



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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Four locals join 51 Eastern Oregon officials signing push-back letter against Governor Brown's COVID rules

'Our students are struggling in their education as well as their mental and emotional fitness, families have been stressed to the maximum, and decade-old businesses that are the lifeblood of our Oregon communities have closed for good.'

Oregon Democrat Gov. Kate Brown received a letter last Wednesday from 51 legislators and commissioners from across eastern Oregon. They urged her to stop her one-size-fits-all approach to COVID-19. Below is the full text of the letter sent to Brown:

Dear Governor Brown, We appreciate and understand the challenges you have faced as our Governor during this challenging time in Oregon. We have seen improvements in the response to COVID-19 and the executive decisions you have made that have slowed the spread of the virus. In our roles as state legislators, county commissioners and judges, and regional leaders, we've encouraged every effort available to do the same.



Morrow County Commissioner Chair Melissa Lindsay

A one-size-fits-all approach to shutting down the state was logical and appropriate in March when the onset of this pandemic was new and was unknown. Over time, we have learned, adapted, adjusted and improved. Keeping counties and regions in a Phase II for an indefinite period of time is a one-size-fits-all approach that does not work any longer.

It is time to re-evaluate the metrics and the ever-changing goal posts related to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our rural, semi-rural, eastern and frontier communities. We have shut down for months, we have met the metrics required, we have followed the goal posts as they've moved, we have adhered to the rules, we have slowed the spread—and yet, our counties, communities, small businesses, K-12 schools, childcare and colleges, health departments and more, sit in a stale and stagnant state without forward progress. We have done and continue to do all that is within our capacity to slow the spread of COVID-19, and now, some of our border counties are being directly affected by decisions and actions from outside our state over which we have no control. This is not a sustainable

position for our communities.

Our COVID-19 cases will ebb and flow over the next several months just as they have over the last several weeks. This metric is not a reliable indicator of the situation. The metric that is most important to reconsider at this time is the original goal of ensuring there is adequate hospital capacity and not overwhelming our medical facilities. We have met this goal from the onset and continue to meet this goal. This must be the benchmark for future conversations on how we learn to live with COVID-19.

There is still much we don't know about COVID-19, but what we do know is the continued closure and limitations under these guidelines disproportionately impact women, single-parent homes, rural communities and small businesses. Our students are struggling in their education as well as their mental and emotional fitness, families have been stressed to the maximum, and decade-old businesses that are the lifeblood of our Oregon communities have closed for good.

Over the past few weeks, we have safely met with school superintendents, the ODE Director, county sheriffs, county public health authorities and agency representatives to discuss how we move forward.

We must make significant changes to the way our systems are being managed going forward. It is not realistic or sustainable to continue in Phase I or II, as currently described, for our districts, counties and communities wherein.

We propose four areas for change:

1. Restaurants and bars: Our hospitality industry, restaurants and bars must be able to stay open. The data shared by OHA does not show any indication that our restaurants and bars are the cause of increased cases. In addition, our hospitality industry is responsible

for employing tens of thousands of Oregonians and keeping our already fragile economy moving. Our restaurants and bars need to be able to extend their hours beyond the arbitrary closing time of 10 p.m. and need to safely expand their indoor occupancy especially as we head into the holiday season and winter when indoor restaurants, lodging and tourism activity will grow. We are at risk for nearly 40 percent of our remaining businesses closing in the next six months if we do not allow for reasonable expansion of these services and industries.



Commissioner Don Russell



Commissioner Jim Doherty

2. Schools: Our schools need to be allowed to fully re-open for in-classroom learning, and our students need to be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities. All teachers, students, staff and volunteers who want to return to in-person learning should be able to do so in a safe manner. All teachers, students, staff, and volunteers that desire to continue CDL should be able to do so. If it is safe for college athletes to return to sports, assuredly it is safe for high school students. Parents need to be able to return to work, and our students and teachers need the stability of the classroom.

3. State Agencies: We need to reopen our state agencies at all levels, including and specifically DMVs, across the state. We would argue, and assume you would agree, that our state agencies and state employees are essential. These agencies are funded with public dollars and our public needs full access to these essential services.

4. Religious institutions: Release our churches and places of worship. While outliers will exist as the exception, most churches and places of worship will be and have been more than scrupulous in protecting their congregations from harm from COVID-19. Give pastors, religious leaders and governing boards the latitude to exercise their best judgment for safety.

We have been living with extreme difficulty with COVID-19 for over eight months and have taken the necessary precautions during this time, but we have another six, 12, 18 months, or longer to go as we continue to understand this pandemic. Further shutdowns are not sustainable. We must adapt our phases to allow for

therapeutic remedies that appear to be on the horizon.

At this juncture, by not allowing our kids to go to school, our parents and families to work, our agencies to open for services, and our small businesses to reopen for business, we are failing our state and devastating the lives of tens of thousands of Oregonians. Our rural communities are being left out and left behind. As leaders, we are failing our constituents and the future of our state's survival is at risk.

We urge you to consider a more realistic approach and set a course of action that allows for freedoms, safety and sustainability to work in conjunction with one another. In order to accomplish this, we must empower our local public health authorities to work with the local elected leadership, both of whom fully know local situations, to work together and in partnership with the OHA to move forward with what can become a regional version of Phase II-A and Phase II-B.

We are having these conversations now, and more importantly, we are taking the necessary steps to develop these plans so we can act and move our unique regions forward towards a sustainable, viable future. Something has to change, and we're prepared to move ahead.

We have a simple ask.

Sheriff will not enforce Governor's COVID edicts

'We have not engaged in any criminal enforcement on COVID-19 measures or orders sent down from Governor Brown and we will not start now,' says Sheriff Matlack



Sheriff Ken Matlack

Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack last week issued a statement saying his office will not be enforcing any COVID orders sent from Salem by Democrat Governor Kate Brown. Following is the sheriff's complete statement:

A message from Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack

First, I wish to thank the people of Morrow County for my re-election as your sheriff. It continues to be a great honor to serve you.

2020 has been a very challenging year as a nation, state and county. Like I said in April, "We are facing the COVID-19 pandemic head on, at the state, county and local level. To say our everyday lives have been changed would be an understatement."

Following Governor Brown's latest executive order, the "Two Week Freeze" we have been asked by members of the public, "Are you going to be enforcing the order. Are you going to be citing and arresting people for spending Thanksgiving with their loved ones, in their own

As the leaders chosen by Oregonians to represent their best interests and be their advocates, throughout and across our beautiful state, we would ask that the governor and governor's office participate in these meetings and work with us, assess the proposals and plans we put forward, and consider the options we will be recommending for your consideration and approval. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

The letter is signed by Sen. Lynn Findley, Sen. Bill Hansell, Rep. Mark Owens, Sen. Kim Thatcher, Sen. Fred Girod, Sen. Brian Boquist, Sen. Chuck Thomsen, Rep. Greg Barreto, Rep. Racquel Moore-Green, Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis, Rep. Mike Nearman, Rep. Bill Post, Rep. Rick Lewis, Rep. Carl Wilson, Rep-Elect Lily Morgan, Rep.-Elect Bobby Levy,

homes? The short answer to that question is no.

When this pandemic started in early 2020, as your sheriff I took the position that the Sheriff's Office would be educating the public on safety measures, recommendations and guidelines. I said at the time we would not be the primary enforcers of the Governor's executive orders. The Governor has the Oregon State Police who work directly for her. In addition, the Governor exercises direct control of OSHA for work-place violations and agencies like OLCC that regulate alcohol use in businesses and restaurants etc., along with other state entities that are controlled by the governor's office.

We have not engaged in any criminal enforcement on COVID-19 measures or orders sent down from Governor Brown and we will not start now. If citizens or businesses refuse to follow the safety recommendations, they could face civil litigation or fines from OSHA or OLCC. They will not be cited or arrested by any member of the Morrow County Sheriff's Office.

As a county we have worked through the state of emergencies, executive orders, shutdowns, restrictions, health guidelines and safety recommendations. We have been successful by working together as a community of family and

-See MATLACK/PAGE TWO

county commissioners from Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Polk, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties. Local elected officials signing the letter were:

Melissa Lindsay
Morrow County Commissioner

Don Russell
Morrow County Commissioner

Jim Doherty
Morrow County Commissioner

Senator Bill Hansell
Senate District 29

G-T closed for Thanksgiving

The Heppner Gazette-Times will be closed for the Thanksgiving holiday on Thursday and Friday, November 26 and 27. Normal business hours will resume Monday, November 30.

The Gazette-Times wishes everyone a happy and safe Thanksgiving weekend.



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