

# Biden and Brown shift vaccine doses to where demand is high

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Hoping to pick up the pace of vaccinations, state and federal health officials are ditching their population-based distribution game plans to get more doses where they are wanted and needed.

President Joe Biden wants 70% of American adults fully vaccinated by July 4. The goal translates to about 160 million people. Currently, 105 million American adults are fully vaccinated.

To get there, Biden announced last week that he was ending the system that sent weekly shipments of vaccine to states in amounts based on their population.

The move will send more vaccine to places where demand is high, with additional supply drawn from areas where vaccine sits unused in medical refrigerators.

Allotments to states that do not want or cannot use more vaccine will go into a federal "vaccine bank." States where shots are in demand will be able to order up to 50% more than their current allotments.

Oregon, California and Michigan are among states saying they still need more vaccine

to meet demand. On the flip side, West Virginia has reported a surplus of vaccine, and Arkansas officials said the state no longer wants weekly shipments.

With Oregon one of 12 states currently seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases, the state plans to withdraw from the vaccine bank quickly.

"Oregon will ask for the maximum allowed, which will help us to get shots in arms faster," Gov. Kate Brown said May 4.

Oregon is scheduled to receive 848,840 doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which requires two shots to fully vaccinate. The state is receiving an additional 7,300 Johnson & Johnson single-shot doses. A 50% increase in total doses would give the state over 1.27 million doses in a delivery.

On April 27, Oregon's infection rate had grown by 53% over the previous two weeks, the highest mark in the nation.

COVID-19 infections are still rising in Oregon, but more slowly. Cases have risen only 12% over the past two weeks. Oregon's 33% increase in hospitalizations over the same time is the third highest in the nation, behind only Alaska and Kansas. Nationwide, the infection



EOMG file photo

**Kerry Gillette, a physician assistant with Mosaic Medical, fills syringes with the Moderna vaccine during a COVID-19 vaccination clinic at Bethlehem Inn in Bend in February.**

rate is down 26% in the past two weeks.

A positive trend is a decline in deaths from the virus. OHA reported 55 COVID-19 fatalities in April, the lowest total since 22 died in March 2020, early in the pandemic. December 2020 was the worst month, with 597 deaths.

OHA data suggests that the leading cause of the lower fatality rate was the number of older people and those with underlying medical conditions who have been vaccinated.

A key part was inoculations of patients and staff in nursing homes, which are tied to 53% of all COVID-19 deaths in Oregon.

The nation average is 32%.

Oregon currently has the fifth lowest death rate per 100,000 people in the United States. Alaska, Vermont, Hawaii and Idaho have lower rates.

Biden's vaccination goal would require that 55 million people get their first shot by the end of the first week of June, just four weeks from now.

The Oregon Health Authority reported Thursday that just under 37% of state residents age 16 and older were fully vaccinated. Another 15% have had one shot and have scheduled their second dose.

The one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine could speed

up the effort, but manufacturing issues and a review of safety concerns have slowed distribution to a trickle.

Just as there are states that eagerly desire the vaccine while others shun it, counties in Oregon show the same pattern.

The percentage of adults who had received at least one vaccine shot varied widely across Oregon's 36 counties, from 64% in Benton and Hood River counties, to just over 32% in Lake, Umatilla and Malheur counties.

That's led to shifting more vaccine to areas where it is in demand, including Portland.

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock told EO Media Group that some of the reasons for the low turnout to get shots were political.

Though ex-President Donald Trump was vaccinated, some see vaccination refusal as an extension of the opposition to Brown's orders closing businesses that angered many in the area.

"The polling seems to show older Republican men seem to be the group who least likely want to get the vaccination," Murdock said. "But I'm an absolute contrast to that. I'm old, I'm a Republican and I couldn't wait to get mine fast enough."

Oregon has the highest rate of "vaccine hesitancy" on the West Coast, with 15% of residents saying they are unsure or don't want to get the shots, according to a report this week from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In contrast, California and Washington are reporting about 11% of the population is unsure or doesn't want to be inoculated. California officials said the highest rates of negative response were in the northern tier of rural counties nearest the Oregon border.

Oregon has also dealt with what OHA Director Pat Allen has called "vaccine belligerency," an active opposition to not only being inoculated, but at times protesting those who choose to get the vaccine. Incidents have included the heckling by anti-vaccination hardliners of Bend high school students at a school-sponsored clinic.

Other steps are being taken to get more "impulse vaccinations" by offering shots without appointments. Many people across the country and in Oregon have expressed frustration with multiple, sometimes clunky websites required to make appointments. Now, it's possible to just show up and roll up a sleeve.

## Former Oregon House Speaker Dave Hunt cited in sex trafficking sting

By Jim Redden  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Former Oregon House Speaker and current Clackamas Community College board member Dave Hunt was cited by Portland police in an undercover sex traffic sting operation in April.

Contacted by the Portland Tribune on Monday, May 3, Hunt said, "I don't think I should talk about that."

Clackamas Community College announced several hours later that Hunt was taking a leave from the board.

As a legislator, Hunt was one of numerous sponsors of a bill criminalizing sex trafficking in 2007. In 2011, he also voted for HB 2714, which created the crime of commercial sexual solicitation, the crime for which he was arrested and cited.

The Portland Police Bureau issued a press release May 1, saying its Human Trafficking Unit had cited eight men in an operation conducted in April. Officers posted online decoy ads on known human trafficking websites, and the subjects who "contacted undercover police officers to arrange payment for sexual acts" were criminally cited on the charge of commercial sexual solicitation.

The release did not name those cited, but said the list was available on request. The Portland Tribune requested the list and received it Monday morning, May 3. It included "53-year-old David Hunt of Milwaukie."

Reporters at the Portland Tribune then requested and received a portion of the police report. The suspect has the same full name, date of birth

and home address as the former speaker and current CCC board member. It said he was arrested and cited on April 28 by two Portland police officers at a Ramada Inn in Southeast Portland.

A Democrat, Hunt served as state representative for District 40 of the Oregon House of Representatives, representing Clackamas County from 2003 to 2013. He was elected Oregon House majority leader for the 2007-2009 session and served as speaker during the 2009-11 session.

After leaving the Legislature, Hunt served as president and CEO of the Pacific Northwest Defense Coalition for five years and as senior vice-president of Strategies 360 for three years. He currently serves as president and CEO of Columbia Public Affairs, where he is also a registered Oregon lobbyist. According to the police bureau, the Human Trafficking Unit is one of its oldest units. It added two additional detectives along with an additional sergeant and four officers in 2020, giving it the investigative capacity to follow up on felony-level Measure 11 crimes while simultaneously conducting rescue missions for victims of trafficking and affecting the demand side of trafficking by conducting periodic buyer suppression missions.

Due to both COVID-19 restrictions and months of nightly civil unrest, the unit's work was severely curtailed for most of the year. Its operations included six surveillance missions, 100 hours of remote review surveillance, two buyer suppression missions and four rescue/trafficker suppression missions.

## State Rep. Nearman faces two criminal charges in Capitol breach

By Peter Wong  
Oregon Capital Bureau

State Rep. Mike Nearman faces two criminal charges in connection with his opening of a door that allowed anti-lockdown protesters to enter a closed Capitol building during a Dec. 21 special session of the Oregon Legislature.

According to filings in Marion County Circuit Court, Nearman, a Republican from a Mid-Willamette Valley district, faces one count of first-degree official misconduct and one count of second-degree criminal trespass. Both are misdemeanors; maximum punishments are one year in jail and a \$6,250 fine.

Nearman was indicted after Oregon State Police turned over the results of its investigation to the district attorney in Marion County, where Salem is.

Prosecutors said that Nearman, "being a public servant, did unlawfully and knowingly perform an act which constituted an unauthorized exercise of his official duties, with intent to obtain a benefit or to harm another."

Nearman, 57, is a former software engineer in his fourth term from District 23, which stretches over Yamhill, Polk, Marion and Benton counties. He lives outside of Independence, although the city itself is in District 20.

The Capitol has been closed to the public since March 18, 2020, at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The House and Senate have limited access to floor sessions to members and staff. All committee meetings, including public testimony, have been virtual.

Video surveillance footage that went viral shows Nearman opening a door that allowed anti-lockdown pro-



Contributed photo

**State Rep. Mike Nearman**

testers to enter a Capitol vestibule — police eventually ejected them — and re-entering the building from the south side by using an access card. He did walk by the west entrance, but police were gathered inside.

Police rebuffed a second attempt by protesters later to breach the Capitol at the west entrance. Five people were arrested, at least one of them for using a chemical irritant against police, others for shoving news reporters and photographers covering the protest.

A few days after House Speaker Tina Kotek disclosed Nearman's identity — but not the footage — based on information from State Police, Nearman said this in a statement Jan. 12:

"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."

Lawmakers did complete action on the four bills put before the Dec. 21 special ses-

sion, which ended in one day, without further disruption. The protesters did not reach the House and Senate chambers or the office wings.

Republicans, who are the minority party in both chambers, have pressed for reopening the Capitol. But with at least four people reporting coronavirus infections in the House during the 2021 session — there have been no such reports in the Senate — a reopening appears unlikely in the near future.

### More actions pending

A conviction on either misdemeanor count, or both, would not result in Nearman's automatic expulsion from the Oregon Legislature. Only felony convictions result in automatic ousters from the Legislature, as a result of a 1994 constitutional change.

However, Nearman already has faced actions by Kotek, who stripped Nearman of his committee assignments and fined him \$2,000 for the cost of damage to west entry doors by the protesters. Nearman also agreed to surrender the electronic access card that allows him into the Capitol, and must give 24-hour notice before he enters the Capitol. He cannot allow access to unauthorized persons.

Kotek and others also have filed a complaint with the Legislative Equity Office against Nearman. The complaint is pending in the House Committee on Conduct, which is divided equally between majority Democrats and minority Republicans. The committee has not started public proceedings

yet, choosing to wait until the criminal investigation was completed.

The committee can recommend a range of penalties, the ultimate one being expulsion from the House, on constitutional grounds of "disruptive behavior."

Kotek renewed her earlier call for Nearman to resign his seat.

"Rep. Nearman put every person in the Capitol in serious danger and created fear among Capitol staff and legislators," she said in a tweet. "I called on him to resign in January and renew my call in light of today's charges."

The committee did call for expulsion in the recent case of Rep. Diego Hernandez, a three-term Democrat from Portland accused of creating a hostile work environment and sexual harassment. Of the five women who came forward against Hernandez, the committee concluded there was substantial evidence in three cases.

Hernandez announced his resignation on Feb. 22, one day before the House scheduled action on the committee recommendation, and it took effect March 15. Neither chamber of the Oregon Legislature has voted to expel a member since statehood, although it has happened in other states.

The committee also has a complaint pending against Democratic Rep. Brad Witt of Clatskanie. It was filed by Republican Rep. Vikki Bresse-Iverson of Prineville, who accused Witt of sexual harassment in a series of text messages.

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