

# State scrambles vaccine priority list again

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon is once again scrambling its priority list for COVID-19 vaccinations, with some seniors pushed from next weekend to March.

Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority blamed the whipsawing schedule on unreliable information from the Trump Administration as it wraps up its final days in office.

"This is a deception on a national scale," Brown said.

The change came as OHA reported late Friday that a Multnomah County resident was the first known case in Oregon of a highly infectious variant of COVID-19.

Brown announced Tuesday that those 65 and older were now eligible for vaccination beginning Jan. 23. Teachers and child care providers would also start receiving inoculations the same day.

Oregon's speedier rollout of inoculations was announced soon after U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Jan. 12 that vaccine it was holding back would be released. It was an unexpected windfall for states worried about scarcity in coming weeks.



PMG file photo

**Oregon is changing its priority list for COVID-19 vaccinations.**

Federal officials also recommended opening up vaccine availability to those 65-and-over once the first priority group of health workers and people in long-term care facilities were vaccinated.

The timing meant older Oregonians, who are the most susceptible to serious illness and death from COVID-19, would get inoculations earlier.

But the optimism soon evaporated. Federal officials told Brown and Oregon Health Director Pat Allen that there had been a miscommunication.

Actually, no additional vaccine at all would be on its way.

"I thought I was losing my mind," Allen said, "I went back and reviewed the actual

C-SPAN video of Secretary Azar, and the words he used were 'releasing the entire supply.' He talked about physical inventory. It was incredibly clear."

In response, Brown on Friday said the state would have to revise its priority list for the second time in one week.

The new rollout also underlined an already controversial decision by the governor to place school teachers and staff above the elderly on the priority list.

After the current Phase 1a of vaccinations for health care workers, inoculations for K-12 educators and school workers would start Jan. 25 statewide. Brown had targeted Feb. 15 for

reopening in-class teaching. Grant County has already completed most of its Phase 1a vaccinations and moved on to educators Friday. A clinic for people 65 and older was scheduled Tuesday for Grant County residents.

But, outside of Grant County, older Oregonians who are not in long-term care facilities would be placed into four priority tiers. Those over 80 would begin vaccinations on Feb. 8. Those over 75 come next a week later, on Feb. 15. Over 70 would begin Feb. 22 and over 65 on March 1.

Despite criticism that she was putting schooling over lives, Brown has stuck with her decision to prioritize getting schools reopened. She said virtual learning had left many students, particularly in less-affluent districts, falling behind. She also pointed to an uptick in teenage suicides due to the long isolation.

Brown said she didn't know if any other state was giving teachers the same higher priority. A Centers for Disease Control model program sent to the states has at-risk elderly in the group to be vaccinated after health care workers and congregate care residents and staff. "Each state is doing it differently," Brown said.

# Bentz explains voting against impeachment

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, voted against impeaching President Donald Trump on Wednesday, joining most House Republicans in a losing effort to avoid a stinging rebuke to the president in his last week in office.

The impeachment was approved 232-197, with 10 Republicans joining all Democrats in the equivalent of an indictment for inciting a mob to violently invade and ransack the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, killing five.

The article of impeachment for incitement of insurrection would normally be sent to the Senate for an extended trial to convict or acquit the president. Only three presidents have been impeached: Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton and now Trump twice. In the prior three trials, all were acquitted.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-California, can send the impeachment to the Senate. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, said the earliest he would consider the impeachment would be Jan. 19. That is the day before Biden replaces Trump as president during ceremonies at the Capitol.

Bentz did not speak during the two-hour debate and spent much of the time off the floor due to attempts to limit COVID-19 exposure in the House chamber.

Bentz said Wednesday the attack on the U.S. Capitol by pro-Trump supporters was inexcusable. "I continue to share the emotions many are feeling in the aftermath of the unprecedented and unacceptable violence this past week."

Bentz said the "rush-to-judgment" impeachment would only divide the nation more and undercut efforts to get both parties working on key issues such as COVID-19 as soon as possible.

"I voted against impeachment because our focus should be on unifying our nation, ensuring a peaceful transition to the Biden Administration," Bentz said.

With less than two weeks since he was sworn-in, the bulk of Bentz's time has been taken with the Electoral College vote, the riot and opposing efforts to oust Trump as



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**"OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE ON UNIFYING OUR NATION, ENSURING A PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION."**

— Rep. Cliff Bentz

soon as possible.

"I came to Congress to stand up for rural communities across my district by addressing the terrible damage caused by recent wildfires, and to reform the laws that govern our water rights," Bentz said.

As the lone Republican in Oregon's House delegation, Bentz was at odds with the state's other Congress members — Suzanne Bonamici, D-Beaverton, Earl Blumenauer, D-Portland, Peter DeFazio, D-Springfield, and Kurt Schrader, D-Salem.

"Donald J. Trump encouraged and incited the violent attack that occurred on Jan. 6, when Congress was gathered to certify the results of the 2020 presidential election," Bonamici said in a statement. "It was an attack on our Capitol and our democracy. Today I voted to impeach him for incitement of insurrection."

Two Republicans from Washington state voted to impeach.

Bentz was sworn in Jan. 4 as the new congressman replacing 20-year veteran Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River.

Bentz had been in the Capitol earlier on Jan. 6, before thousands of Trump supporters stormed the seat of national government, overwhelmed police and began defacing statues, occupying offices and stealing computers and other items.

# GOP lawmaker defends opening Oregon Capitol door

Video shows Rep. Nearman letting protesters into Statehouse; 'Open ... means open,' he said

By Peter Wong  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Embattled state Rep. Mike Nearman offered his first response last week to disclosures that he let anti-lockdown protesters enter the closed Capitol during a Dec. 21 special session of the Legislature.

The Republican from Independence made no apologies for his action.

"I do think that when ... the Oregon Constitution says that the legislative proceedings shall be 'open,' it means open," he said in a statement. "And as anyone who has spent the last nine months staring at a screen doing virtual meetings will tell you, it's not the same thing as being open."

The Capitol has been closed to the public since March 18, 2020, at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The House adopted rules for the 2021 session, which started Monday, that make all committee hearings virtual — over the objections of minority Republicans.

Nearman also went on the attack against House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat from Portland who disclosed on Jan.



Contributed photo

**State Rep. Mike Nearman — one of the Legislature's most conservative members — is the state director of the anti-union group Freedom Foundation.**

7 that State Police confirmed to her that it was Nearman depicted on video as the man opening a Capitol door. Protesters entered a vestibule on the northwest side of the Capitol, but State Police troopers confined them there and eventually ejected them. Police repelled a second attempt to breach the west entrance later in the day.

Nearman questioned the

timing of the disclosure, which occurred one day after the Jan. 6 invasion of the U.S. Capitol by a pro-Trump mob intent on disrupting the congressional certification of the electoral votes confirming Democrat Joe Biden's victory over President Donald Trump. Five people died, among them a U.S. Capitol Police officer.

The video of Nearman's action has gone viral, triggering an outpouring of criticism of Nearman.

"I hope for due process, and not the mob justice to which Speaker Kotek is subjecting me," he said in the statement.

## Facing actions

Nearman is under criminal investigation by Oregon State Police, who have arrested five people in connection with the disruption. The breach did not stop lawmakers from completing their work in the one-day session.

Any criminal charges would likely be decided by the Marion County district attorney.

Potential charges could include "official misconduct," which covers a variety of offenses.

Kotek did take three actions against Nearman, who was seated for his fourth term along with the 59 other representatives. Nearman acquiesced in one of them.

She stripped him of his two committee assignments, depriving him of any ability to influence legislation beyond voting on bills in the full House. She fined him \$2,000 for the cost of damage to the door. She also joined other members to file a complaint against Nearman with the Legislative Equity Office, which could trigger an investigation by the House Committee on Conduct, which has an equal number of members from both parties.

Nearman read a statement in which he agreed to surrender his electronic access card to the Capitol, not admit non-authorized people into the Capitol and give 24-hour notice before he enters the Capitol.

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