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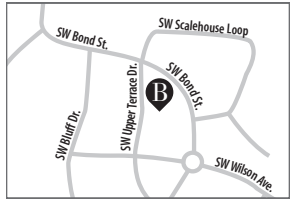
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LOCAL, STATE & REGION

COVID-19 data for Jan. 20

Deschutes County cases: 36,867 (675 new cases)
Deschutes County deaths: 225 (zero new deaths)
Crook County cases: 4,561 (45 new cases)
Crook County deaths: 62 (zero new deaths)

Jefferson County cases: 5,666 (128 new cases)
Jefferson County deaths: 70 (zero new deaths)
Oregon cases: 559,976 (10,034 new cases)
Oregon deaths: 5,916 (8 new deaths)
COVID-19 patients hospitalized at St. Charles Bend on Thursday: 63 (4 in ICU).

The Bulletin had been tracking the seven-day average case count based on state data since local cases were first reported, until the state stopped providing county-level data for weekends or holidays. When data is available, The Bulletin will continue to publish information about the pandemic.

Lawsuit: Brown unlawfully commuted sentences of nearly 1,000 inmates

BY ZANE SPARLING
The Oregonian

Two Oregon district attorneys and the relatives of three homicide victims on Wednesday accused Gov. Kate Brown of unlawfully freeing nearly 1,000 inmates, filing a new legal challenge that seeks to slam the gate on over 70 proposed commutations.

District attorneys Patricia Perlow of Lane County and Doug Marteeny of Linn County are among the parties alleging Brown has violated clemency procedures that require victim notification. The lawsuit, filed in Marion County Circuit Court, asks a judge to halt Brown from allowing those convicted of crimes as minors from applying for commutation.

"We are asking that the court compel the governor to follow the laws that are already in place," said Monique DeSpain, a lawyer for the Kevin L. Manix law firm, which filed the



Bulletin file photo

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown commuted the sentences of 912 inmates who were deemed at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19, according to a June 2021 letter she wrote to state lawmakers.

case on behalf of Perlow, Marteeny and the homicide victims' relatives.

Brown commuted the sentences of 912 inmates who were deemed at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19, according to a June 2021 letter

she wrote to state lawmakers. The freed inmates were medically vulnerable, had completed at least half their sentences and were not serving time for crimes against people.

Brown also commuted the sentences of 41 inmates who

fought the historic Labor Day 2020 wildfires, according to the June letter, which is cited in the lawsuit. Those released didn't "present an unacceptable safety, security, or compliance risk to the community," the letter said.

Forty-four inmates and three jailers have died of COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic, state records show.

The lawsuit alleges Brown broke rules requiring individual commutation applications and unlawfully delegated her responsibilities to state agencies.

"This lawsuit is not personal on my part," Marteeny said in a statement. "I believe our laws put limits on (Brown's) actions. I am working to enforce those limits."

Perlow, in a statement, argued Brown was ignoring crime victims' statutory and constitutional rights. "The governor's priority is offenders of crimes, many of them violent,"

Perlow said.

A spokesperson for Brown declined to comment.

Aliza Kaplan, a Lewis & Clark Law School professor who frequently helps inmates prepare clemency applications, said the governor's actions were in line with historical standards.

"She's using it in the exact way it should be used," Kaplan told The Oregonian. "These people have been punished significantly, and even in a place like prison, they have managed to rehabilitate themselves, and the governor is offering them mercy."

The lawsuit also seeks to halt Brown's reconsideration of youth offenders' sentences.

The Oregon Department of Corrections said in October that some 250 youth offenders would be eligible for commutation if a 2019 law giving them "second look" hearings halfway through their sentences were to be retroactive.

LOCAL BRIEFING

High Desert Museum among grant recipients from commission

The High Desert Museum and Tower Theater Foundation are among several Central Oregon nonprofits awarded grants from the Oregon Arts Commission for 2022.

The largest award for Central Oregon went to the High Desert Museum, which will receive \$17,725 from the commission this year. The Tower Theater Foundation Inc. was awarded \$8,077. Awards also went to BendFilm (\$7,016), Sisters Folk Festival (\$8,589), and Sunriver Music Festival (\$4,899).

At the High Desert Museum, the funding will help support bringing arts and culture in programming and exhibitions, said Heidi Hagemeyer, museum spokesperson. An example is the works of three Native American artists that will be featured in an upcoming original exhibition "Imagine a World," which opens Jan. 29.

COCC plans 'car-mencement' for 2022 graduates

Central Oregon Community College



Central Oregon Community College/Submitted photo

Central Oregon Community College had a "car-mencement" ceremony in 2021.

announced Thursday that it will hold a drive-thru ceremony for students graduating from the college in 2022.

A press release from the college said the ceremony on June 11 in Bend was moved to drive-thru in an effort to prioritize "student, staff and community

health, and building upon the successful precedent of last year's drive-thru ceremony."

"After overwhelmingly positive feedback from students, their families and many staff members — as well as out of an abundance of caution for everyone's

health and safety — COCC is pleased to share that this year's ceremony will again take place as a drive-thru "car-mencement," said Alicia Moore, the college's vice president of student affairs.

Graduates will be grouped into waves based on their major and "for social distancing and logistical purposes." They will remain in their vehicles until they step out and onto a stage to receive their degree or certificate, with faculty joining at certain times.

Madras man struck by car, killed

A Madras man walking in the road on U.S. Highway 97 after his car ran out of gas was struck by a car and died Wednesday night.

Anthony Manuel Hernandez, 40, was walking in the southbound lane between Redmond and Bend when he was hit by a black Mercedes G15. The driver was Howard Dietrich, 45, of Portland, Oregon State Police reported.

Police and emergency medical personnel responded to the scene of the crash at about 9:30 p.m. Wednesday.

— Bulletin staff reports

EMBEZZLEMENT OF \$1.6M

Former adoption agency bookkeeper gets 4.5 years in prison

BY MAXINE BERNSTEIN
The Oregonian

A former bookkeeper for an international adoption agency who stole more than \$1.6 million from her employer and her own family was sentenced Wednesday to 4½ years in federal prison.

U.S. District Judge Marco A. Hernandez said he considered that the fraud spanned about eight years and affected multiple victims.

Melodie Ann Eckland, 56, of Hillsboro pleaded guilty to wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, filing a false tax return and willfully failing to collect or pay payroll taxes.

She was also ordered to pay more than \$1.6 million in restitution.

The illegal scheme was discovered in March 2018, when one of the owners of the Journeys of the Heart adoption and surrogacy agency received a call from a Premier Community Bank representative inquiring about several business checks that had been presented for payment with a signature of the owner that appeared to be forged, according to prosecutors.

Eckland stole funds directly

from the adoption agency's business account at the bank by using the Journeys of the Heart computer to make unauthorized wire transfers to her personal U.S. Bank account and by writing unauthorized checks to herself, according to prosecutors.

To hide her fraud, Eckland maintained two separate QuickBooks files on the adoption agency's computer.

To cover the money she had stolen, Eckland applied for loans from at least five lending agencies on behalf of the adoption agency, using the names of the agency's owners without their permission. Eckland altered agency financial records to make it appear as though she owned the agency and was authorized to enter into the loan agreements. Beginning in 2016,

Eckland stopped making the agency's quarterly employment tax payments to the IRS and stopped filing employment tax returns. As a result, the agency owed more than \$94,000 in past due employment taxes.

In a further attempt at a cover-up, she transferred \$123,900 she stole from an account belonging to the estate of her deceased brother-in-law to the

adoption agency's bank account by forging her husband's signature, according to prosecutors.

Eckland, who worked as the bookkeeper for the adoption agency from 2011 until April 2018, spent the money from her thefts on gifts and living expenses for her adult children, trips to Hawaii, Mexico and Disney World, groceries and living expenses, prosecutors said.

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