

Oregon to expand vaccine eligibility

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

Over 1 million more people will be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccines in the next two upcoming eligibility phases, state officials said Tuesday.

The groups to be added on March 29 and May 1 will nearly double the number of people eligible for vaccination. Like most states, Oregon is already struggling with the gap between vaccine eligibility and availability.

To date, there has only been enough vaccine available to inoculate less than half of the approximately 1.36 million Oregonians already eligible. There are an estimated 2.8 million adults in Oregon out of a population of just under 4.3 million.

The numbers for the next eligibility groups have not been announced, but were provided by OHA in response to a query by EO Media



Ryan Brennecke/The (Bend) Bulletin

More than one million Oregonians will become eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine by May 1.

Group. The last change to the eligibility list was March 1, when everyone age 65 and older was approved to get vaccinated.

On March 29, eligibility will be extended to an estimated 530,000 more people, according to OHA. The group includes those 45 and older with medical conditions that

put them at higher risk of severe illness or death, pregnant women 16 and older and homeless people.

On May 1, an estimated 550,000 more people will be eligible. The minimum age for those with medical conditions will be extended to those 16 and older. It also includes essential workers as defined by

the Centers for Disease Control and members of multi-generational households.

The final two groups are everyone else 45 and older on June 1 and everyone 16 and older on July 1.

President Joe Biden has set May 1 as the date when states should open eligibility to all those 16 and older. But Gov. Kate Brown said the state would stick with its current priority system until there is a firm commitment from federal health authorities of a major increase in vaccine being sent to the state.

Oregon health officials felt burned in January when they announced eligibility for everyone over 65 based on what turned out to be an erroneous statement by federal health officials in the Trump administration. Brown had to reverse the order and restore a tiered priority system.

Since the arrival of the first vaccines from Pfizer and

Moderna in December, about 1.36 million people in Oregon are in the nine priority groups already eligible.

But the state reports total shots to date at 1,346,090. The vast majority of the shots are the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which require two shots spaced about a month apart.

That translates into just under 674,000 two-shot inoculations, enough for less than half of those eligible. The gap between eligibility and availability has resulted in widespread frustration over trying to book appointments with county health authorities, pharmacies or other medical providers.

Recently, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine that requires just one shot has arrived in Oregon.

Through March 15, a total of 1,642,505 doses of vaccines have been delivered to Oregon.

Oregon has averaged

about 24,000 shots per day, putting it in the middle of states nationwide.

Because of Brown's decision to prioritize educators over seniors in January, the state is below the national average for seniors who have been inoculated. Though vaccine is provided through the federal government and the Centers for Disease Control has a suggested prioritization list, states ultimately have authority to decide who gets inoculated at what point.

Oregon has been one of the safest places in the country during the pandemic. The state has the fourth lowest number of COVID-19 cases per capita among all states, according to an ongoing count by the New York Times.

Only Hawaii, Vermont and Maine have performed better since the first COVID-19 case was reported in Washington on Jan. 21, 2020.

POLITICS

Continued from Page 3A

While the court sifts through the paperwork, the Legislature is planning/hoping/praying the Oregon Supreme Court will pick its solution. A way to move things along in advance would be to hold the 10 required hearings — two in each of the current five congressional districts.

Which brings things back to COVID-19. The usual "road trip" of lawmakers to districts to hear from voters aren't happening this year because of COVID-19. All 10 redistricting hearings will be virtual.

Congressional District 2 covers a lot of territory

The Wednesday, March 10, hearing was Congressional District 2, a nearly 70,000-square-mile expanse that share borders with California, Nevada, Idaho and Washington. Anyone living east of the Cascades, plus a chunk of the southwest part of the state, lives in the 2nd District.

All four of the other congressional districts are represented by Democrats. The 2nd is solidly Republican, with freshman U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, in the seat.

The hearing would require something of a technical miracle. Video testimony expected from Wallowa County, Bend, Medford, Klamath Falls, and several other spots in the district taxed the Legislature's internet capabilities. Balking phone lines, echoing microphones, stuck mute buttons and more led to frequent silent spots. Many of the people who signed up to testify either couldn't get through or gave up prior to their turn in the queue.

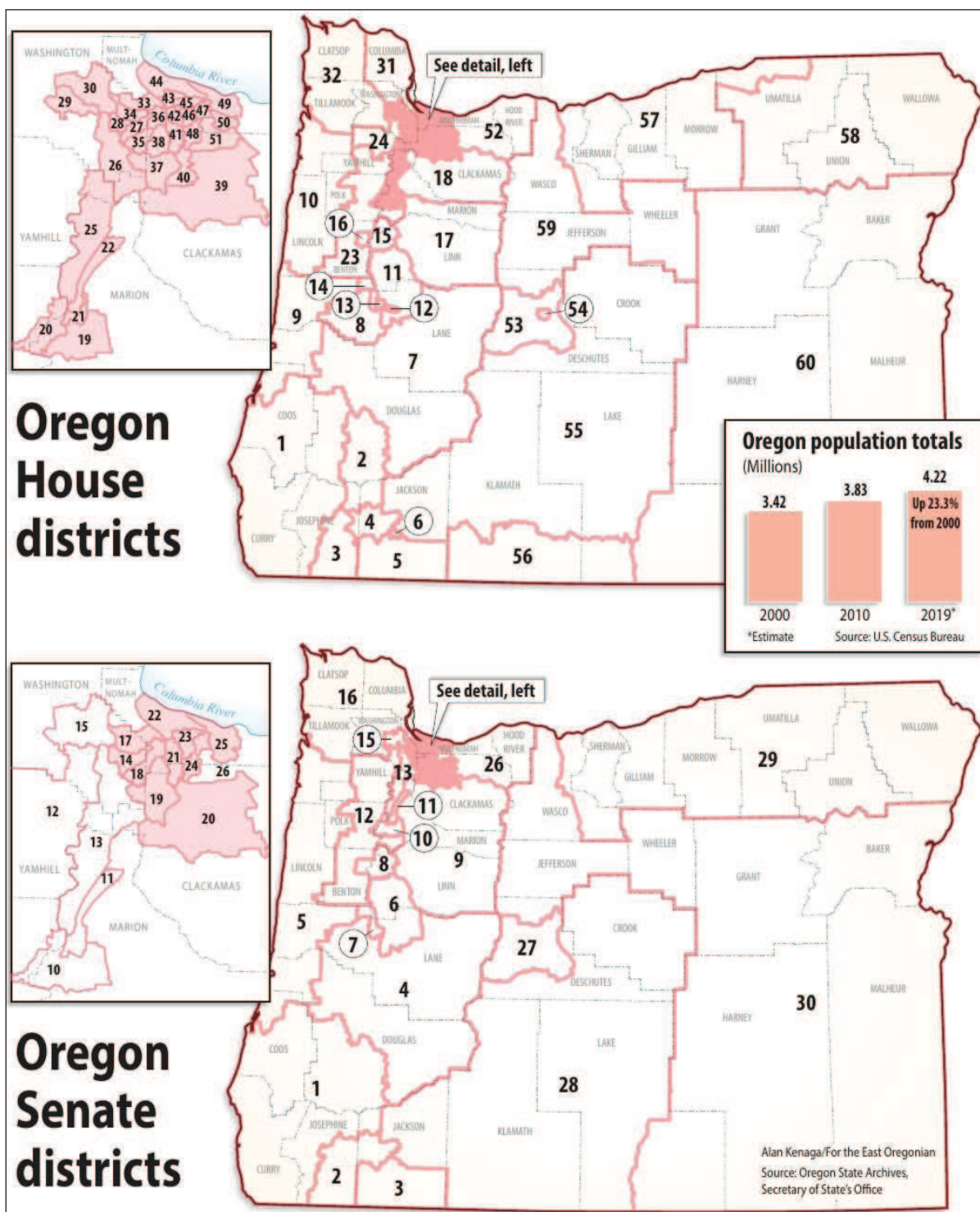
Two who signed up discovered they lived in other congressional districts.

One caller wanted to know why Wallowa County had been left off a map of Greater Idaho.

Some of the panel members squinted "what?"

Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-Dallas, finally piped up to explain the caller's query was about a theoretical secession of much of Eastern Oregon to form "Greater Idaho" with the neighboring state to the east.

Bonham even helpfully added that maps circulating for the mythical



"Greater Idaho" state did not include Wallowa County, though he wasn't sure why. With the mystery aside, the discussion could return to Oregon.

For over an hour, the committee heard three main themes: The district was much too large, it included different communities with different identities and, in the case of Malheur County, a completely different time zone.

Finally, the desires of people in the district were too often ignored in the capitals of Washington and Salem.

How they were ignored depended on each testimonial.

In a written statement, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock struck a note between hope and resignation over the likely outcome of the process.

"My greatest concern is that our district could be gerrymandered in order to further diminish representation for a portion of Oregon that reflects ideology, values, and interests much different than the remainder of Oregon," Murdock said.

New districts should make sense geographically

New districts should "geographically make sense" to retain an Eastern Oregon voice in Washington and Salem.

"If Oregon gets a new seat, we are not naive enough to expect more representation for Eastern Oregon, but we would like to retain what we have," Murdock said.

Nathan Soltz, chairman of the Democratic Party of Oregon's 2nd Congressional District Commit-

tee, said the sparse population and vast landscape made it difficult for communities to feel any mutual connection.

"You can drive from Medford to Enterprise — about 10 hours — and never leave CD2," he said.

Brad Bennington of Jackson County said lawmakers needed to listen more to rural voters.

"There is more to the state than just Portland and Salem," he said. "There are a lot of people who feel they haven't been heard."

Bennington said he would give the legislators the "benefit of the doubt" in drawing political maps.

"Democrats can keep themselves in the supermajority until the day the sun doesn't come up," he said.

Todd Nash of Enterprise said it would be difficult to draw political maps with so little population to pool into a district.



Nash

"We have about 320 acres per person," he said.

Craig Martell, of Baker City, said proximity and highway connections should guide the grouping of communities in districts.

"Baker City and La Grande, only 44 miles apart on Interstate 84, belong in the same district," he wrote. "As lines are currently drawn, Senate District 30 is a grotesque gerrymandered monstrosity."

'A robust debate'

Resolutions have been introduced in the Legislature to move to a commission like those already used in California and several other states. Several speakers endorsed such a plan. But even if approved by the House and Senate, the change to the state constitution would need voter approval. Any change wouldn't occur until the 2031 redistricting.

At the end of the evening, Salinas, chair of the House committee, said the gathering of so many people from so many places had been time well spent.

"A robust debate," she said.

The video ended. The committee will hold a second hearing on Saturday, March 20, at 1 p.m.

Advertising of any kind has been a challenge this past year - When? Where? Even Why?

Being the new podiatrist in town especially during 2020 with all its new challenges, Juli has been nothing but completely amazing at helping us with different options and offers there are to choose from. I have been very impressed with the quick promptness and professionalism from her and am very happy choosing to advertise through Baker City Herald. Thank you for all your hardwork at keeping us up to date with our monthly stats and other advertising opportunities.



Dr Brian Sanders, DPM
Sanders Podiatry

- Gain Exposure.
- Drive More Business.
- Find New Customers.

Baker City Herald

Marketing assistance from the print and digital experts. Talk to our customer success team today.

541.523.3673

