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Getting back to 'NORMALCY'

New sheriff building stability

McKinley focusing on maintaining personnel, cultivating collective vision

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley has been busy since he took the helm of the sheriff's office in January.

The former undersheriff, who in his second bid for sheriff unseated long-time Sheriff Glenn Palmer, said his office had been on more calls this year than last.

McKinley said he is not sure what he would attribute the uptick in calls to.

"I can't exactly put my finger on it yet," he said. "Maybe we're doing business a little different, and people are more willing to call."

Nonetheless, he said, he has been going out on calls himself.

"This is not a place where you can just sit in the office and type all day," he said.

Building stability

McKinley said he and his deputies are there to provide a service to the voters.

At its core, he said the sheriff's office is a business.

"We're supplying a service to the voting public, and I want them to get a good product," he said.

Building stability within the office is critical, he said.

McKinley said the focus within the office right now is keeping personnel long enough to cultivate a collective vision.

McKinley said he had been surprised that an institution as old as the Grant County Sheriff's Office had not been further along in bringing that shared vision into the community.

The future of the John Day Police Department

The prospect of John Day losing its police department due to a lack of funding may require the sheriff's office to reassess their priorities.

The city plans to ask voters to approve a levy to fund the police department, and if that fails, city officials have said they plan to close the police department and transition the officers over to the sheriff's office.

McKinley has said it would be difficult for the sheriff's office to absorb the cost of John Day's three police officers long term. He said too that services in John Day would be "greatly diminished."

"You have to put it in context: It's a

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EOMG file photo

Registered nurse LeAnn Alexander administers a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center CEO Lisa Guzman at the health clinic in Mission in December.

When 70% of eligible adults are vaccinated statewide, mask, social distance and other limits in all 36 counties will be lifted

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon is about 90,000 people short of its goal to get at least one shot of vaccine into the arms of the state's eligible adults in order to lift most COVID-19 restrictions by June 25, state officials said Friday.

"We are so close to fully reopening our economy," Gov. Kate Brown said during an afternoon press conference.

Brown has said, when 70% of eligible adults are vaccinated statewide, she will lift mask, social distance, restaurant occupancy, audience size and other limits in all 36 counties.

The official mark as of noon Friday: 67%.

After a spring that saw Oregon residents racing to get vaccinated, the pace has slowed to the point that supply far outstrips demand.

The Oregon Health Authority reported Friday that 15,761 doses of COVID vaccines per day were being administered. That is down from an early April peak that saw more than 50,000 shots administered on some days.

To date, 2,303,485 people in Oregon have had at least one dose.

Like most states, Oregon is left with a remaining eligible population who either haven't found the time and opportunity for vaccination, or are hesitant for personal reasons.

As yet unknown is how many eligible adults are opposed to inoculations — what OHA once termed "vaccine belligerent." County vaccination rates for getting one shot into eligible arms range from 34% in rural Lake County to nearly 71% in the tech hub areas of Washington County near Portland.

Umatilla County has officially put shots in just under 39% of eligible adult residents as of Friday. Some county officials have argued the count is too low because it doesn't include people who were inoculated in nearby Washington and Idaho or at federal and other facilities that don't show up in OHA counts.

Public health officials are using flexible hours, drop-in sites, outreach to remote communities, lottery prizes and other rewards to attract more arms for now readily available vaccination needles.

Brown and state officials presented a mix of optimism, frustration and concern over the COVID-19 situation in Oregon.

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PMG file photo

Gov. Kate Brown, at a 2020 press event, wearing her social distancing mask in public.

Grant County judge faces possible recall effort

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County Judge Scott Myers faces a potential recall effort.

Chief petitioner Joshua Walker of Seneca filed a prospective recall petition with the Oregon Secretary of State's Office June 10.

Walker wrote in his justification that Myers has shown a "lack of administrative oversight," a "refusal to collaborate," "financial mismanagement" and a "lack of transparency." In addition, Walker wrote that Myers has lacked oversight over departments and county personnel, which has led to a lack of confidence in his leadership and overall dysfunction.

Walker wrote that "critical public funds" were unaccounted for and misspent, which prolonged economic recovery in the county. He said Myers is unwilling to invest in economic devel-



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Grant County Judge Scott Myers during a June 9 session of Grant County Court.

opment in the county, leading to "continual population decline, decreased revenue, and the loss of basic services and amenities."

He claims Myers is violating his oath of office by refusing to meet with

other elected officials.

Myers told the Eagle Monday, "The record will show my position on the potential of wasting money when COVID-19 started, and it is evident that I wouldn't spend road fund dollars on development on private property."

Walker declined to comment Sunday and said he wanted to wait until petitions begin to circulate before speaking publicly about it.

Lydia Plukchi, a compliance specialist with the Elections Division of the Oregon Secretary of State's Office, said their office notified Myers that a recall had been filed against him.

Plukchi said templates were issued to Walker and that both a cover and signature sheet for a prospective recall petition must be approved in writing by the elections official before the chief petitioner may begin circulating the petition.

A June 11 letter emailed to Myers from Deborah Scroggin, the state's direc-

tor of elections, wrote that the chief petitioner must collect and submit at least 578 valid signatures from registered voters no later than 5 p.m. on Sept. 8.

According to Scroggin's email, if enough signatures are not gathered, then the recall petition becomes void.

If the recall petition contains the required number of valid signatures, Myers would have five days to decide whether to resign from office, or file a Statement of Justification that would be included on the ballot in the special recall election. The county must hold a special county-wide election for the recall within 35 days.

If the majority votes to recall Myers, the governor would appoint a replacement until the next pertinent election.

The last recall for a county judge was for Mark Webb in 2009, and it failed. A coalition of citizens failed to recall former County Commissioner Boyd Britton in 2016.

