

# Coronavirus rescue loans put some workers in a bind

By Molly Young

The Oregonian via AP StoryShare

MEDFORD — Lindsey Bosman was a day-one employee when Common Block Brewing Company opened in Medford in late 2016. She's been working there ever since and felt she'd developed a close-knit work family.

But she was also one of about 40 employees temporarily laid off March 17, the day after Gov. Kate Brown announced she was closing all bars and restaurants to staunch the spread of the coronavirus.

Bosman quickly filed for unemployment and was lucky to qualify in the first wave of the tsunami of jobless claims that have since swamped the Oregon Employment Department. In addition to her normal benefit of \$362 a month, she also is receiving \$600 a week in supplemental federal benefits. Together, the payments are covering her rent, car payment and utilities while she's idled. In fact, they're considerably higher than her normal income.

That put her in an odd position when she received an email from the brewery's owners on the evening of April 22. Common Block had just received a federal paycheck protection loan to cover employment and operations.

The email gave Bosman and other employees five days to decide if they would come back to work no more than half time. If they opted not to return on reduced hours Common Block said the business would consider that a resignation — potentially making workers ineligible for continued unemployment benefits.

Bosman was aghast at the company's ultimatum, as were fellow employees. Even if she got the full 20 hours — and there were no promises being made — at \$11.25 an hour, she would gross only \$225 a week in wages. Tips? Maybe, but the brewery still is only operating with a skeleton crew for takeout.

"I will not be able to live on a 20-hour week basis losing benefits," she said.

Bosman's predicament illustrates how the paycheck protection program is having unintended consequences for restaurants and bars still unable to fully reopen. It shows how some small businesses may not be

following the spirit of the legislation. And it illustrates how a program meant to help employees could actually leave them in the lurch.

## Almost 19,000 Oregon businesses in federal program

Congress designed the Paycheck Protection Program for businesses with fewer than 500 employees to maintain their pre-COVID employment levels, and specifically to keep employees compensated and off the unemployment line, whether the business can fully reopen or not.

The loans give businesses eight weeks of payroll support. If employers maintain pre-COVID levels of employment and pay after eight weeks, the loan is forgiven. Lesser levels of employment translate to lesser forgiveness, with unforgiven balances converting to a two-year loan bearing an interest rate of 1%.

Some 18,732 Oregon businesses received loans totaling \$3.8 billion in the first round of funding ended April 16. Congress replenished the program with another \$310 billion last week, throwing another lifeline to small businesses and their employees.

However, restaurants, bars and other businesses cannot yet reopen and so cannot productively recall their full workforce. In Oregon and across the country, the loans have created a dilemma for business owners and employees as they contemplate how to use the money and comply with the loans' employment requirements.

The email from Common Block's owners, Danielle and Alex Amartico, asked Bosman and her colleagues whether they were or were not available to work 20 hours or less.

If employees indicate they are not available to work the pared-back schedule, the email said, the brewery will pay out their accumulated time off "and your employment at Common Block will terminate."

"While your unemployment benefits may continue, you will no longer be temporarily laid off," it said. "You will have voluntarily resigned your position."

See the full version of this article at [www.lagrandeobserver.com](http://www.lagrandeobserver.com).

# Oregon protesters demand state reopen

■ Standing together, often without masks, protesters seek end to virus restrictions

By Saphara Harrell

Salem Reporter via AP StoryShare

SALEM — Hundreds of Oregonians gathered at the Capitol Saturday to protest restrictions intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The Oregon rally was the latest in a series across the country demanding that governors allow businesses to reopen and lift stay-at-home orders.

Those attending complained of government overreach as the state's restrictions stretch into a seventh week with no end date set. Gov. Kate Brown on Friday revealed more details of what she and her health advisers think needs to happen before she relents on her orders, now

extended until July. Her plan requires more robust statewide testing to detect COVID-19 and continued declines in the number of Oregonians infected. But her announcement wasn't enough to dissuade those who traveled to Salem to insist she act quicker.

The rally formed as the Oregon Health Authority disclosed that five more people have died from the respiratory disease, pushing the state total to 109. The state said 2,635 people have tested positive.

By midday Saturday, cars drove by the Capitol honking their horns while people cheered and held signs in the pouring rain.

The event was organized by Oregon Uniting for Lib-

erty, which on its website cites constitutional education as its main goal.

Craig Etton said he wasn't planning to participate to Saturday's event but changed his mind when Brown extended the coronavirus state of emergency by 60 days. He said he was protesting the lack of due process with Brown's executive order.

The West Linn resident works in construction and has been continued working because the industry is classified as essential.

"I'm out here more for people who can't go back to work," he said.

Etton, 68, was one of the few in the crowd at the rally wearing a mask. He said he still respects the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations.

"When this all started I felt there was a time and

place for stricter restrictions, but now it's no longer," he said. "The decisions that I see being made seem to be arbitrary. It's just (Brown's) doing it because she can."

Etton said if businesses were given the opportunity to reopen they would do so safely.

Sheralyn Kemp of Corvallis said she came to the rally because of people suffering from job losses or the inability to get medical procedures, like ports for chemotherapy.

"This is not trivial. It is essential to let people live their lives," she said through a cloth mask.

### Editor's Note

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~ Nick E. Pallis, Former Patrol Sergeant, Union County Sheriff's Office

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**Expansion of the drug task force, bring back a comprehensive Reserve Program, full support of Union County Search & Rescue, and better policing/visibility in all communities**

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