

# Records

Continued from Page A1

Health Statistics, Vital Records and Certificates.

The processing time in January, however, averaged 12.7 days, Woodward said. The longer time could be related to delays by funeral directors or physicians filling out the appropriate forms, a challenge she characterized as statewide, not regional.

The state's vital records office has certified 6.5 million records since it was established in 1903. Last year, the office certified 35,000 deaths, about 3,100 per month, Woodward said. Records for deaths and marriages are kept confidential for 50 years, while birth records remain confidential for 100 years, she said.

An electronic system is used to process death statistics, and about 90 percent of funeral directors and physicians use the system, Woodward said. But there are no penalties for delays.

"The main message to physicians is that this is the last important thing they can do for families," Woodward said.

## Delays and hardships

Delays in obtaining a death certificate can create a hardship for survivors, especially those already struggling on a fixed retirement income. Spouses often have joint ownership or accounts



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

**Claude Baker at his home on Laycock Creek Road. Baker's bank account was frozen for 16 days while he waited to receive his wife's death certificate.**

for banking, trusts, pensions, life insurance, homes, personal property and utility bills.

Claude Baker, whose wife, Bobetta, passed away Feb. 26, said it took 16 days before he received a death certificate. He said he was told that much time wasn't uncommon and the delay might have to do with getting the attending doctor's signature on the death report so it could be sent to the Oregon Health Authority.

In Baker's case, his wife's Social Security checks were automatically deposited at a bank in California, and the bank froze the joint account not long after she passed away. The

bank sent him forms to fill out so he could access the account, but he lacked the death certificate needed to be sent with the forms.

Baker said he and his wife had established a living will and trust and he had power of attorney, but he said it took the assistance of a senior nurse at Blue Mountain Hospital to "break the logjam" and expedite the process.

## Local medical examiner

April Bieber resigned as Grant County medical examiner on Feb. 22. As a result, Grant County currently does not have a medical examiner to handle unattended

deaths, "nor are there any immediate or apparent prospects for appointing one," Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter told the Eagle.

According to state law, "the local health officer shall temporarily act as medical examiner in cooperation with the chief medical examiner until the vacancy is filled." The chief medical examiner is a position within the Oregon State Police, currently based in Clackamas.

The Oregon Health Authority lists Dr. David Hall, a provider at Blue Mountain Hospital, as the local health officer, Carpenter said. Hall served as the Grant County medical examiner in the past but "has declined to fill the role of medical examiner during this vacancy," Carpenter said.

State law provides that in cases where the positions of local health officer and district medical examiner are both vacant, "the district attorney shall temporarily act as medical examiner in cooperation with the chief medical examiner until the vacancy is filled."

On April 23, Carpenter told the Grant County Court that the state medical examiner's office had taken on the role of local medical examiner but wasn't generally available to travel to Grant County. The office asked the court to appoint additional death investigators to assist them.

At the time, Sheriff Glenn Palmer was the only appointed certified death investigator in

Grant County. On May 8, the court agreed to appoint Gretchen Ladd, who is the district attorney in Wheeler County with a home in Canyon City, and former John Day Police Chief Richard Tirico.

Ladd was already certified, but Tirico would need training that could cost the county \$1,157. A death investigator typically looks into factors relating to deaths other than medical causes.

## Preventive measures

There's not much a person can do to expedite death certificates, but people can plan ahead for the time when a spouse or family member falls ill and when they die.

Estate planning, drawing up a will and drawing up papers giving another person power of attorney needs to be done ahead of time. Choosing an executor to handle financial affairs after a person has died also needs to be done ahead of time. People should contact an attorney for proper detailed advice on these matters.

Baker said his biggest problem was that immediately after his wife passed away, the Social Security Administration contacted the credit union in San Jose, California, and froze her account. The agency even requested that her last check be returned, he said.

But once he sent the proper documents, the bank account was unlocked right away.

"It was an inconvenience for us," he said. "But for others, it could be a catastrophe."

# Senate

Continued from Page A1

By walking out, they denied the 18 Democrats a quorum, bringing the Senate to a halt.

It lasted four days. When Republicans again didn't show on Friday, both sides said they were in it for the long haul.

Then Gov. Kate Brown began negotiating with Senate Republicans, and over the weekend, everything changed. On Monday at 3 p.m., the education package came up for a vote in the Senate and eventually passed on a party-line vote.

As part of the deal, Republican senators agreed to forego protests on future votes for bills like cap and trade and paid family leave.

Senate Minority Leader

Herman Baertschiger Jr., R-Grants Pass, declined to comment on whether his caucus would play nice. He said of Republicans' negotiations with Democrats, "It had a lot more to do than with just guns and vaccines."

He declined to elaborate, but he said the Republicans' denial of a quorum achieved what it set out to do: It brought Democrats and Republicans together to negotiate a way forward.

"We're here to do the people's work. If we fail, the citizens are the losers," Baertschiger said. "If we come together and find solutions, the citizens are the winners."

When asked if giving in sets a political precedent, Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, doubled down on the school vote being a historic win. "I'm not surprised it took

this kind of effort," Courtney said. "In fact, I wasn't sure we could get there."

Burdick said, while she's devastated to lose the gun bill, this is the most historic vote she's taken in her 23 years as a lawmaker. Burdick met with Baertschiger on Saturday and agreed to kill the bill.

That same day, Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, met with Sen. Dallas Heard, R-Roseburg, to concede on her vaccination bill, something Steiner Hayward has worked on for years. Steiner Hayward declined to discuss the deal.

The vaccine bill became one of the most controversial of the session, as opponents daily came to the Capitol to protest. Some wore stickers and made signs. Others duct-taped their mouths shut as a symbol for being silenced. By the thou-

sands, they submitted written testimony. They regularly confronted lawmakers and staff in the building.

"The people opposing that bill just behaved reprehensibly around the building," Burdick said. "I'm afraid that some of them are going to feel those tactics worked. Those tactics had nothing to do with what happened today."

Republicans also secured a promise that Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, will have more of a say on the expansive carbon pricing proposal inching toward the House, although Courtney declined to elaborate.

Courtney has been Senate president since 2003. He has the power to ask the governor to call out the Oregon State Police to bring wayward senators back to the Capitol for a vote, and he exercised it

in 2007 when Republicans attempted to boycott a tax vote.

This time, Courtney chose not to send state troopers after the missing Republicans, saying that would have been "a nightmare."

"I don't have to conquer or win," Courtney said. "I like it when the institution works."

Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, said on the Senate floor that the walkout needed a resolution.

"At some point, we have to come back together," Boquist said.

"Being in charge means you have to govern, and you have to figure out how to get people back into the building to govern," said Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, who was co-speaker in a House at the time evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. "When you have a majority, you have an expectation, and you have people that have expectations for you. You still have to run government."

While the walkout originally focused on the state's

troubled pension system, any fix was notably absent from the final deal. Both sides refused to say how the gun control and vaccine bills were picked out of Republicans' expansive list of Democratic proposals they wanted dead.

When asked about how the deal was sorted out, Baertschiger just wanted to talk about the pension woes, though he declined to offer details on a solution and said the state should stop "adding to" the system's debt.

Late last week, a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced an amendment to Senate Bill 1049 that would cut employee benefits and make other changes to PERS in an attempt to lessen annual payments to retirement benefits. That bill could move to the House floor as soon as this week.

"I do believe that if we don't get a handle on this PERS," Baertschiger said, "that we are going to be back in two years, and the educators are going to be asking for more money again."

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## Hello Grant County,

Isn't Grant County beautiful in the springtime? I think so, and that is what I am hearing from many of the visitors that are stopping by the Chamber office.

First Friday was a hit again this month! Several people came out to enjoy the scavenger hunt. Congratulations to Karen Johnston for winning the gift basket. Next month, First Friday will be a poker walk. Mark your calendars for Friday, June 7.

Our tourist season officially opened May 1. Kam Wah Chung is already seeing more visitors than they saw this time last year, and the Sheep Rock Unit of the John Day Fossil Beds is expecting a big year as well. Make sure to let visitors know about our wonderful local museums. The folks at the Grant County Historical Museum, the Ranch and Rodeo Museum and DeWitt Museum and Depot Park work very hard to preserve our history for future generations. If you haven't visited our local treasures, you should! The Seneca Oyster Feed and 62 Days are right around the corner. For other events, check the calendar on our website: [gcoregonlive.com](http://gcoregonlive.com). We try to list everything that is going on. If you know of something that is not on the calendar, let us know so we can get it on there.

The June Chamber Board meeting will be held Thursday, May 16. The board meets at the Chamber office at 10:30 a.m. and the no-host luncheon is held at the Outpost at 12 p.m.; everyone is welcome to attend. Our guest speaker will be Genevieve Perdue, conservation specialist from the Blue Mountain Land Trust. We hope to see you there!

**Tammy Bremner**  
Manager, Grant County Chamber of Commerce

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**SAUNDERS/FAMILY & FRIENDS REUNION**

Dates: June 21, 22 and 23  
Place(s): Holliday Park and Mt. Vernon Community Hall

**Friday June 21:** Holliday Park  
12:00 to Evening  
Meals ...Potluck

**Saturday June 22:** Mt Vernon Community Hall  
Meals  
Breakfast 8-10 am: Pancakes by Family  
Noon: Potluck  
Evening: Potluck

**Sunday June 23:** Mt Vernon Community Hall  
Meal:  
Breakfast 8-10 am: continental Potluck  
Who: All related  
Family's: Johns/ Osbornes/Springers/Gibbs/Others  
Silent Auction: All Participants Welcome  
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