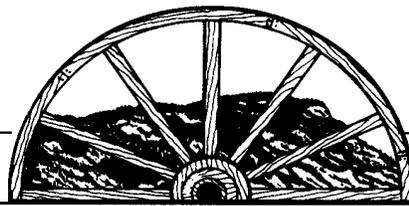

CITY OF



LA GRANDE

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**CITY of LA GRANDE
MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
COVID-19 Surge Mayor Clements Message
City of La Grande
June 17, 2020**

**Contact: Robert Strope
City Manager
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The recent surge in COVID-19 cases in Union County has brought the reality of the pandemic into sharp focus. Let's face it, many of us let our guards down a bit over the last couple of months. And why not? With only a handful of cases locally, the pandemic seemed a problem for the rest of the world. Why wear masks and social distance when, it appeared, the possibility of infection was so low or non-existent? As we moved through Phase I, we thought we were in the clear, but that is, sadly, not the case. We now have a major outbreak.

Local government organizations and personnel are doing all they can to give us the best information and to be sure we have the resources to fight this outbreak. Testing and contact tracing are being used to identify and quarantine people who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who are presumed to be infected. Assistance from Oregon Health Authority and Umatilla County is making the work easier, but there is still much to be done.

Being notable for having the largest outbreak on a per capita basis in the State of Oregon over the last three months is not something to be proud of, particularly when the outbreak could have been prevented by following the recommended safeguards. This did not have to happen. Even prior to reopening, we lost sight of the importance of balancing human lives, personal freedom and economic recovery. We might have carried masks, but not worn them while shopping because, well, so few of the other people there seemed to be wearing them.

A 4000% increase in positive COVID-19 cases over a one-week period, and more cases to come, concerns me. It should concern everyone. We all know people who are vulnerable to serious illness should they be infected. It takes all of us working together to protect them. I think about the limited capacity of our local health care facilities, and hope they are not overwhelmed if someone I care about needs to use them. And I wonder why, as individuals, we have forsaken the responsibility of protecting the community that we depend on, by not wearing masks and limiting our social interactions.

There are many serious consequences of this pandemic. As the Mayor, I worry about the impact on people's livelihoods, and on the City's economic health. The City Council has worked to help local businesses and support individuals who face challenging circumstances. But now is not the time to forget the power of this virus to

injure our community's best asset, the people of La Grande and Union County. We must refocus and recommit to reducing the spread of COVID-19. Now is the time to wear that mask in public because it is the right thing to do for your community. Now is the time to refrain from gathering in large groups. Now is the time to realize that we're in this situation for the long haul to save businesses, to save our community, to save lives. We're in this together!

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