

Walden reported to be one of few GOP in Congress to accept Biden victory

By Gary Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau



U.S. Rep. Greg Walden

Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, is among just 27 Republican members of Congress who will say Democrat Joe Biden has been elected president, according to a survey The Washington Post published Saturday.

Walden, who did not run for reelection and will leave Congress after 20 years in office, represents all of Oregon east of the Cascades and a portion in the southwest, including Ashland, Medford and Grants Pass.

The newspaper asked all 249 Republicans in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House "Who won the election?"

Walden was among the 70% of those polled who did not respond directly to the newspaper's query. But the Post reviewed recent public statements and put Walden on the list of

27 accepting Biden as the next president based on a Dec. 1 interview for a National Journal podcast.

"I think in the end we'll have a transition here, and you'll have a new president

come Jan. 20," Walden said in the interview. "I don't see the math where this gets overturned and so far I've not seen the evidence of the amount of fraud it would take, or mistakes — and those occur in every election — to overturn the results in any state."

Walden added, "So, I think the die is pretty well cast" on who would be president.

Walden could not be reached for comment by EO Media Group on Saturday. Former state senator Cliff

Bentz, a Republican from Ontario, was elected in November to succeed Walden. Bentz could not be reached for comment on Saturday.

Walden is the only Republican in Oregon's delegation of two U.S. Senators and five members of the U.S. House.

Biden beat President Donald Trump by 7 million votes and an Electoral College win of 310-232.

President Trump has made an unprecedented attempt to overturn the election result, making unsubstantiated claims of massive voter fraud. He's lost several court decisions trying to stop ballots from being certified, lobbying election officials to set aside results, then attacking them when they declined his demands.

The Electoral College votes on Dec. 14. Then the ballots are sent to Congress for review. Trump is chal-

lenging these usually pro-forma steps in the election process.

The election ended with Republicans holding a 50-48 majority in the U.S. Senate. Two seats from Georgia will be decided in a run-off on Jan. 5. If Republicans win one or both of the seats, they will retain control of the chamber. If Democrats win both seats, the Senate would be tied 50-50, with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, a Democrat, breaking any ties as President of the Senate.

Most Democrats have suggested Republicans are not speaking out to say Biden won out of fear that an enraged Trump will scuttle the party's chances in Georgia.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, has not supported Trump's claims, but has pointedly refused to call Biden "president-elect." House Minority Leader

Kevin McCarthy, R-California, has refused to discuss Republican plans for dealing with Biden for the next four years.

"Let's wait until (we see) who's sworn in," McCarthy said, "and we can discuss that."

Twelve of the 52 Senate Republicans acknowledge Biden's victory, including Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, Susan Collins of Maine and Mario Rubio of Florida. Seven of the group are retiring and will not be in the Senate next year.

The Post noted that of the 15 House Republicans who will say Biden won, six are retiring and two represent districts Biden won handily.

After the Post story was published, Trump called those who confirmed Biden was president-elect were "RINOs" — a term used for those deemed "Republican in Name Only."

'Extreme Risk' rating for virus infections hits most of Oregon

Counties could switch risk levels Dec. 17 and Dec. 31

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon last week transitioned from a COVID-19 freeze to a frosty list of new restrictions that will likely last into the start of 2021.

The "Two-Week Freeze" ended Dec. 2, but state officials say infection rates are still on a rapid rise.

The Oregon Health Authority implemented a four-tiered "Risk Level" rating system on Thursday, just as the freeze ended.

The most restrictive "Extreme Risk" list includes 25 out of the state's 36 counties, including Grant County — four more than Oregon Health Authority officials had projected the week before.

"Counties that are facing extreme risk of virus spread will need to continue with strict health and safety measures, similar to the Two-Week Freeze," Gov. Kate Brown said in a statement.

Five counties — Benton, Clatsop, Coos, Curry and Lincoln — are in the "high risk" category. Tillamook and Harney are counties rated as "moderate risk," while Gilliam, Sherman and Willowa are "lower risk" counties.

"I want to stress that there is no 'zero-risk' category," Brown said.

The move came amid warnings the worst phase of the pandemic that's hobbled the nation since February is yet to come. Rapidly rising COVID-19 case counts and deaths will be compounded by a surge of infections from Thanksgiving and Christmas travel.

"December and January and February are going to be rough times," Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control, said Dec. 2. "I actually believe they're going to be the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation."

Officials warn that already stressed hospitals could run out of intensive care unit beds and that available staff was stretched thin and have to be pulled out if they catch the infection themselves.

The past 30 days have accounted for 27% of deaths since the first death in Oregon on March 14.

Officials say the use of masks, social distancing and hygiene are the best tools to try to slow the virus.

County statuses will be reviewed once every two weeks, and if there is progress, they can move one risk level down for the following two weeks. There are two dates in 2020 when counties could switch levels: Dec. 17 and Dec. 31.

With cases rising and spikes expected from Thanksgiving and Christ-

mas travel, it's most likely that risk levels are more likely to stay the same or go up. Last week, the state said it expected 21 counties to be at Extreme Risk when the program started Dec. 3. Since then, four more have been added.

If the don'ts far outnumber the do's on the Extreme Risk Level, that is the point. The restrictions are meant to tamp down the normal flow of activity that might spread the virus.

Most indoor group activity is barred during December, the coldest month of the year, for much of Oregon.

Under the Extreme Risk Level, gatherings are limited to six people from no more than two households. Advice: Meet the neighbors one set at a time.

During the pandemic, many workers have been unsure if they should stay home or clock in. Under the three less strict risk categories, employers are "recommended" to have staff work from home. At Extreme Risk, it is required. Offices are closed to the public.

Hungry? "Takeout is highly recommended," the state says.

If you do go to a restaurant, hope for heat lamps or firepits, because it will be outside.

If you can hold your exercise class or Christmas concert outside, you can have as many as 50 people participating and watching.

When the temperature drops as the state gets deeper into winter, either put up with the chill or shut down.

Entertainment? No dances or going to the movies (Hollywood isn't releasing much during the pandemic anyway). Music clubs — jazz, rock, soul, classical or barbershop quartets, it doesn't matter. All closed.

No museums — art, history, rocks and minerals, even the "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" exhibit at the Oregon State Hospital Museum of Mental Health, all shuttered. If your town has an aquarium, it's fish only — no human visitors.

But watching "It's A Wonderful Life" on your TV at home or tracking Santa's progress on the NORAD radar website on the family laptop are allowed.

Sports — nothing indoors. Whether the game is pick-up, kids, high school or even college, all are outside or off limits.

Exercise? Think solo at home or no go.

Shopping has some leeway. Stores and malls should look at those maximum occupancy signs and keep the number of people to half — again, don't forget to count staff.

"Faith institutions" — churches, synagogues, mosques included — should be at 25% capacity or 100 total people, whichever is smaller. Outdoors, no more than 150. "Curbside pick-up is encouraged."

Oregon's COVID-19 deaths climb while vaccine wait will be 'several months' for most

By Gary Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown on Friday painted a dark future for Oregon if the COVID-19 pandemic spirals out of control in the several months it will take to get a vaccine to most in the state.

"Our hardest days still lie ahead," Brown said. "Oregon hospitals are filling up."

Brown said Friday was the worst day of the crisis that hit Oregon 10 months ago.

Oregon health officials said the current infection rate is 1.25, meaning four infected people spread COVID-19 to five uninfected people.

The rate means new infections would be above 2,000 per day through Christmas Eve, including 75 severe cases requiring hospitalization.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state's leading infectious disease expert, said it would be another week to 10 days until the Thanksgiving holiday's full impact on the spread of COVID-19 is known.

But a Thanksgiving spike could push the infection rate to 1.5 — with every two people with COVID-19 infecting three others.

The higher rate would push new cases to 2,700 per day and severe cases

to 110 per day.

Sidelinger said infections will spiral exponentially higher if the public doesn't wear masks, maintain social distancing, meet outdoors and limit the circle of people that meet over the upcoming Christmas holidays.

"We've broken records we never thought we would break," Sidelinger said.

Brown and the health officials expressed cautious optimism over news of two vaccines nearing federal approval.

A vaccine from Pfizer could arrive in the state as early as Dec. 15, followed by another developed by Moderna.

Oregon is slated to receive about 267,400 doses by the end of the year. That's enough two-shot vaccinations to start immunizing the state's doctors, nurses and health care facility staff working with COVID-19 patients.

OHA Director Pat Allen said hope should be tempered with reality. It will take time and a major effort to get the vaccine into Oregon and then out to all the state's more than 4.2 million residents.

"It will be several months," he said.

Brown said she was in talks with both Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature over a possible special

session in coming weeks.

Lawmakers would be asked to bridge the financial and legal gap between the end of much federal funding and a state moratorium on evictions at the end of the year. The \$2.2 trillion CARES aid package approved by Congress and signed by President Trump last spring sent \$1.4 billion in aid to Oregon.

Despite the continuing spread of the virus and an economy staggered by shutdowns, the White House and Congress have not been able to come up with a follow-up plan before the current one expires. President-elect Joe Biden, who takes office Jan. 20, had said direct aid to Americans and to states was a top priority.

Oregon state officials have released a draft COVID-19 Vaccination Plan, but said they are still consulting with medical, civic and cultural groups on the final version.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended that initial doses should be given to the nation's 21 million health care workers and three million residents and staff of nursing homes.

The CDC said state decisions should be distributed in a way that will "promote justice, mitigate health inequities and promote transparency."

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Hello Grant County,

Are you ready for the holidays? Christmas will be here before we know it. Don't forget to "Shop Local" and help our Grant County businesses.

The latest "freeze" has made it difficult for many of our businesses this holiday season. Some are very concerned that they may not recover their losses. Let's support them whenever we can! Order takeout and buy gifts locally whenever you can. Also, help our neighbors. Some of them have lost their jobs right before Christmas.

One way to help local businesses is to purchase Grant County Greenbacks. This keeps your money local. Greenbacks come in denominations of \$5, \$15, and \$25.

They can be purchased at the Chamber Office dollar for dollar. Chamber member businesses who receive them redeem them at the Chamber, again, dollar for dollar. This has been a very successful program and has kept over \$50,000 in Grant County since it started in 2015.

Our Business Enhancement Program has also proven to be successful! To date, we have given out over \$18,000 to local member businesses for improvements. Our most recent recipients are Feathered Arrow Salon - \$2,427.77, Canyon Creek Clinic - \$2,500 and the Blue Mountain Lodge - \$2,500.

We gave out three grants this month from our Community Sponsorship Program. The Events receiving \$500 each were The Timber Trucker's Light Parade, The City of Mt. Vernon Food Basket for the Elderly Program, and Christmas on the Prairie.

There will be no Chamber board meeting for the month of December due to the most recent COVID 19 restrictions.

We will meet again in 2021. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and happy and healthy holiday season!

Tammy Bremner
Manager, Grant County Chamber of Commerce

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