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COVID-19 kills fifth Grant County resident

89-year-old man died May 5

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Another Grant County resident has died of COVID-19. The Oregon Health Authority reported Friday that an 89-year-old man from Grant County tested positive April 12 and died May 5 at his residence. OHA reported he had underlying conditions.

The death was one of eight announced Friday and brings Grant County's death toll to five.

Grant County Health officials reported 18 cases in the last week. The county's rate of COVID-19 infections was 180 per 100,000 people as of May 10, the third highest in the state.

The Centers for Disease Control reported that Grant County has inoculated 30.9% of its residents, and the county remains among the least vaccinated in Oregon. However, the county fully vaccinated more than half of the county's seniors over 65 as of Monday, the CDC reported. In addition, the CDC noted that roughly 30% of Grant County residents 18 and over had received the vaccine.

In Grant County's region seven, shared with Deschutes, Harney, Klamath, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake and Wheeler counties, the Oregon Health Authority reported 15 variant cases. The CDC identifies B.1.526 — which has been identified in Grant County — as a "variant of interest," which is being monitored, but not a "variant of concern" that has been shown to cause increased transmissibility or disease severity.

Region seven has two intensive care unit beds and 53 non-ICU beds available.

St. Charles Hospital in Bend reported Monday that the hospital had nearly 40 COVID-19 patients, with six in ICU and five on ventilators.

Grant County is one of three counties that will drop in risk level Friday, Gov. Kate Brown announced Tuesday. The county will move from high risk to moderate risk, easing restrictions on businesses. Restaurants will be able to seat people indoors at 50% capacity up to 100 people, and up to 150 people outdoors. Closing time remains 11 p.m.

Turning the tassel

Grant County schools prepare for graduation

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County high schools have all made plans for outdoor graduation ceremonies this year.

Grant Union Junior/Senior High School Principal Ryan Gerry said they will have graduation at 10 a.m. June 5 outdoors on the football field.

They have 31 seniors this year at Grant Union. Gerry said in a letter to parents that each graduate will be allotted 15 tickets for field level entrance at the graduation ceremony. The graduate's family or friend

groups will be assigned certain seating sections on the field.

Drive-in and additional seating will be available in the football stands area separate from the field area. The ceremony will be live-streamed on the NFHS Network and on the Grant Union Facebook page. Masks will be required for people in attendance during the ceremony, according to the letter.

"It has been a very unique and challenging year in general with COVID, so we are really looking forward to having the opportunity to celebrate our seniors and their accomplishments at this year's graduation ceremony," Gerry said.

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Contributed photo/Tanni Wenger Photography
Graduates from Prairie City School toss their caps in the air at their 2020 graduation ceremony.

Locked and unloaded



EOMG file photo

Two gun proposals were combined in a final bill headed to Gov. Kate Brown for signature.

Senate vote sends gun legislation to Gov. Brown

By Peter Wong
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown is the final stop for the Oregon Legislature's major gun legislation of 2021.

The Senate voted Wednesday, May 5, to accept the House version of a bill that combines requirements for locks and safe storage of firearms with a narrowed ban on concealed-handgun license holders bring firearms into some public places, notably the Capitol and the Portland airport.

The vote was 17-7. Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose was the lone Democrat to join six Republicans in opposition to the revised Senate Bill 554. Five Republicans and one independent were recorded as excused or absent.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, a Democrat from Eugene and chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the bill follows the principles laid out by a 2008 U.S. Supreme Court decision. The court for the first time concluded there was an individual right to bear arms under the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but that right can be regulated.

"What we do know is that reasonable regulations can be placed on these individual rights we have," Prozanski said. "The bottom line is that we have a bill that does in fact address certain areas that we feel as a state need to be regulated."

Oregon would join 11 other states with some form of requirements for locks and safe storage of firearms, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

As for the narrower scope of the ban on guns

"IT CLEARLY INFRINGED ON THE RIGHT TO PEOPLE'S SELF-DEFENSE. I VOTED TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND MINORITIES IN MY DISTRICT WHO WANT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-DEFENSE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES AS THE OREGON CONSTITUTION ALLOWS FOR."

—Sen. Tim Knopp of Bend

"SAFE STORAGE SAVES LIVES, HELPING PREVENT UNINTENTIONAL SHOOTINGS AND FIREARM SUICIDES. IT WILL MAKE IT HARDER FOR POTENTIAL SCHOOL SHOOTERS TO OBTAIN A GUN, AND IT WILL SUPPORT RESPONSIBLE GUN OWNERSHIP."

—Henry Wessinger, State of Safety Action president

in some public places, Prozanski said it was a compromise. The original Senate version would have left it to all local governments to decide restrictions for themselves; the final version limits the option to school districts, community colleges and state universities. The option for cities, counties and special districts was removed.

The ban still applies to the Capitol in Salem and the passenger terminal at Portland International Airport.

As a state representative in 1995, Prozanski voted for a law that pre-empts local governments from regulating firearms, other than discharging them in public.

"But I will tell you that even though I thought it was the best decision I could make at that time, today is a different day," he said.

State of Safety Action, a nonprofit that advocates prevention of gun violence, issued a statement of support after the vote.

"Safe storage saves lives, helping prevent unintentional shootings and firearm suicides," Henry Wessinger, the group's president, said. "It will make it harder for potential school shooters to obtain a gun, and it will support responsible gun ownership."

Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod of

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