#### **Continued from A1**

The states' fragmented war on COVID-19 has resulted in a resounding defeat. No corner of the planet has been ravaged like the United States. The nation makes up 4% of the world population, but has accounted for 20% of the nearly 2.5 million killed in the pandemic, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center and the U.S. Census Bureau.

The political equivalent of herding cats has continued with the arrival of two vaccines that could snuff out the virus. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two shots, given about a month apart.

States have been allocated a portion of the available vaccine equal to their percentage of the national population.

For Oregon, that comes out to about 1.3%.

With the initial shipments, state health agencies were sent a long list of recommendations on how to parcel out the shots. But in the end, the final priority list for the scarce vaccine was up to each of the 50 governors.

Ethicists call these "lifeboat" decisions — who, when and why someone could be chosen to live or die. An inoculation against a potentially deadly virus fits the bill.

Gov. Kate Brown promised Oregon would distribute the shots with equity.

The decisions are necessary, but the fragmentation of evaluating a comparative value of human lives through 50 different prisms, was going to be problematic from the start.

Governors and health officials are human beings who bring their own beliefs to decisions. Any choice will attach a social value to people or

The start was the easiest part from an ethical standpoint.

The first shots were sent to protect doctors, nurses, and other health care workers. The pandemic took a toll on hospitals and medical centers, where severe illness and sometimes death affected the very people whose jobs were to save lives of others.

The long months of the pandemic had also shown society's weakest points. Nursing homes reported just 5% of all COVID-19 infections nationwide. But the often frail residents and close quarters mean these residents account for just over one-third of all deaths. Oregon is one of 10 states where more than half of all gate care" facilities, according to the New York Times.

Residents and staff of the homes were put next to medical workers at the top of the priority list.

At that point, the states' unanimity ends.

### COVID-19 | U.S. death toll passes 500,000

# 'It's very hard for me to imagine an American who doesn't know someone who has died'

**Associated Press** or weeks after Cindy Pollock began planting tiny flags across her yard — one for each of the more than 1,800 Idahoans killed by COVID-19 — the toll was mostly a number. Until two women she had never met rang her doorbell in tears, seeking a place to

ther they had just lost. Then Pollock knew her tribute, however heartfelt, would never begin to convey the grief of a pandemic that has now claimed 500,000 lives

mourn the husband and fa-

in the U.S. and counting. "I just wanted to hug them," she said. "Because that was all I could do."

After a year that has darkened doorways across the U.S., the pandemic surpassed a milestone Monday that once seemed unimaginable, a stark confirmation of the virus's reach into all corners of the country and communities of every size and makeup.

'It's very hard for me to imagine an American who

The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention

recommended that those

over age 65 be next in line.

About 80% of deaths from

States are aged 65 and over.

twice as likely as a 17-year-old

7,900 times more likely to die,

All but five states followed

the recommendation, includ-

Gov. Kate Brown decided

care workers should be next in

Brown argued that 153,000

hopes of jump-starting a re-

turn to school this spring by

students shuttered at home

educators and school staff

were a relatively small num-

ber of people to put ahead of

the 795,000 Oregonians over

the age of 65. Oregon Public

Broadcasting estimated that

It was a price Brown be-

lieved was worth it to get the

governor and health officials

portrayed it as a short delay.

some who disagree with this

"I know there will still be

state's future functioning. The

each week of delay.

with "virtual learning."

to become infected, they are

COVID-19 in the United

Risk rises with age so that

while someone 85 is only

according to the CDC.

Oregon did not.



Evan Vucci/AP

During a speech at the White House on Monday, President Joe Biden reads the number of Americans who died from COVID-19. "Today, we mark a truly grim, heartbreaking milestone," he said.

doesn't know someone who has died or have a family member who has died," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics at the University of Washington in Seattle. "We haven't really fully understood how bad it is, how devastating it is, for all of us."

Experts warn that about 90,000 more deaths are likely in the next few months, despite a massive campaign to

vaccinate people. Meanwhile, the nation's trauma continues to accrue in a way unparalleled in recent American life, said Donna Schuurman of the Dougy Center for Grieving Children & Families in Portland.

In recent weeks, virus deaths have fallen from more than 4,000 reported on some days in January to an average of fewer than 1,900 per day.

Still, at half a million, the toll recorded by Johns Hopkins University is already greater than the population of Miami or Kansas City, Missouri. It is roughly equal to the number of Americans killed in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War combined. It is akin to a 9/11 every day for nearly six months.

Joe Biden said Monday, urging Americans to remember the individual lives claimed by the virus, rather than be numbed by the enormity of the toll.

breath alone in America."

The toll, accounting for 1 in 5 deaths reported worldwide, has far exceeded early projections, which assumed that federal and state governments would marshal a comprehensive and sustained response and individual Americans would heed warnings.

"The people we lost were extraordinary," President

"Just like that," he said, "so many of them took their final

> tion eligibility for some Americans will stretch into 2022. Problems ahead include getting a vaccine that is safe for children. The current vaccines are only recommended for those 16 and over.

get a shot."

Also souring the pub-

shots through dubious eligi-

bility. In Oregon, Providence

Health included its board of di-

rectors — which includes large

donors — in the medical group

"We all hate people who butt in line," Brown said when told

Brown, 60, said on Friday that she had not been vacci-

nated. Under her current plan,

there is no timeline for when

Brown is expected to an-

nounce the next eligible groups

Friday. The actual start date for

those inoculations isn't likely to

Often overlooked was the

sheer size of the national effort

to eventually offer vaccination

President Joe Biden made

headlines with a promise to put

100 million shots into Ameri-

cans' arms in his first 100 days

in office. Since the current vac-

promise covers only 50 million

people. At that pace, vaccina-

cines require two shots, the

to the estimated 333 million

she would become eligible.

be before early spring.

Americans.

at the top of the list.

of the action.

lic mood were reports of well-connected people getting

New vaccines could significantly shorten the timeline. The estimates also don't take into account Americans who decline to get vaccinated. Some estimates put the refusal rate

Caplan says that is the issue that looms large in the future.

at 30%.

"The focus now is on who is getting the vaccine," he said. "At some point the question will be who is not getting the vaccine."

States will have to navigate legal and ethical question on treatment of those who do not get vaccinated.

Israel has vaccinated almost half its population and is planning laws and rules for post-pandemic activity. Israelis who are vaccinated received a "Green Badge" — a certificate with a unique QR code, according to the Associated Press. When museums, concert halls, theaters and other public venues reopen, the Green Badge" will be required to get inside.

Caplan said a similar system could be used in the United States for everything from football stadiums to neighborhood bars.

How far the prohibitions facing those who go unvaccinated is an ethical debate still over the horizon for now. "Can you require vaccina-

tion for a job?" Kaplan said. "It's problematic. But it is a question that's coming." gwarner@eomediagroup.com

### **COVID-19 by the numbers**

**COMPARING TOTAL POPULATION...** 

World: 7.745 billion • U.S.: 333 million • Oregon: 4.3 million

## ... WITH COVID-19 NUMBERS

U.S. as percentage of world population	4.47%
U.S. as percentage of COVID-19 deaths	20.23%
Oregon as percentage of U.S. population	1.3%
Oregon as percentage of COVID-19 deaths	0.43%

Source: Bulletin research

ing California and Washingchoice," Brown said at a press conference Jan. 22. "The harsh reality is we are managing a scarce resource right now." teachers, school staff and day

The blowback was immediate. Senior advocates, medical groups and even her own Governor's Commission on Senior Services weighed in against Brown's decision.

There are 45 other states that are listening to the science and vaccinating vulnerable seniors," commission members said in a Jan. 28 letter to the governor.

Adding to the timeline troubles was a Feb. 3 federal court order requiring Brown to immediately start vaccinating about 12,000 inmates at Oregon prisons. About 28% of inmates had been infected with COVID-19, compared to 3% of Oregon's overall population. The delay in vaccination violated the U.S. Constitution ban against "cruel and unusual punishment." The state did not appeal the ruling.
Caplan, the NYU ethicist,

said governors who deviate sharply from federal guidelines risk cracking public consensus. "Why are elderly in group

homes vaccinated, but the elderly living on their own must wait?" Caplan asked rhetorically. "Why are teachers more important than the grocery store bagger or UPS guy?"

The governor's objectiv ity was called into question because she had received \$240,000 in contributions from the Oregon Education Association PAC in her 2018 race for governor, a relatively small portion of the \$18.5 million she raised for the race.

even with the vaccine, they might not go back to the classroom without wider vaccination of the public. The CDC announced last week that schools could safely reopen without vaccinating teachers.

Some union officials said

Brown also had Oregon go its own way for age-related vaccinations. Eligibility was staggered, beginning with those 80 and older on Feb. 8, two weeks after the education group. The minimum age for eligibility would drop five years every week until everyone 65 and older was eligible March 1.

Vaccine shortages hit every state. But media reports of 65-year-old residents lucky enough to get an early appointment at mass inoculation sites like Disneyland and Dodger Stadium in California stoked resentment in Oregon.

"States are amending their criteria of who is eligible sometimes adding millions of people — but without any additional supply," Caplan said.

states were inexplicable to people who were eligible across the country, but not in their own hometowns.

"It erodes public trust," Caplan said. "In the end, it comes down to 'I'm just going to do whatever I have to do to

spokesperson. A federal me-

diator was slated to be part of

St. Charles leaders say they

are concerned that the fed-

eration is "bargaining in bad

faith," and they plan to file an unfair labor practice charge

of bad-faith bargaining with

the National Labor Relations

the talks.

Board. "We reiterate our disappointment in the Federation's decision," said Berry. "St. Charles will take all necessary steps to ensure that care for our community continues in a safe and uninterrupted way." Reporter: 541-617-7818,

Arthur "Kelly" Conrad MD of Bend, OR Oct 18, 1951 - Feb 15,

mkohn@bendbulletin.com

### St. Charles

**Continued from A1** 

The medical techs voted 94% in favor of authorizing the strike and sent a 10-day notice warning of the impending walkout, according to the state-St. Charles Health System

described the move as "disappointing," in a press release, especially while it is coping with COVID-19 patients and largescale community vaccination "While this strike notice

cannot slow our efforts to meet these critical community needs, it just adds new — and unnecessary — challenges when our community needs us most," said Aaron Adams, president of St. Charles Bend and Redmond. The federation represents

about 150 technical employees at the St. Charles campus in Bend.

The strike would only affect technical employees at the St. Charles Bend hospital campus. It would have no impact on the health care system's other hospitals or clinics in Redmond, Madras and Prineville.

"This is our last resort to improve the conditions at the hospital," said DeeDee Schumacher, an ultrasound technologist who has worked at St. Charles for 40 years. "We don't want to strike and would rather continue working in our community, so we hope the hospital will avert this by settling a fair contract."

Strikes in the health care field rarely last longer than a week, said Potter, primarily due to the high cost of temporary replacement healthcare workers. Strikes by technologists are uncommon he added.

"We have only been able to identify a single prior example in the last few decades in the United States. That strike lasted only two days," said Potter.

The St. Charles medical techs unionized in 2019 and have since been bargaining for their first contract. Pay and working conditions are the primary issues of contention. The federation also alleges that the hospital broke federal labor laws by changing pay for some health care professionals.

The federation said hospital management subsequently agreed to mediation, but has delayed establishing timely bargaining dates. It alleges that more than 90% of medical techs are being underpaid and the hospital's proposals fall short of adequate wage adjustments.

'Since September of last year, we have been offering to meet on nights, weekends and even holidays in order to complete this contract in a timely manner," said Potter. "The administration of St. Charles refused every such offer and on December 3rd walked away from the table entirely. Our members are no longer willing to let St. Charles set the sched-

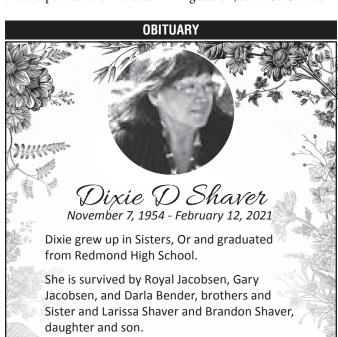
Potter said the medical techs are prepared to remain on strike as many days as necessary "to secure the recognition, respect and fair treatment they deserve."

St. Charles insists the onagain-off-again talks had been going in the right direction and the timing of the notice is not consistent with the latest agreements. As recently as Saturday, the two parties were in discussion with a federal mediator to set new dates for bargaining, the hospital said in a statement.

Rebecca Berry, vice president of human resources for St. Charles Health System, blames the federation for dropping out of the bargaining. "If (the Federation) be-

lieves that progress is not being made, it needs to look at its own decisions," said Berry.

March 10 had already been scheduled for another bargaining session, said a St. Charles



There will be no memorial services. In lieu of

flowers she would want contributions made

View Funeral Home, Salem, Oregon.

to your favorite charity. Arrangements by City

# DEATH NOTICES

**Richard Dale Johnson** of Sunriver, OR March 29, 1939 -February 17, 2021

Arrangements: Baird Funeral Home of Bend is honored to serve the Johnson family. Please visit our website, www.bairdfh.com, to share condolences and sign our online guest book.

Services:
A Celebration of Life will take place at a later date.
Contributions may be made to: Bend Humane Society (hsco.org) or Deschutes Land Trust

(deschuteslandtrust.org)

Niswonger-Reynolds Funeral Home is honored to serve the family. 541-382-2471 Please visit the online registry for the family at www.niswonger-reyn-

Arrangements:

2021

olds.com Services: Celebration of Life for Dr. Conrad will be held at a later date. Contributions may be made to: Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation www.JDRF.org

### **OBITUARY DEADLINE**

Call to ask about our deadlines. Monday - Friday, 10am - 3pm. No death notices or obituaries are published Mondays. When submitting, please include your name, address and contact number. Phone: 541-385-5809 Fax: 541-598-3150 Email: obits@bendbulletin.com