

# Pushback

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people they might infect. The salvo from the House Republicans was part of a barrage fired at Brown's plans over the past week. A letter from the National Grocers Association and 10 other major retail groups has asked federal health and worker safety officials to stop Brown from requiring employees to ask for and verify vaccination cards. Making front line workers the gatekeepers and enforcers of state policy was inappropriate and potentially dangerous, the letter said. The criticism came as what was supposed to be a showcase for the state's new policy on vaccinated sections in venues has been scaled back and watered down by key participants. The National Basketball Association and Brown simultaneously announced last week that Thursday's NBA play-off game between the Portland Trail Blazers and Denver Nuggets would operate under new rules tied to a successful COVID-19 vaccination effort in Multnomah County. Up to 8,900 fans were allowed into the Moda Center for the game, a big jump from the 1,900 who were let in for a handful of games at the end of the regular season this year. Brown said, under a new policy, fans who showed their vaccination certification when entering the arena could sit in new vaccinated sections where they would not have to wear masks and socially distance as required by fans in other parts of the arena. The game plan was all possible because Multnomah County had become one of six counties in the state to certify

that it had put at least one shot of vaccine into 65% of its residents and submitted a plan for outreach to underserved residents still needing inoculation. Brown said the Moda Center was just the first venue to have the vaccinated sections and that the option would be offered in counties that hit the 65% vaccination rates. Restaurants, theaters, gyms, faith institutions and public events could opt for the plan if they required verification of vaccination. Some of the opposition to the plan to require showing proof of vaccination came from politicians and others who had opposed masks at different points in the pandemic and had lobbied for lifting restrictions on businesses and crowds despite high levels of infection in many areas of the state. While Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, had criticized Brown's new policy earlier in the week by noting the strong feelings about masks "on both sides," the volatility against showing certificates surfaced quickly among opponents of COVID-19 restrictions. The Enchanted Forest, a longtime children's adventure park near Salem, announced it was reopening and would require adults to show they were vaccinated. The blowback from vaccine and masking opponents was immediate and intense, fueled by posts on Facebook groups and other social media. After a deluge of angry messages — some including threats to the park or workers — the owners reversed course and said the opening would be delayed to a later, unspecified date. While federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have consulted with local officials across the country, pub-



Eagle file photo  
**Rebekah Rand, director of emergency management at Blue Mountain Hospital District, fills a syringe with the COVID-19 vaccine at a January vaccine clinic at the Grant County Fairgrounds.**

lic health decisions fall under the role of states. That's led to a patchwork of often contradictory measures, even with neighboring states such as Oregon and Idaho. Health officials in Oregon, California and Washington pledged early in the pandemic crisis to work together and keep policies in sync as much as possible. The same could not be said of Idaho, which opted for far fewer restrictions on activity and less stringent mask rules. But the trio of West Coast states have hardly been monolithic in their responses. California and Washington went much wider, earlier with vaccination priority for all residents 65 and over, while Oregon stuck with a more step-by-step approach of priority groups. Newsom has announced all students at California's massive University of California and California State University systems must be vaccinated prior to being allowed to take part in in-person classes in the fall. While Brown said at a press

call last month that she thought the mandatory vaccinations ordered by Newsom were a good idea, in practice, Oregon has allowed each university to make separate announcements of their plans. So far, the University of Oregon, Oregon State University and Portland State University have all announced that vaccinations will be required. Brown's boldest initiative has been to require the display of vaccine cards in selected situations. Oregon Health officials wanted residents to be more assured when going to a "vaccinated-only" area than just the promise of others that they were obeying the law. The idea of segregated access for those who have been inoculated and those who haven't hasn't gained traction in a majority of states, but 14 have created or are working on ways to keep potential virus spreaders away from others. But the sticking point always comes back to how to really know if vaccinated-only areas included only the truly vaccinated. The most common answer

is trust. In a politically fractured nation where masks, vaccines, in-person school instruction and large gatherings have become grist for often hyperventilating debate, that's a leap of faith. But it's the approach suggested by the CDC. For now, Brown is not moving toward another change of policy. She's already made changes to the state's original four-tier COVID-19 risk level system that dictated how severe restrictions in counties were. Earlier, Brown said no counties would be put in the extreme risk level as long as the entire state has fewer than 300 COVID-19 patients in hospitals and the number didn't grow by 5%. There are currently 274 patients, well below the threshold. That alone keeps Crook, Jefferson and some of the other counties on the high risk list from ascending to extreme risk. Then Brown announced this change: Get a shot of vaccine into the arms of 65% of eligible residents age 16 and up and any county could be dropped to the least restrictive level of rules. Brown has said that waiver shows that vaccination, not just infection rate, is the way back to something approaching normality. "Vaccines are very effective in keeping people safe from COVID-19," Brown said last week. "They are the key to returning to normal life and lifting health and safety restrictions statewide." But in the short term, the vaccination rate waivers have led to anomalies. Deschutes County this week reported some of the highest infection rates in the state: 372.4 cases per 100,000

population and an 8.2% rate of positive tests. Under the original guidelines, the county would be at extreme risk with limits just short of the kind of lockdowns experienced in the state early in the pandemic. But because Deschutes County has been certified as having administered at least one shot to 65% of its residents, the county's COVID-19 risk level is set at lower, the tier with the fewest limits on activities and businesses. Its next door neighbors, Crook and Jefferson counties, also have some of the highest rates in the state and are under high level restrictions this week, the most stringent currently applied by OHA. Clackamas, Jackson, Lane, Marion, Malheur, Polk and Umatilla have lower per capita rates than Deschutes County — some less than half. Yet, all are among the 15 counties rated at high risk. The chances of those counties moving to lower level are mixed, depending on where they are in their vaccination campaign. Clackamas, Lane and Polk have all vaccinated more than 60% of eligible residents and could get waivers soon. Marion has passed the 50% mark. But Umatilla and Malheur have each vaccinated less than 35% of the eligible group, while Jackson is a tick below 50%. Unless there is a major shift to higher vaccinations and lower infections, many counties will have to wait until Oregon registers an overall 70% mark for residents with one shot of vaccine. Brown has said, at that point, all 36 counties will move to lower level no matter their local case and infection numbers.

# Logging

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that both support. Merkley said, in the 2018 federal farm bill, he included authorization to double spending on forest collaboratives — which he described as the "antidote to the timber wars." But the next step — indeed, the vital step — is to actually include that money in the Forest Service's budget. During the May 26 hearing before the subcommittee, Merkley urged Christiansen to include that money in the agency's budget request for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1, 2021. "This is an amazing opportunity," Merkley said. **Backlog of projects** Two collaboratives are underway in the Blue Mountains, one in the southern part of the range, the other in the northern section, on the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla national forests. Last year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture allocated \$2.7 million

for the latter collaborative during the current fiscal year, which started Oct. 1, 2020. Forest Service officials have said that the \$2.7 million will help the two national forests start chipping away at a backlog of projects that are ready as soon as money is available. Although the details of the work vary depending on the area of the Blue Mountains involved, the general concept is to cut some of the trees, primarily smaller-diameter ones, that are growing in higher densities than was historically the case in the northern Blues, Steve Hawkins, deputy fire staff officer for the Wallowa-Whitman, said in a 2020 interview. Those smaller trees, most notably grand and white firs, have encroached over the past century or so in places that historically were dominated by ponderosa pines and tamaracks, in part due to the exclusion of fire, which historically killed most of the firs when they were relatively small. Ponderosa pines and



Eagle file photo  
**U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley during a 2019 town hall in Mt. Vernon.**

tamaracks, which generally grow in widely spaced stands rather than in thickets, are much more resistant to wildfires than the grand and white firs that have become much more prevalent over the past several decades. Although Merkley promotes the additional \$40 million for collaborative projects, his ultimate goal is much more ambitious. He said he believes the federal government needs to spend at least \$1 billion more each year on forest res-

toration work nationwide. **'We have to do more'** One way to make that money available, Merkley said, is by ensuring the federal government does not return to the practice known as "fire borrowing." That term refers to the federal government transferring money from Forest Service and other agency budgets to cover firefighting costs, leaving less money for projects designed to reduce the size of wildfires and, thus, the cost to fight them.

Fire borrowing was necessary in several years over the past decade as millions of acres burned annually across the West. Merkley said, although Congress ended fire borrowing in 2018, the changes made then will expire at the end of the current fiscal year — Sept. 30, 2021 — unless it's reauthorized. "We cannot go back to the fire borrowing of the past," Merkley said. During the press conference, Merkley recalled driving the length of Western Oregon in September 2020 following the fires that burned more than 1 million acres, destroyed towns such as Detroit, east of Salem, and killed 11 people. "It was unforgettable to me," Merkley said of the experience of driving for hours and never escaping the cloying smoke that persisted in much of Oregon for more than a week. "I've never seen anything like this." Merkley also talked about the 2020 fires during Wednesday's appropriations hearing before his committee. "Whether they have lost a

loved one, business, or home to a wildfire, had to pack their most valuable belongings and anxiously awaited go orders, or were trapped inside by a thick blanket of hazardous smoke, nearly every family in the West has been impacted by wildfires in one way or another," he said. "It's impossible to thrive if your community is being ravaged by these blazes. That's why any plan to boost America's infrastructure, create jobs, and protect lives and our economy must include responsible forest management strategies that can help us stay ahead of wildfire risks. Anything less will be a grave mistake that will leave communities scrambling in the face of an emergency, threaten American lives and livelihoods, and require more taxpayer-funded recovery projects." Merkley said the threat of severe fire seasons is likely to increase due to climate change. "Fire seasons are getting longer, forests and getting drier," he said. "We have to do more on the forest management end."

# Crime

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and \$10,000 for each other charge, according to court documents. McKrola is being held at the Grant County Jail and is scheduled to appear in court on the new charges at 9 a.m. June 7.

He is also scheduled to enter a plea on previous sex crime charges at the same time. In the previous case, McKrola is accused of first-degree rape, first-degree sodomy, first-degree sexual abuse, second-degree kidnapping, three counts of strangulation and furnishing alcohol to a person under

21 committed on Dec. 20, 2020, with a single alleged victim identified, according to an amended indictment filed March 1 by Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter. The three first-degree charges from the previous cases are also Measure 11 offenses, and if convicted on all three, McKrola would be

sentenced to more than 22 years in prison. Carpenter said in a statement he could not release further details because of ongoing criminal investigation and prosecution. He encouraged anyone with additional information regarding these offenses to contact Oregon State Police Detective Brian Wickert at 541-889-6469.

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