

# The COVID-19 crisis isn't over

**G**ov. Kate Brown used an apt metaphor recently regarding the COVID-19 virus and what may be in store for the state over the next month.

"We are going to be stepping out on the ice," she said.

The statement is indicative of what has become a hallmark of the COVID-19 virus — its utter unpredictability.

The respiratory infection is now a part of our lives, a familiar signpost as we navigate our way from one day or one week to the next. The COVID-19 virus signpost is clearly one most everyone would like to avoid or ignore.

Except we can't. That's because in the wake of Brown's approval of many counties moving into phase two of a reopening, cases of the virus haven't declined but increased in many areas of the state.

At the tail end of last week, the Oregon Health Authority reported 34 new COVID-19 cases in Umatilla County. Those new positives push the total for the county to 298.

Since mid-May, when the state began a methodical reopening process, the number of Oregonians testing positive for the virus has doubled.

Oregon isn't alone. More than 15 other states are enduring a boost in cases, and, in some cases, shattering daily records.

Then there is the peculiar case of Union County. There, the county commissioners last

week made an unprecedented decision to move the entity back into phase one COVID-19 restrictions after more than 200 people tested positive for the malady in less than a week.

As unfortunate as the situation in Union County is, it should be a red flag regarding what can happen if proper precautions are not in place as the state reopens.

The pandemic guidelines — social distancing, wearing a mask, staying home if you are sick — remain just as relevant today as they were two months ago.

Yet, in the end, whether we have a major outbreak here will depend almost entirely on local residents.

That means we must all heed the warnings and guidelines from the health authorities at the county and state level. Just because we've moved into phase two of the governor's reopening plan doesn't mean the virus is gone. In fact, the COVID-19 virus is here to stay. The measures adopted by the governor to stop the spread were fueled by the real fear that hospitals and other care centers could be overloaded if a major outbreak occurred.

That hasn't happened and probably won't. Local health centers are prepared to meet just such an emergency.

Yet, that doesn't mean we should ignore reality and pretend everything is back to normal. It is not. And won't be until there is a vaccine or treatment.



## GUEST COMMENT

# Rural Oregonians need to be at the center of their own recovery

By Heidi Khokhar

**R**ural has struggled for decades — Oregon can do better.

More than 35 years ago, Oregon's rural communities experienced an economic downturn of epic proportions when the timber economy collapsed. While state and federal governments responded with significant resources and support for almost a decade, it was not enough.

The 2008 Great Recession, again, hit rural places hard. Now, the COVID-19 crisis will likely affect Oregon's rural and tribal economies disproportionately and have repercussions for years to come. Our history tells us we have yet to invest the needed resources, provide the needed support or allow the needed time for rural recovery after these major economic downturns.

In the past, we failed to create an environment where rural could propel themselves to an equitable, inclusive and resilient economy. Then we moved on, leaving them behind and on their own — with adverse impacts to the entire Oregon economy and our ability to work together towards common goals.

### Rural Has Unique Needs

In Oregon, rural places face the same complex challenges as larger population centers, in more geographic isolation, with scarcer financial resources, fewer peo-

ple to do the work, rarer models designed to fit their situation and more confusing or less trusted information sources.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the associated economic impact and the current social and political climate combine to create a situation on a scale that may eclipse anything we have known. In this moment, we can clearly see the bad — inequities in our systems and the lack of resiliency of our local economies — and the good, shared values from which we can build.

### Rural Oregonians Need to Be at the Center of Their Own Recovery

Rural Oregonians are working hard to recover, sleeves rolled up, helping each other. Their resilient spirit leads them to look for opportunities to act locally, connect to one another and access resources and support. However, they cannot do it alone — and this time, they shouldn't.

Rural Development Initiatives and many other partners have been with rural communities through it all. For decades, we have worked to understand their needs, support their work, provide access to models and resources that work in rural and help them set and achieve their goals. We stand committed to listen, support their economic recovery and play an active role in connecting policy makers and resources to their efforts.

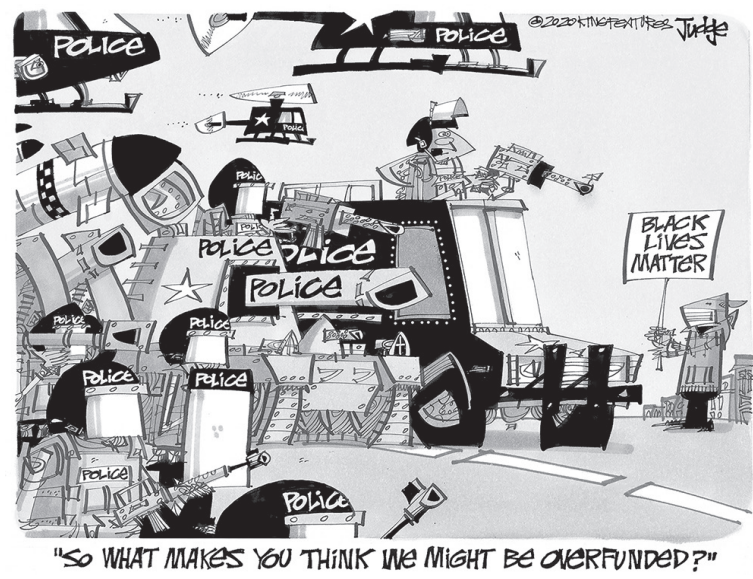
Together, we can ensure that

Oregon moves forward to become better and more resilient than before.

Right now, we have an opportunity to choose a path forward that creates a stronger future for all Oregonians. This includes investing resources to better understand the specific needs of rural Oregon — focusing on the further disproportionate impact on rural Indigenous, Black and other communities of color — and to develop solutions in partnership with rural people and the rural organizations that support them.

Oregon's legislative leaders must make proportionate investment in rural Oregon to address not only the immediate COVID-19 needs, but also the larger economic struggles felt by these communities for decades. We implore our state leaders to ensure Oregon's economic recovery specifically includes rural communities, and that rural people and organizations be included in the policy decisions that ultimately affect their own recovery. RDI is committed to advancing these priorities, and we look forward to being an active partner with our elected leaders, and others, in making sure all of Oregon recovers to become better and more resilient than before.

*Heidi Khokhar is the executive director of Rural Development Initiatives. She grew up in a small Southern Oregon town and has worked alongside rural people and communities for over 20 years.*



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Keeping the virus at bay

To the Editor:

The Emergency Operations Center-Grant County Sheriff's Office has on its recent record of accomplishments: unnecessary hirings (for finding and doling out federal and state money expected for COVID-19, few if any for increased community health care needs); unnecessary purchases for stated purpose; unjustifiable expenditures in view of one single lone positive; corruption of the county court showing a disturbing trend as expressed in Mr. Hamsher's June 16 statement that: "Its just like we can approve anything" (BME June 16, 2020).

"Anything" then means an additional \$125,000 of taxpayer revenue. (It now appears the initially planned full EOC budget was "pre-approved" and will be paid; per-

haps over Scott Myers' objection, if we're lucky, giving the illusion we do have county government of-the-people-by-the-people-for-the-people, rather than one-of-by-and-for the EOC-GCSO assembly.)

Despite: no further need for the additional personnel hired (their employment contracts should stipulate the likely temporary nature of the job); no need for the wide-ranging purchases in their intended purpose (purchases have a return policy, within 30 to 90 days, not too late!); no need for further emergency measures, rather, maintaining what the populace has successfully practiced the past three months: caution, observance of new rules, watching the rest of the state and nation, and plain common sense.

Beginning years back but continuing to figure into the county budget are sheriff's deputy furloughs, arbitrary and unexplained paid leaves, false arrests, refusals to

acknowledge state law and resulting legal expenses when someone did call it. All at taxpayer expense without corresponding service. True sum total to date? Does anyone know?

And even further back, to the infancy of his sheriffhood, court minutes repeatedly show Palmer asking for money, and more of it, and concern over this squeaky wheel by other county employees.

Needless to say, I object to most any and all these expenditures and herewith politely but urgently request the county assessor to calculate my share of this total sum, and refund me in the upcoming tax year. Taxation without representation is a no-go.

And how far would \$250,000 have gone toward giving local business a boost?

So, back to the purpose of this exercise: Where (who) is the virus?

**Vega Nunez**  
Ritter

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• **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.

• **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.

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### SALEM

• **Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: governor.state.or.us/governor.html.

• **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).

• **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.

• **Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/Bentz. Email: Sen.CliffBentz@oregonlegislature.gov.

• **Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale** — 900 Court St. NE, H-475, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/findley. Email: Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov.

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