

EOU being cautious about booster requirements

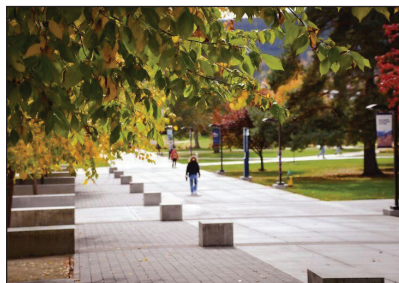
By **ANDREW CUTLER**

The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Officials at Eastern Oregon University are keeping their options open about instituting COVID-19 booster shot requirements amid a sharp national spike in coronavirus cases driven by the highly transmissible omicron variant.

Tim Seydel, EOU's vice president for university advancement, said the university in La Grande is not yet requiring boosters but has been having conversations about a requirement, especially in light of the University of Oregon's Twitter announcement Dec. 20 that it would require booster shots as omicron reached Oregon, saying students, faculty and staff should get the extra dose "as soon as they are eligible."

"Our focus probably right now is continuing to watch what's happening, monitoring the situation, and recommendations from health officials statewide and of course, locally," Seydel said. "There's no requirement



Oregon Public Broadcasting/Contributed Photo
Students walk on the Eastern Oregon University campus during the 2021 fall term.

right now for students or employees to have a booster as we start with our winter term. We're going to continue to monitor to see how the situation evolves."

Seydel said with so many moving parts and differing projections, Eastern Oregon officials continue to meet on a weekly basis with the Center for Human Development to stay abreast of COVID-19's impact locally.

The school instituted a vaccination mandate in October that

requires all of EOU's on-campus staff and students to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 or to have an approved religious, philosophical or medical exemption. Seydel said on-campus vaccination rates for employees and students is 75-80%. The school has spent the holiday break reminding students and staff to be safe if they were traveling.

"When we start up again, all unvaccinated students, if they can't, don't have proof, then they'll get tested," he said. "And then we'll continue monitoring them and our employees. If they're vaccinated we already have their proof. And then if they're unvaccinated, then we'd have them continue to do their weekly or daily health checks."

As the omicron surge unfolds nationwide, Seydel said Eastern Oregon does not anticipate a change in on-campus activities.

"Eastern put protocols in place and worked to have students in class on campus, even at limited capacity,"

he said. "That really worked well for our students, and we want to keep doing that."

Seydel said the school has been successful in keeping case counts low this fall, an indication that EOU's protocol is working and that students are making sure to monitor themselves.

"If they're not feeling good, they're getting over to our Student Health Center and getting tested," he said.

Seydel said Eastern Oregon will continue to hold vaccine clinics during the winter term to further encourage the extra shot. During two recent clinics held on campus, approximately 80 booster shots were given, according to Seydel.

"We've had four clinics already, and we're planning to hold another one in January. And at the last one, we had just a lot of booster shots, which again is another really good indicator," he said. "We had a lot of students and employees going in to get their booster."

CHILL

Continued from A3

"A significant snowfall is possible Monday-Wednesday, even at lower elevations," according to the Weather Service's forecast discussion posted Wednesday morning, Dec. 29.

The weather shift that started on Christmas Eve interrupted what had been a relatively mild and dry December.

From Dec. 1-23, the average high temperature at the Baker City Airport was 38.7 degrees, about three degrees warmer than usual.

The temperature topped 40 degrees on 10 of those days, including 45 degrees on Dec. 23 — 11 degrees above average for that date.

But since then the temperature has been above freezing only briefly, and not at all since Christmas Day.

The low temperature of 2 degrees on Dec. 28 was the chilliest reading in 2021. It's possible, though, that the temperature will go lower still before 2021 concludes.

With consecutive lows of 5 (on Dec. 27) and 2, the last week of the year seemed frigid compared with the rest of the month, but neither temperature came close to threatening the record lows for those days.

The record low for Dec. 27 is 13 below zero, set in 1994. The record for Dec. 28 is 14 below, set in 2011.

The all-time record low for Baker City is 39 below zero, set on Dec. 30, 1978.

POWER

Continued from A1

behalf, has "contacted the Respondent several times to request access to survey, test, and sample the Property. Respondent has not granted Idaho Power access to the Property."

Berg said the company needs access to the properties to do a variety of surveys.

According to the court petitions, this work is needed "to ensure the proposed path complies with federal and EFSC (Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council) permitting and siting requirements, including

that it does not conflict with any protected resources."

The petitions list the following surveys and inspections that Idaho Power wants to do on each of the five parcels:

- Pygmy rabbit survey (2022)
- Rare plant inspection (2022)
- Wetlands inspection (2020 or 2023)
- Terrestrial visual encounter survey (2022)
- Raptor survey (2022)
- Noxious weeds survey (2022)
- Land survey (2022)
- Appraisal field visit (2022)

"Because construction on the B2H project is scheduled to start as early as 2023, Idaho Power must begin surveying, testing, and sampling the Property in 2022," each of the four petitions states.

Berg said Idaho Power typically sends three letters to each property owner before filing petitions in court.

"We prefer to work directly through landowners, and we encourage people (who are respondents in court filings) to contact us as soon as they can," Berg said. "We much prefer to handle it out of court. We don't want to force the issue in court."

Berg said the owners of

about 65% of the private land in Baker County that are along the line's proposed route have given Idaho Power access for surveys and inspections.

Of the remaining 35%, most have not responded to the company's requests, he said.

Two property owners have denied access to their land, Berg said.

He declined to say whether either of those property owners is among the five that are the subject of the company's current court petitions.

The petitions seek access to the properties through Oregon Revised Statute 772.210, which states that power com-

panies can "enter upon lands for the purpose of examining, locating and surveying the line thereof and also other lands necessary and convenient for the purpose of construction of service facilities, doing no unnecessary damage thereby."

That law also enables power companies to acquire real property for the purpose of building and maintaining transmission lines.

The petitions ask a judge to grant Idaho Power access to the five properties, as well as a judgment for Idaho Power's costs and disbursements incurred herein and for any other relief the court deems appropriate."

MANAGER

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The mandate applies to health care workers, including the city's firefighters, who also operate ambulances.

Ultimately, the city didn't have to make any cuts in its ambulance service, as affected employees were either vaccinated or received an exemption.

"I mean, the whole vaccine mandate and the challenge of how do we manage that with our fire department, the ambulance service, that was a little nerve-wracking at the potential of that reducing our ability to provide service like we need to," Cannon said.

In addition, the City Council in August directed Cannon to consult with attorneys regarding a possible lawsuit the city might file challenging the governor's executive orders.

The city ended up not filing a suit, but Cannon said the directive was his responsibility as the city no longer has a full-time attorney on staff.

"I guess any time a local government wants to take on a lawsuit like that, normally

I think you'd have your city attorney attack that but a number of years ago the city decided to go with a contract attorney as opposed to having somebody in house, so who else is it going to fall on but the city manager?" Cannon said.

He said he was happy to do what the council asked, despite his concerns.

"You know, honestly, it's a tough thing for a city to try to 'sue the governor' or 'sue the state', especially a city our size, we just don't have the resources to do that sort of thing," he said. "It made me a little nervous on the long-term ramifications of that but I did the best I could with that."

Cannon said he'll let others decide whether it's a good thing the city didn't file a suit.

"I did what I was asked. As a city manager, that's your job — the council says, 'hey, get this done', you go, 'OK, I'll figure that out,'" Cannon said.

He noted that other legal challenges were filed against the governor's mandates. None thus far has been successful.

Although taking on a task typically delegated to an attorney posed a new chal-

lenge, Cannon is no stranger to the myriad roles that can confront a city manager.

In Saluda, with a much smaller population and budget than Baker City's, he was also responsible for public works, zoning and other areas for which Baker City has administrators.

"I don't want anything to imply that I get to sit back here and watch everybody else work, that's far from the truth," he said. "But it is nice because we're able to do a lot more and tackle a lot more projects because other people are working on it. So, in some ways the change from the smaller city to a bigger city is a lot easier. In other ways, it's more challenging because you have more things to navigate."

In the midst of a turmoil that has affected all segments of society over the past two years, Cannon said he has also been working with councilors on a variety of projects and goals.

"We're looking hard in our budgets, catching up our audit, and improving processes across the whole city," he said.

He emphasized that there has been "a lot of good things

that have happened" in his first year here, including reorganizing the budget process and beginning a "deep dive" on the needs of IT, personnel, and other areas.

Cannon said he has focused on making sure the work environment at City Hall and in other departments is positive.

Another emphasis is on making sure all departments, including police and fire, have the equipment they need to best serve citizens.

"We're making headway on those regards and, so, we have a long ways to go but a lot of good things have happened even with all the challenges," Cannon said.

Cannon said he and his family, which includes his wife and their three children, have been welcomed to Baker City, and the people here are kind and generous.

"I just am grateful for the opportunity to be here. People have been so kind and welcoming," he said.

Cannon's contract had an initial annual salary of \$105,000. That was increased to \$110,000 in the budget for the fiscal year that started July 1, 2021.

OMICRON

Continued from A3

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Monday that just under 62% of all Americans — over 205 million people — have had two shots of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or one shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. While 66 million people have had a booster shot, another 66 million remain totally unvaccinated. Both figures are about 22% of the population.

The numbers are shifting toward more protection, with the CDC reporting an aver-

age of just over 1.03 million shots put in arms every day.

Older adults, who are at a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, are getting vaccinated at a higher rate than the general public. CDC says 57% of adults 65 and older who have been vaccinated have also received a booster. Only 35% of the entire population has been vaccinated and had a booster.

With OHSU forecasting that the omicron variant spike will peak on Feb. 9, the Legislature is considering its options for the 2022 session, which begins Feb. 1 and ends 35 days later.

Senate President Peter

Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek issued a statement regarding possible impacts of Omicron on the short session:

"The new forecast from OHSU is concerning. It is too early to tell what impact the

Omicron variant will have on the February session. We continue to consult infectious disease doctors and public health experts to keep Oregonians safe while ensuring strong public participation in the legislative process."

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New At The Library

Patrons can reserve materials in advance online or by calling 541-523-6419. In the past week, Baker County Library has added 20 new bestsellers, one audiobooks, nine movies, 15 children's books, and 64 other books, including 50 that are available online. See everything new to Baker County Library District at wowbrary.org. Materials featured, and in library collection, does not indicate endorsement or approval of contents by the library. Selections are based on factors such as demand, public interest, diversity of viewpoint, community relevance, and others.

FICTION

- "The Christmas Pig," J. K. Rowling
- "The Death of Jane Lawrence," Caitlin Starling
- "Flying Angels," Danielle Steel
- "The Trouble With Peace (The Age of Madness, Vol. 2)," Joe Abercrombie
- "Elinor: A Riveting Story Based on the Lost Colony of Roanoke," Shannon McNear

NONFICTION

- "Hearth: A Global Conversation on Identity, Community, and Place," Annick Smith and Susan O'connor
- "Lightning Down: A World War II Story of Survival," Tom Clavin
- "The Weekday Vegetarians: 100 Recipes and a Real-Life Plan for Eating Less Meat," Jenny Rosenstrach
- "These Precious Days: Essays," Ann Patchett
- "They Called Us 'Lucky': The Life and Afterlife of the Iraq War's Hardest Hit Unit," Ruben Gallego and Jim DeFelice

DVDS

- "Venom: Let There Be Carnage" (Sci-Fi)
- "The Mitchells Vs. the Machines" (Animation)
- "Creed II" (Drama)
- "The man who killed Don Quixote" (Comedy)
- "The Auschwitz report" (Drama)

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Thank you! The many expressions of love and support, given to us during this time of great loss, were an immeasurable comfort. The help from Gray's West & Co., planning the service. All the cards, flowers, food, phone calls, and memorial contributions were very much appreciated.

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