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Oregon News

[Zoom calls with Gov. Kate Brown: Prisoners meet in one-on-one sessions amid commutation push](#)

The Oregonian \$\$\$

She announced in October, for instance, that she would review more than 200 juvenile cases for commutation, in some cases making longtime prisoners immediately eligible to pursue parole. Earlier this year, she granted conditional commutations to 41 incarcerated people who helped fight historic wildfires last year.

In the meantime, her staff confirmed Thursday that Brown has met quietly with a total of 11 incarcerated people over the past two months, all of them by Zoom.

The most recent spate of meetings with incarcerated people came during a period when she also met with a bank executive, a top lobbyist in Washington, D.C. and her own executive team.

Brown, head of a sprawling government bureaucracy, rarely meets with ordinary Oregonians one-on-one, making these conversations with prisoners all the more remarkable.

On the day she had a conference call with Pen, for instance, Brown's calendar shows she met with House Republican Leader Christine Drazan, who was allocated the same 30-minute slot the governor's staff set aside for the clemency meeting.

The following day, her calendar shows another clemency meeting. It is unclear from her calendar whether she spoke with a prisoner at that time. That day, she also met with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee to discuss their states' vaccine mandates.

Pen was convicted in 2018 of possession of methamphetamine. The indictment cites Pen's persistent involvement in similar crimes in Union County and notes that the latest allegations took place while he was already on probation.

"Future efforts to rehabilitate (Pen) will not be successful and there exists a need to ensure the security of the public," the indictment states.

Ryan Browne, a probation and parole officer in Union County, said he got a call about the commutation meeting from prison counselor Bonnie Ward. Pen sat in Ward's office for his call with the governor, Browne said.

Browne said Ward called to alert him that Pen was about to be released.

Ward did not respond to text messages from The Oregonian/OregonLive about the call.

Browne said Ward told him that "the inmate was going on and on about his release plan."

That concerned him, Browne said, because he does not know what steps the governor's office took to vet Pen's release plans and worried that the governor is "seeing the crime and what he is serving and not understanding the whole picture."

Browne said Pen has cycled through the criminal justice system and failed treatment efforts for years.

"He is known in our community for dealing drugs and vandalizing and stealing from innocent people," Browne said.

[GOP LEADER SAYS VICTIMS AND FAMILIES TRAUMATIZED BY PLAN](#)

KQEN

Oregon's House GOP leader says victims and their families are traumatized by Governor

D...? ... commutation plan

Brown's commutation plan.

A release from the Oregon House Republican Caucus said this week the commutation list for prison sentences was made available to the media before victims were notified, prioritizing violent offenders and harming victims and their families.

House Republican Leader Christine Drazen said, "The Governor continues to abuse executive power and is now minimizing the voices of victims". Leader Drazen said, "Voters passed Measure 11 to give victims of violent crimes the security of justice and safety with truth in sentencing". Drazen said Governor Brown is circumventing voters and the Legislature to "...clear the path for these violent offenders to be released, despite the trauma it causes victims and their families if they're forced to relive these crimes".

[Canby State Rep Decries Governor's Latest Commuted Sentences](#)

Canby First

Republican lawmakers, led by House Minority Leader Christine Drazen, of Canby, are pushing back on Governor Kate Brown's latest use of her clemency powers, claiming her actions are minimizing and retraumatizing the victims of violent crimes.

Brown signed an order Wednesday commuting the sentences of more than 70 prisoners who committed serious crimes as juveniles — and has, in general, granted more pardons and commutations than any governor in state history during her six years in power.

The latest round comes more than two years after the Legislature passed a new bill that made sweeping changes to the state's juvenile justice system and mandatory minimum sentences. Those changes apply to juveniles sentenced on or after Jan. 1, 2020.

The governor's commutations this week include people convicted between 1988 and 2019 for crimes such as murder, assault, rape and manslaughter while they were younger than 18 — effectively applying part of the 2019 legislation, Senate Bill 1008, retroactively — known as a "second look hearing."

"The governor continues to abuse executive power and is now minimizing the voices of victims," Drazen said in a statement Thursday.

Drazen went on to castigate Brown over procedural issues related to the commutations — saying the list was provided to media before victims were notified.

"Voters passed Measure 11 to give victims of violent crimes the security of justice and safety with truth in sentencing," Drazen said. "The governor is circumventing voters and the Legislature to clear the path for these violent offenders to be released, despite the trauma it causes victims and their families as they're forced to relive these crimes."

The district attorneys in both Lane and Coos counties expressed frustration with the commutations this week, as did Washington County District Attorney Kevin Barton in a statement provided to OPB.

"This list represents dangerous individuals who were appropriately sentenced," Barton said. "Our immediate priorities are to assess the impact of mass commutations on community and victim safety and to ensure the victims of these crimes are informed of the possible release and have an opportunity to have meaningful input in the process."

Brown's office responded to those concerns Wednesday, including allegations that the families of victims weren't informed in advance.

"Regrettably, in this case, the commutation list was obtained by some members of the media at the same time we began our process to contact district attorneys about victim notification. District attorneys and their staff with trauma-informed training have conducted outreach to inform victims and their families."

A similar paffe by state officials occurred last month when the Oregon Department of

... criminal cases by state officials occurred last month, when the Oregon Department of Administrative Services mistakenly sent data sets to two newspapers containing the names and vaccinations statuses of more than 40,000 state workers.

[Drazan: Governor Traumatizes Victims](#)

Northwest Observer

Recently, Governor Brown announced her intention to commute the sentences of several Measure 11 felons -- most now adults -- who were sentenced under the old Measure 11 sentences for violent crimes as youths a move that many read as contradicting the promise that SB 1008 would not be retroactive.

This week Governor Brown's commutation list for prison sentences was made available to the media before victims were notified, prioritizing violent offenders and harming victims and their families.

House Republican Leader Christine Drazan (R-Canby) released the following statement in response to Governor Kate Brown's commutation of sentences:

"The Governor continues to abuse executive power and is now minimizing the voices of victims. Voters passed Measure 11 to give victims of violent crimes the security of justice and safety with truth in sentencing. The Governor is circumventing voters and the Legislature to clear the path for these violent offenders to be released, despite the trauma it causes victims and their families as they're forced to relive these crimes."

The Department of Corrections said it has identified a total of 248 people who meet the governor's criteria for commutation.

[Migrant Oregon weed workers face threats amid illegal boom](#)

Associated Press

Thousands of immigrants working on southern Oregon illegal marijuana farms that authorities say are run by foreign cartels are living in squalid conditions and are sometimes being cheated and threatened by their gangland bosses.

The situation has gotten so bad in the largely rural region near the state line with California, amid a violent crime surge and water theft for the growing operations during a severe drought, that Jackson and Douglas counties declared a state of emergency last month. They requested state funding and other resources, including deployment of the National Guard, to properly enforce cannabis laws.

On Thursday, commissioners in neighboring Josephine County said they are preparing their own emergency declaration. A draft document cites "rampant violations of county codes, state water laws and criminal laws." They previously wrote a letter to Oregon's senate president saying the county is experiencing "a tragic surge in narco-slavery."

A spokeswoman for Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, Elizabeth Merah, has said that there are no immediate plans to deploy the National Guard.

Many of the zone's illegal marijuana farms operate under the guise of being legal hemp farms, but the crops that they grow have amounts of THC — the component that gives pot its high — far above the legal levels allowed for hemp.

State regulators and local law enforcement officers have been overwhelmed by the amount of industrial-scale growing sites, which they say number in the hundreds and possibly thousands. There aren't enough inspectors to test for THC content at each site to determine which ones are legal and which are not, officials have said. Some sites, frequently with armed guards, have refused entry to state inspectors. Police have said they do not have the capacity to raid all the

suspicious sites because each raid requires an investigation and search warrants.

And some managers of the illegal operations are refusing to pay workers and have threatened them with violence if they go to the authorities or try to quit, according to law enforcement officials and a group that advocates for the migrant and farm worker rights.

They produce tons of marijuana that is sold outside the state. Officials believe the cartels selected southern Oregon because it's considered part of the the fabled marijuana-growing Emerald Triangle, a zone in which California's Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity counties form the major part.

The region produces top-quality weed that is "the microbrew of cannabis," said state Rep. Lily Morgan, a Republican from the small city of Grants Pass, the county seat of Josephine County. "You can ask a high dollar around the world for it," she said.

Local landowners often rent or sell their property to the illegal growers at prices much higher than normal rates. In one case, an owner went to her land to negotiate a lease renewal and discovered that the manager of the illegal marijuana farm was gone — and had left the growing equipment and workers behind.

Morgan said the owner told county officials: "These people have been left, there are workers who have no I.D., they do not speak English, they have no food."

Sickler doesn't expect a letup of the criminal activity because a lot of cash is involved, creating a tempting target for robbers.

In raids conducted by Sickler's deputies on one day in September on two pot farms, officers found \$650,000, 7.5 tons of processed marijuana and 20,000 pot plants.

Last month, men with guns tried to rob an illegal marijuana growing site and processing facility in the small Jackson County city of Eagle Point. Three men from Sacramento, California were arrested on charges of robbery, unlawful use of a weapon and assault.

Josephine County Sheriff Dave Daniel predicted no immediate resolution to the problem of illegal marijuana farms.

"This summer was absolutely out of control," he said. "We're anticipating next year being just as bad, if not worse."

[Cheap, potent meth is pouring in from Mexico. Is it making Oregon's homeless crisis worse?](#)

KGW

A surge of cheap, potent methamphetamine from Mexico is flooding the U.S. drug market, and the growing problem is exacerbating the mental health and homelessness crises in Portland.

Oregon has long experienced the ravages of meth. At one point, Oregon had the most meth addicts per capita in the country. The viral Faces of Meth anti-drug campaign from the 2000s began in Multnomah County. In 2018, the New York Times reported what was by then an open secret on Portland's streets: meth, a drug that many thought had been effectively shut out, was back in force and making inroads in communities it had never affected before.

There's no question the drug is here and readily available. The Department of Justice recently made a major drug bust in Portland, taking down two trafficking cells and seizing more than 40 pounds of meth. In October, officers made the largest meth bust in Oregon history in Eugene — 384 pounds of methamphetamine, worth more than a million dollars, along with stolen guns and thousands of dollars in cash.

Last month, an article in The Atlantic explored the changing world of drugs in the United States, including Portland. brought on by a new wave of manufacturing methamphetamine over the last

15 years. The article explains that meth used to be made primarily from ephedrine, the drug in cold medicine that led to a flurry of restrictions to try to crack down on homegrown meth labs. Those regulations made it harder to produce meth in the "traditional" way, and U.S.-based meth labs have become much more rare.

As Mexican cartels looked for a way to make up for lost income as the black market for marijuana largely dried up, they began relying more on meth.

[Oregon nurses union sets Nov. 15 strike deadline against Kaiser Permanente](#)

Reuters

Union leaders for 3,400 nurses and other medical staff at Kaiser Permanente in Oregon set a Nov. 15 strike deadline on Thursday, threatening a walkout they said would idle some 30,000 workers overall unless contract talks make suitable progress.

The Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals is at odds with Kaiser over the medical network's plan for a two-tiered wage system featuring a lower pay scale for newly hired employees than their more senior colleagues.

The union says such a system would deepen what the nurses describe as a staffing crisis in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic.

Labor leaders cite a survey of Kaiser nurses and other healthcare workers that found 42% were considering leaving the field over perceptions of mistreatment.

[Federal infrastructure package could bring big changes to Oregon](#)

OPB

The \$1 trillion infrastructure plan under consideration by Congress could mean big changes for Oregonians: safer, less congested roads; broadband access for rural communities; and fortification of the state's power grid against wildfire and other future disasters. The plan is one of two bills making up a \$2.75 trillion spending Democrat-backed package aimed at bolstering the nation's economy and fixing crumbling infrastructure while creating jobs and new social programs in the process.

But uncertainty over Congressional leadership's plans to approve the infrastructure bill and a concurrent social spending package put forth by President Joe Biden has Oregon agencies that would spend billions in new funding keeping a close eye on the situation.

The precarious situation has caused agencies such as the Oregon Department of Transportation to initiate planning for a variety of scenarios with laundry list of major projects facing the state over the next decade, including building a new interstate crossing over the Columbia River and renovating the Rose Quarter stretch of Interstate 5 to widen the freeway and reconnect the former Albina district's streetscape.

If the infrastructure bill passes, the state can expect to see a total of \$3.4 billion for federal and state road projects, and another \$268 million for bridge improvements over the next five years. "We've been doing a lot of thinking about how to most effectively spend this money coming from the federal government," said Travis Brouwer, ODOT assistant director for revenue, finance and compliance. "We want to show Oregonians the benefits they'll see from this legislation very quickly."

[Off to Scotland: Oregon's governor at Climate Change Conference](#)

The Chronicle

Brown will discuss the impacts of climate change on Oregonians, as well as to highlight the

actions Oregon has taken to reduce carbon emissions, transition to clean energy, and ensure that Oregonians disproportionately impacted by climate change are not left behind. Brown will be joined by other U.S. governors to highlight the state-level actions that can be taken around the world to address the climate crisis.

“I have been Governor since 2015, and it was about that time that Oregon took a front row seat to climate change,” Brown said. “Nearly every year the extreme weather has been worse than the last. We are a warning for the rest of the world.

[Oregon study finds widespread support for school mask mandates](#)

Baker City Herald

Despite some vocal opposition, there is widespread support for K-12 school mask mandates, according to a survey by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.

The survey shows that 70% of Oregonians support mask mandates in schools, 23% are opposed and 6% are unsure. Support among people without school-age children is 72%, while support amongst parents of school aged children is 65%.

Gov. Kate Brown announced a mask mandate for K-12 schools in July to slow the spread of the coronavirus and the highly contagious Delta variant. The rule applies to everyone indoors and outdoors.

People living in urban areas are more likely than people living in rural areas to support mask mandates in schools, according to the survey. The majority of Oregonians do not believe wearing masks jeopardize children's health and safety, learning capacity, potential or outcomes, teachers' instructional effectiveness and children's and families' freedom.

[Oregon reports 74 new deaths, 1,211 new cases, 2,025 breakthroughs](#)

KATU

The Oregon Health Authority reported on Thursday 74 new COVID-19-related deaths, 1,211 new cases of the disease and 2,025 breakthrough cases.

The state has now reported 371,001 positive cases and 4,543 deaths since the beginning of the pandemic.

OHA said Wednesday that the daily number of reported deaths will be higher than usual for the next several weeks due to a computer error.

The agency on Thursday released its breakthrough report. It said out of 8,239 COVID-19 cases reported between Oct. 24 and Oct. 30, 2,025 were breakthrough cases, or about 25%.

[Oregon might not match federal timeline on vaccine mandate for large employers](#)

The Oregonian

A sweeping federal vaccine mandate, the details of which were released Thursday, ensures thousands of employees at large Oregon businesses must be vaccinated for COVID-19 or face weekly testing.

But the state's timeline may differ from the Jan. 4 vaccination deadline laid out in the new federal rules.

Oregon is one of 21 states and Puerto Rico that have their own workplace safety agency. Oregon's Occupational Health and Safety Division, known as Oregon OSHA, will have 30 days to write its own vaccine rules. They must be “at least as effective” as the federal rule, but need not be identical — and could be more restrictive.

[Free rapid PCR COVID-19 tests — first in Oregon — available by appointment in Redmond](#)
KTVZ

Deschutes County Health Services, Central Oregon Community College and the Oregon Health Authority are partnering to offer the first no-cost rapid PCR testing site in Oregon, officials said Thursday.

Appointments will be available at the COCC Redmond campus, Thursdays through Mondays from noon to 7 p.m.

Individuals will receive a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test that they self-administer. Results will be available within 1-2 hours.

Appointments are required and can be made online at cur.tv/redmond. Appointments are also available by calling the COVID-19 hotline at 541-699-5109, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

[Teachers Sue Over ‘Political’ Image Ban in Schools](#)

US News (Associated Press)

The teachers union in Newberg, Oregon, has filed a lawsuit over a policy passed narrowly by its school board, limiting what kinds of images or signs school employees can display on campus.

The “Ensuring Safe Environments To Learn” policy bars school employees from displaying images “relating to a political, quasi-political, or controversial topic.” The lawsuit was filed Wednesday.

[Body donated to science dissected in front of paying audience at Portland hotel](#)

The Oregonian

The body of a 98-year-old man who died of COVID-19 was dissected in front of a paying audience inside a downtown Portland hotel last month — after his wife thought she donated his body to science.

Seventy people gathered inside a meeting room at the Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront — some paying up to \$500 a ticket — to watch the autopsy of David Saunders, who lived in Louisiana with his 92-year-old wife until he died from the coronavirus. DiLeo said the way Saunders’ body was handled could be considered abuse of a body, a Class B felony in Oregon.

But Lt. Nathan Sheppard, a Portland police spokesperson, said detectives consulted with the Oregon Department of Justice, Oregon State Police and Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office and determined no crimes were committed during the autopsy.

He said civil laws may have been violated, including those that forbid certain postmortem examinations of bodies and place restrictions on the disposition of unclaimed bodies.

Only private citizens, not governmental agencies, can press civil charges.

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