way’

By Les Zaitz
Malheur Enterprise

ONTARIO — U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz met behind closed doors with his Republican colleagues in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6 as President Trump implored Congress to overturn the presidential election.

They huddled to consider the case for dismissing millions of American votes. Making that case would give Trump the second term that he falsely claimed he won.

In the coming hours, Bentz, R-Oregon, would lock down in his congressional office as marauders a block away vandalized the Capitol. Secured with his staff, he parsed legal issues on voting in six states in question.

And he ultimately joined the effort to deny one state — Pennsylvania — a say in who should be president.

The vote was consequential for Bentz, serving just his fifth day in office. He had come to Congress representing Oregon’s 2nd Congressional District, an attorney by training and an experienced politician with years in the Oregon Legislature.

In an interview Saturday, Jan. 9, with the Malheur Enterprise, Bentz explained his path to that vote. He

“The proper thing to do is to have him leave office under the normal course.”

— Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, who doesn’t believe President Donald Trump should resign or be impeached



shared how he learned belatedly about “inappropriate” remarks made by Trump as the insurrection unfolded.

He’s faced intense scrutiny for his stance. Commenters by hundreds loaded up his Congressional Facebook page. Some supported his vote against the Pennsylvania results but most criticized him. A few said he disgraced himself and should resign.

Bentz said, however, that he acted on principle, not politics, when he cast that vote.

“Sometimes it’s really difficult to do the right thing,” Bentz said.

The path, the vote

On Jan. 6, Congress convened to consider election results certified by each state, and formally declare the winner of the presidential election. The process is typically routine with little controversy.

But key Republican legislators had joined with Trump in conceiving a plan to thwart the process. They hoped Congress would reject the results from enough states to strip

away their electoral votes for Joe Biden, leaving Trump the winner.

Bentz had already signaled his concerns about the election, joining with 25 other Congressmen-elect in a Dec. 15 letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The letter asked for an investigation.

The incoming legislators referred to “multiple states engaged in litigation” and said that “thousands of witnesses have submitted sworn affidavits of reported fraud.”

The letter also said the legislators had “verified reports” of issues with mail ballots, with voting machines and with restrictions on election observers.

During the Enterprise interview, Bentz conceded he saw no evidence of those issues.

“That part of the letter I don’t support,” he said.

He also said that he didn’t accept the president’s claims that election fraud was so widespread that he actually won.

Republican congressmen

met at 9 a.m. Jan. 6 in an auditorium at the Capitol Visitor Center. According to Bentz, objections to the results of six states were anticipated.

The session broke up three hours later, each Congressman left to decide on their own how to treat each state’s electors. Bentz said he was not pressured by House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-California, or other Republicans to support overturning the presidential election.

As they left the auditorium, Trump was launching into an outdoor speech not far away, addressing thousands of his supporters. His speech later was blamed by officials in both political parties for inciting the invasion of the Capitol.

Unaware of the president’s rallying speech, Bentz returned to his second-floor suite of offices in the Longworth House Office Building, across Independence Avenue from the Capitol.

There, his staff went to work to analyze the election processes in the six contested states.

“I told them to go through each state as best we can” to determine “what foundation for a constitutional objection” existed, he said.

He wanted to know if the election process in any state

seemed out of line with the Constitution.

He said he decided he would object to a state’s election results if the vote was done using methods not authorized by that state’s legislature. He said the Constitution delegates to state legislators, not other government officials, the power to decide how elections will be done.

Bentz concluded that the challenge to Arizona wasn’t justified, and late Wednesday night — after the invaders had been expelled and order restored — he joined others in the House in voting against that objection.

The Pennsylvania vote

About 12:30 a.m. Washington time on Jan. 7, the House turned to Pennsylvania. The debate lasted two hours, but Bentz didn’t speak or make any submission to the Congressional Record to explain his eventual vote supporting the objection.

Bentz, in the later interview, said he had concluded that Pennsylvania’s votes should be rejected, based on how the state handled certain mail ballots. Pennsylvania officials intended to count any mail ballots that were postmarked by Election Day but delivered in the next few days, extending the deadline. Their decision was backed

by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

The state received 9,428 such ballots, but set them aside at the direction of the U.S. Supreme Court. So the results of those votes weren’t included in the state’s final count sent to Congress, showing Biden had won the state by about 80,000 votes.

Bentz said in the interview that he wasn’t aware the votes hadn’t been included in Pennsylvania’s totals. He acknowledged that had he been successful in his challenge, his questioning of about 10,000 uncounted ballots would have overturned the results of voting by nearly 7 million people.

But he also explained that he acted on principle — that he judged that Pennsylvania had violated the U.S. Constitution and he wasn’t going to support that.

“It would have been easy to have voted against the objection for Pennsylvania,” Bentz said. “That’s not what my analysis showed. You’ve got to stick with your principles.”

Bentz said he was also mindful that voters across the country still doubt the election results.

“I wanted people to understand they were being heard,” Bentz said. “These people are so angry about being left out.”

Wyden says a new political era in Washington, D.C., will speed virus aid

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

With Democrats in control of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House, and with Democrat Joe Biden’s Jan. 20 inauguration approaching, Americans can expect a large, long-term package of aid to help get through the COVID-19 pandemic that will likely last well into the year, Sen. Ron. Wyden, D-OR, said in a Jan. 8 interview.

Wyden said he was supporting efforts to get President Donald Trump to resign or be removed from office after the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, sparked by Trump’s speech to protesters. On Jan. 8 Wyden called for the resignations of Sen.

Ted Cruz, R-Tex., and Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., for their roles in the Electoral College challenge that set off riots culminating in a siege of the Capitol.

“Any senator exhorting such an assault violates their sworn oath and is unworthy of holding federal office,” Wyden said. “There must be consequences for senators who would foment a violent mob for personal gain.”

But focus also has to be sharp on what to do after Trump is gone.

“We’re going to get \$2,000 checks out to Americans as soon as we can,” Wyden said. “We’re going to get those \$600 federal unemployment benefits back. We’ve got folks who are hurting desperately

— they’re not able to pay their rent, buy their groceries, get medicine for their kids.”

Wyden said the political change in Washington, D.C., will reveal the reality that Wyden said Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, have tried to hide: The COVID-19 crisis is deep, hard and won’t be under control for months, even a year.

“These safety net issues are so essential, they should not depend on the whim of one political person,” Wyden said of McConnell. “There was a strategy before not to admit how bad things are.”

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