

Oregon’s hospitals are going to need more financial help

Hospitals across Oregon may have returned closer to pre-pandemic patient revenue. But if it was a revenues/costs race, the costs are winning.

It isn't just St. Charles Health System that has been suffering from financial troubles. The combined operating margin of Oregon's hospitals dove by about 302% for the first part of 2022. The culprit is largely increasing payroll costs. The squeeze put on hospitals can mean patient care could suffer.

The federal government helped prop up nurse staffing agency contracts until recently because of the pandemic. That money is no longer available.

The state of Oregon may step in. One request from the Oregon Health Authority is for the state to allocate just over \$9 million from the general fund budget and to increase the limit of the federal funds the agency may spend by another \$2 million.

The way that money would be spent is important. The bulk of it would go to pay nurse staffing agencies for contract nurses, not permanent nursing employees for hospitals.

What that would do is help for about six months. It's a temporary stopgap. But the state's Legislative Fiscal Office has pointed out key problems.

When the money runs out, what will

hospitals be forced to do? The temporary fix is not going to add a lot of certainty for nurses, hospitals or patients. And Oregon's and the nation's nursing shortage is not going to be over in six months.

If the state continues to pick up the tab, for say all of 2023-2025, the bill may come to \$28 million, not accounting for inflation. Maybe that is worth it. It is a lot more money.

And if the state invests this money in paying for nursing staffing agency contracts, isn't the state just creating a perverse incentive? More nurses may shift to contractual employment with staffing agencies. Hiring nurses to work directly for hospitals is less expensive.

Maybe this is just the kind of thing that Oregon has to do now. But what are legislators going to do to push the state to find more permanent solutions?

Legislators on the Joint Subcommittee on Human Services are scheduled to discuss this issue on Wednesday. You can find more information here: tinyurl.com/ORhospitalmoney.

Does Oregon’s state plan for housing get it right?

We all know Oregon has a housing shortage. How big is it?

The state has a shortage of housing of about 110,000 units. If the state is truly committed to housing the homeless, the need goes up by another 29,000.

Another way of looking at it is just as dismaying.

During the pandemic 2109-2021, some 53,200 new households formed. Do you know how many housing units were built? 28,500.

We're short. It drives up prices. And we all know the impact that has had on families and employers.

A state government plan to help is coming. Legislators are scheduled to get a briefing on it on Wednesday. It's from the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. And we couldn't help but notice that it is the same state agency that just went through a rulemaking process under the direction of Gov. Kate Brown to bring the state more restrictive land use regulations.

The DLCD housing plan is packed with statements that sound great. "Plan for what's needed." "Build what's needed, where it's needed." And "Commit to working together with urgency."

The idea is Oregon will shift from

a historic focus on ensuring sufficient land is available, which, well, got us where we are. Instead, state and local governments would partner to do more to break down development barriers and even fund the housing that the market would not produce. Local action would be refocused on production.

It sounds like a wiser approach. What will it mean in reality? What will it cost? It's hard to know.

When we read in the draft plan that the state will "unlock land, where it's needed" that's where we know people are going to disagree. Oregonians don't agree on what land should be allowed for development.

The DLCD just brought the state more restrictive development requirements, mandating denser development in new climate friendly areas. At least 30% of new residential growth has to be built in the new zones in the state's larger cities.

Some will say that was an important change for the climate and smarter growth But is it going to make it easier to make up Oregon's housing shortage? Or tougher?

You can read the DLCD's draft plan, here tinyurl.com/DLCDhousing. It is accepting comments on its plan through Oct. 3. Comments can be submitted to housing.dlcd@dlcd.oregon.gov.

■ Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.



My Nickel’s Worth

What about the victim?

I'm writing in response to Mark Labhart's defense of Betsy Johnson in the recent newspaper regarding the auto accident she caused in 2013. In his rebuttal to Rick Neufeld's letter of the prior Sunday, he mentions that Johnson was injured, but nowhere does he mention the actual victim of the accident. Her name is Melissa Gallentine, who in 2015, after unsuccessful negotiations with Johnson's insurance company, sued Johnson seeking \$261,000 in compensation for her injuries. It took her four years to fully recover from her injuries, which included a sprained back in multiple places and mild traumatic brain injury (per Willamette Week dated 07/06/22).

Ms. Gallentine's lawsuit was dismissed after Johnson's attorneys argued she was shielded by legislative immunity. Gallentine subsequently refiled her lawsuit, which Johnson claims to have settled for \$43,000 per her campaign.

I thought Mr. Neufeld was clear in his letter that this was not about the accident, but Johnson's response to the lawsuit. It is irrelevant that, as Mr. Labhart says, no citations were issued and no charges were filed against Johnson. What is relevant and indisputable is that Betsy Johnson caused the accident and was responsible for the injuries incurred by Ms. Gallentine, who was the innocent party. By claiming legislative immunity Johnson didn't want to pay for the

victim's injuries. She wanted the people of Oregon to pay instead. I believe that Johnson's behavior was irresponsible and should disqualify her from serving as governor.

— Pam Berreyesa, Bend

Help stop veteran suicide

Seventeen U.S. veterans die by suicide every day; 12 of those deaths involve a firearm. U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, is well-positioned to reduce this tragic death toll by supporting a bipartisan bill currently pending in one of his committees (Judiciary).

The Preventing Suicide Through Voluntary Firearm Purchase Delay Act (HR 8361) would give individuals at heightened risk of suicide, like veterans, the power to suspend their own ability to purchase a firearm. Participation is purely voluntary, so there is no Second Amendment issue. No gun owner would be impacted in any way.

I grew up in Oregon, often visiting Bend. I fired rifles and shotguns in Boy Scouts and on my grandfather's farm. But I choose not to own a gun today, because I fear I might use it in an impulsive suicide attempt. I have bipolar disorder, and I have experienced periods of severe depression and suicidal thinking. In good times, I want this tool to protect myself against dark days.

Giving veterans greater control over their own access to firearms would save many lives. Firearms

are much deadlier than other common suicide methods. And when asked in a survey about this proposal, 22% of veterans said they'd sign up. Join me in urging Representative Bentz to prevent veteran suicide by supporting HR 8361.

— Fred Vars lives in Birmingham, Alabama and is a law professor at the University of Alabama.

Oliver Tatom for Deschutes County commissioner

Recently we hosted a house party to support Deschutes County commissioner candidate, Oliver Tatom. Oliver is an RN and EMT by training, and is very focused on finding a path forward as we address the challenges experienced by our growing county. We particularly appreciated his upbeat, positive attitude, and commitment to collaborating with all stakeholders for the common good. Oliver welcomed the "hard questions" and answered them thoughtfully.

Here are comments from house party attendees:

"He's exactly what the county needs...youth, principles, integrity and a vision."

"It was very educational since we really didn't know what a County Commissioner is responsible for."

"He thinks 'outside the box' from a new perspective."

We will continue our support of Oliver Tatom, and hope that you will too.

— Monte and Kathy Dammarell, Bend

Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

Guest columns

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words and must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

Write: My Nickel's Worth/Guest Column

P.O. Box 6020
Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

With Putin reeling, now is the time to help Ukraine win

BY MAX BOOT

The Washington Post

Russian dictator Vladimir Putin keeps going from bad to worse in his invasion of Ukraine. From his perspective, the last week has been an unmitigated catastrophe. Ukraine's stunning, surprisingly successful Kharkiv offensive has continued rolling on, having already liberated an estimated 3,500 square miles from Russian rule — i.e., more than Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Ukrainian troops are now nearing Luhansk province, which they had lost in July. That makes it increasingly unlikely that Putin will ever achieve even his scaled-down objective of conquering the Donbas region. (Luhansk is one of two provinces that make up Donbas.)

The Russian forces keep trying and, so far failing, to reestablish a new defensive line. Over the week-end, Ukrainian troops crossed the Oskil River, a natural barrier to their advance. The Russian retreat has revealed disarray and low morale in the ranks of Putin's military. In Izium,

Russian troops have left behind more mass graves of their victims to be uncovered by war-crimes investigators.

Putin has never counted on being loved, but his rule has depended on an aura of fear and power that is now being drained away — to be replaced with revulsion and contempt. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, a leading buyer of Russian energy and weapons, openly rebuked Putin during a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. China's Xi Jinping has not openly criticized Putin, but neither has he supported the Russian dictator. Chinese companies are not filling the vacuum left behind by Western firms exiting Russia, and China is not supplying weapons to Russia, forcing Putin to go weapons-shopping in Iran and North Korea.

One indicator of Putin's reduced status in the world is how several other world leaders kept him waiting before meetings in Samarkand — employing against him one of his own favorite tactics for asserting dominance.

Another sign of the times: The U.N. General Assembly voted 101-7 on Friday to allow Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to deliver a televised address. Besides Russia, the only other countries voting no were fellow rogue states Belarus, Cuba, Eritrea, Nicaragua, North Korea and Syria. Russia is almost entirely isolated. Even Kazakhstan, once one of Moscow's closest allies, broke with Putin at the U.N. as part of its broader refusal to support his war of aggression. Another Russian ally, Armenia, has been on the receiving end of a renewed offensive from Azerbaijan, which might be taking advantage of a distracted Kremlin.

Given the heavy losses of men and materiel Russia has suffered since the beginning of this ill-advised war (at least 70,000 casualties along with the loss of 6,200 vehicles, 11 ships and more than 100 aircraft of all kinds), it will be hard put to recover. Putin still appears afraid of ordering a general mobilization for fear of the societal discontent that an expanded draft could bring.

So he is relying on the dregs of society to do his fighting for him. "Putin's chef," the oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, has apparently taken to recruiting mercenaries for his Wagner Group in prisons. Sending more criminals will likely further undermine the already low quality of Russia's undisciplined, discontented forces in Ukraine, raising the risk of a general collapse.

But while Russia is down, it is not yet out. More than 150,000 people have been freed from Russia's yoke in recent weeks, but an additional 1.2 million Ukrainians still live under brutal occupation. Russia continues to occupy roughly 20% of Ukraine, and Ukraine will require more Western military equipment to finish liberating its soil. Ukraine desperately wants higher-end weapons systems such as F-16 fighter jets, Gray Eagle drones, Patriot air defense missile batteries, longer-range missiles, and main battle tanks such as the German Leopard 2 or the American M1 Abrams.

Even though the Ukrainian armed

forces have shown they can rapidly assimilate sophisticated Western systems such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), the United States and its allies are still reluctant to provide the weapons that Kyiv is asking for. The essential reason, once all the excuses are stripped away, is that we are still deterred by threats of Russian retaliation. Indeed, the worse Putin does, the more scared we seem to get. Undersecretary of Defense Colin H. Kahl just put out a statement claiming: "Ukraine's success on the battlefield could cause Russia to feel backed into a corner, and that is something we must remain mindful of."

This seems, to me, a fundamental misreading of the moment. Putin is reeling. Now is the time for the Ukrainians to press their advantage. Seize the moment. Don't give the Russians time to reset and recover. Given the pitiful performance of the Russian military, Putin should be more scared of us than we are of him.

■ Max Boot is a Washington Post columnist and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.