

EDITORIAL

OHA fixes a test glitch

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) finally fixed a glitch in its COVID-19 testing data, and the correction should come in time to significantly ease the restrictions on businesses and other activities that Baker County has labored under for most of the past two months. Businesses and residents that have suffered under the state's most stringent restrictions for all but two weeks since Dec. 3 deserve relief now that Baker County's surge in virus cases has ended.

Until Thursday, Feb. 4, however, it looked as though they wouldn't get the full measure of that relief.

Here's the situation: Baker County's risk level, and resulting restrictions, are based on two metrics measured over a two-week period — number of new cases, and test positivity rate. The county's risk level for the two-week period Feb. 12-25 will be based on statistics from Jan. 24 to Feb. 6.

Based on new cases — 18 from Jan. 24 to Feb. 4 — the county is on pace to drop from the extreme level, which has the most severe restrictions, to the lower, which has the least severe restrictions. To qualify for the lower level the county would need to have fewer than 30 new cases during the two-week period.

The problem, at least until Thursday, was the percentage of positive tests.

On Wednesday, the OHA's database showed Baker County with 47 positive tests from Jan. 24 to Feb. 2, and a test positivity rate of 8.1%. That would put the county at high risk, just below extreme. Figuring out why the state was showing many more positive tests in Baker County than actual infections — 47 positive tests, 18 cases — has been a top task recently for county leaders, said Mark Bennett, a county commissioner.

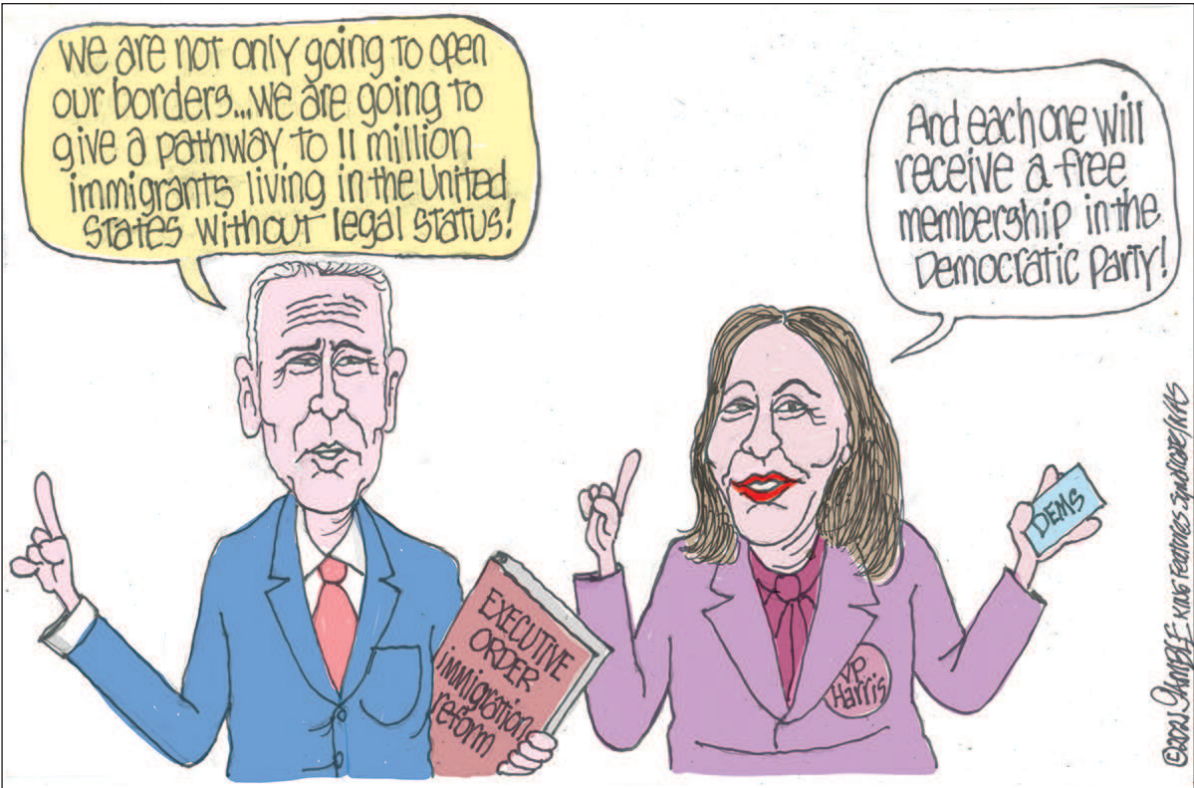
Jonathan Modie, an OHA spokesman, said some people who are infected test positive multiple times. He said the agency also sometimes receives multiple results for the same test, and it doesn't always delete duplicates from a county's total.

The bigger problem is that until Thursday, OHA was calculating the county's positivity rate based on the inflated, inaccurate number of positive tests. Now that the agency has corrected that mistake, the county's positivity rate for the two-week period that ends today was, as of Friday, about 2.7%. The threshold for the lower risk level is a test positivity rate below 5%.

State officials also acknowledged on Friday that they had failed to deduct 12 cases among inmates at the Powder River Correctional Facility in mid-January. As a result, the county moved immediately from extreme risk to high. That allowed indoor dining to resume, albeit at 25% of capacity or 50 people. At lower risk, restaurants can have up to 50% capacity indoors, with no other limitations. The difference is the same for gyms, theaters and museums.

Kudos to county officials for pressing OHA to fix what could have been a tremendously harmful series of mistakes.

—Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Don't like the political system? Try to change it

Concerning Rick Rienks' opinion published in the Herald on Jan. 12, 2021.

Mr. Rienks is opposed to Oregon's political system. He feels his views are not fairly represented by such a "populous" system. He'd prefer an electoral college system.

He proposes that each of the 36 counties elect one person, similar to the U.S. Senate, to which each state elects two senators to Congress.

In Mr. Rienks' scheme, I as-

sume he's thinking of a legislature composed of two houses: a House of Representatives based on population and a Senate composed of 36 Senators, one Senator for each of the 36 counties.

The result in the Senate would be that Wheeler County, population 1,415, would have the same political clout in the Senate as a resident of Portland, population 2,151,000.

If you're serious, Mr. Rienks, in getting the Oregon Constitution changed from its 60 districts in the House and 30 districts in the

Senate, then the remedy provided in the Constitution requires that you draw up an Initiative petition signed by 8% of the votes for Governor in 2018, that is, 140,000 signatures. Gather that many signatures and your Initiative could appear on ballots of the next general election.

If you're not willing to do that, then quit bellyaching that your views are not represented to your satisfaction. Live with it.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

It's time to honor Harriet Tubman

Editorial from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

It looks as though a likeness of famed abolitionist Harriet Tubman finally will appear on American currency, resurrecting a plan that has been stalled for nearly five years.

It's the right move by the Biden administration, one that allows the diversity of the nation to be reflected in an everyday commodity such as paper money. Tubman would be the first Black person to be featured on U.S. currency, and one of only a handful of women whose likeness appeared on U.S. currency or coins.

Tubman's portrait will be placed on the \$20 bill, a plan first announced in 2016 during the Obama administration. The goal was to have the new bill unveiled in 2020 as part of the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amend-

ment granting women the right to vote.

The Tubman \$20 bill design came to a halt, however, under President Donald Trump. He opposed the idea while campaigning in 2016, calling it a move of "pure political correctness" and alluding to his fondness for Andrew Jackson, who is now on the \$20 bill.

Former Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said last year that the new bills could not be put into circulation until 2028 at the earliest, citing non-specific technical issues. He didn't say why the rollout would take nearly eight years compared with the Obama plan of about four years, but did say the decision would rest with the next treasury secretary.

President Joe Biden wasted little time in making it clear that the Tubman \$20 bill would move forward, and that his Treasury De-

partment would be studying ways to speed up the process, although no timetable was announced.

Born around 1820, Tubman escaped slavery and became a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, where she helped other slaves escape captivity prior to the Civil War. When her \$20 bill is placed in circulation, she would join Martha Washington and Pocahontas as the only women to appear on bills; images of Susan B. Anthony, Sacagawea and Helen Keller appeared on coins.

Having a Black woman's image on U.S. currency is a long overdue acknowledgment of the diversity of the nation and the role of Blacks and women in shaping our history. The Treasury Department is taking the right approach in fast-tracking the design and release of a new \$20 bill that honors the work and life of Harriet Tubman.

Pepperoni police are on patrol in Salem

Probably you've been so focused on the pandemic that the sausage scourge has escaped your attention. Fortunately at least one Oregon politician is maintaining a vigil to protect us, and in particular our arteries, from pepperoni and its dangerous cousins among our favorite pizza toppings and breakfast meats.

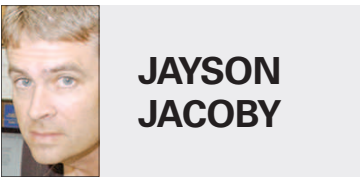
Marty Wilde, a Democratic state representative from Eugene, is sponsoring House Bill 2348. The legislation would prohibit Oregon hospitals from serving any type of processed meat.

Wilde's bill includes a helpful definition of "processed meat" which reads, in part, "meat and poultry that has been transformed through salting, curing, fermenting, smoking or any other process other than cooking ..."

Lest you brand Wilde as a killjoy, he admits in his bill the purpose of those processes — "to enhance flavor or improve preservation."

Both of which are the sorts of processes I happen to prefer when it comes to meat.

I like meat in general. My taste buds enjoy a juicy burger or steak or drumstick. And my teeth, according to the experts who study this sort of thing, are designed to tender-



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ize flesh as well as foliage. Who am I to deny eons of evolution?

But if fresh meat can be made to taste better and to last longer, thanks to the various processing methods Wilde's bill mentions, so much the better.

(Indeed, that list eerily resembles a roster of activities most people, I suspect, would consider desirable. I don't smoke, but I'm all for curing, especially diseases, and I'm a fan of fermenting, especially malted grains.)

Wilde's bill includes another list, albeit not an exhaustive one, of items that would be banned from hospital meals, a scrumptious roster "including but not limited to hot dogs, sausages, bacon and turkey bacon."

That last seems to me redundant, given that the bill specifies "meat and poultry." Perhaps Wilde doesn't trust that unscrupulous hospital officials wouldn't try to sneak some white meat onto their depleted menus.

Wilde's legislative onslaught against salami and its nutritionally questionable cousins is not confined to processed meats served in hospitals, though.

His bill would also require that hospitals and other long-term care facilities offer patients, residents, staff and visitors "100 percent plant-based meals and 100 percent plant-based beverages that are low in fat, sodium and added sugars."

Wilde's targets here aren't limited to animal flesh, either.

The bill, in defining a "plant-based meal," also prohibits "fish, dairy, eggs or honey."

So much for the meat-free pizza. Unless you think it's possible to assemble a pizza that lacks cheese as well as meat, and never mind the absence of anchovies.

On the plus side, people who choose plant-based meals and beverages would not have to pay more for less flavor, because Wilde's bill wouldn't allow facilities to charge more than what they ask "for a comparable meal that is not plant-based."

But Wilde isn't quite finished. His bill also would apply to state prisons. Although they could keep bacon and other processed meats on the menu, they too would be

required to make available to inmates "100 percent plant-based meals as an option any time a meal is served."

Why anyone who is already incarcerated would prefer kale over a kielbasa is not explained in the legislation.

My initial reaction upon reading Wilde's bill is that it's the sort of legislation more likely to spur discussion among the public than to become law.

But almost immediately I reminded myself that I live in Oregon. This is the only state where, if a police officer catches you with a bit of heroin or meth in your pocket, you won't be arrested. Although you might be fined \$100 or be subject to addiction counseling.

(Perhaps the counseling sessions could be expanded to include the person's affinity for certain salt- and fat-laden meat products.)

It's true that voters, rather than lawmakers, decided to decriminalize possession of small amounts of hard drugs, by way of a ballot measure on the Nov. 3, 2020, ballot.

But it seems to me that in a political climate where heroin is considered a relatively benign substance, it might not be farfetched to imagine legislators deciding that

bacon — despite rarely being implicated in fatal overdoses, at least the short-term variety — presents the greater threat to the populace.

It strikes me as passing strange that Wilde would focus on hospitals rather than, say, public schools. The latter, it seems to me, would be the better place to curb appetites for such culinary villains as bacon, before hapless students become processed pork addicts.

Most people in hospitals, by contrast, are adults likely to have such ingrained eating habits that they're beyond rescue.

Of course it's just such habits that land some people in the ICU, their arteries as clogged as a toilet after a toddler tries to flush the contents of his closet.

But depriving patients of a few crispy, salty strips of deliciousness to go along with their eggs (presuming they don't go for the plant-based breakfast, of course) seems to me rather cruel.

Oregon's going easy on people with a hankering for cocaine and LSD, after all.

No need to lard the state's lawbooks with limits on frankfurters.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.