

Legislative leaders approve COVID-19 relief funds

E-board pushes plan over objections of half of state’s lawmakers

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Legislature’s most powerful panel approved a plan to use federal funds to buy \$105 million of personal protective equipment, despite objections from over half of all lawmakers.

“I feel like I have been beat over the head on this issue over and over and over again,” said Sen. President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, who presided over the of the Legislature’s Emergency Board on Monday.

Courtney led the sometimes tense one-hour meeting of the

board, a panel of 20 legislative leaders and key lawmakers from both chambers and both parties that can make decisions while the Legislature is not in session.

The Emergency Board on Monday approved a plan to purchase \$105 million in equipment to distribute to counties and cities.

The approval came despite a letter signed by 47 of the Legislature’s 90 lawmakers calling for the money to go directly to local governments to spend on their COVID-19 priorities instead of having the agenda dictated by the state. Among those signing were at least 18 Democrats.

The letter said the state has made only \$200 million available to local governments through a reimbursement program it controls.

“By keeping a disproportionate

amount of the funds, the state has created inadequate resource distribution with significant statewide inequities,” the letter said.

The letter supports an earlier letter from a coalition of 17 civic groups, including the Oregon Business Alliance, Bend Chamber of Commerce, League of Oregon Cities and the Association of Oregon Counties.

Oregon received about \$1.63 billion in coronavirus relief funds. Under the federal directive, some local governments received their allocations directly — about \$247 million was sent to Portland, and to Washington and Multnomah counties.

Other local governments were to receive \$625 million, with the federal directive saying the money should be allocated to local governments on a per capita basis.

Instead, the Legislature and Gov. Kate Brown have controlled the process. About \$200 million was put into a state-run account in which local governments could apply for allocations.

“In short, they are getting short-changed,” said Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, R-Stayton, a member of the Emergency Board.

While the \$105 million expenditure was the official reason for the meeting, the underlying tension was over the opinion of many lawmakers that Brown, House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland and Courtney were rushing spending through the process with little consultation with other lawmakers.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said the Emergency Board was being “reduced to a rubber stamp for expenditures decided

somewhere else” for deals hammered out before they even came to the Emergency Board.

“We are pushing through items we spent a billion dollars on without any testimony or even time for thoughtful analysis,” she said.

Most Republicans and some Democrats said the allocation of federal dollars so far seems tilted in favor of the Portland area.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, said he respected the efforts of legislative leaders and wished they had worked more “arm-in-arm” with local governments. While wishing there was a way to vote yes, Smith said he was receiving strong signals from his Eastern Oregon district that the process had been unfair to local governments east of the Cascades.

SHERIFF

Continued from Page 1A

while he taught at DPSST.

“He would say to me, ‘I guess Union County is paying for my room this time,’” Pointer said.

Pointer also said Rasmussen would collect additional pay while working patrols for Minor in Possession, a grant-funded program. He said Rasmussen asked him to write a check for \$1,000, covering around 40 hours of work five to six years ago.

Retaliation and job threats

Pointer told the Department of Justice investigator and The Observer he could lose his job for talking about Rasmussen.

Rasmussen promoted Pointer to corporal approximately seven years ago, but in October 2019 he was demoted to special deputy. Lt. Ken Woodward asked Pointer to turn in his keys and credit card because his contract services were no longer needed and said if he wanted to work he must first get a supervisor’s approval before going on duty. Pointer had served the Union County Sheriff’s Office for nearly 25 years at that point. Pointer said he believed he was demoted because of his involvement in the Department of Justice investigation.

At that point, Pointer said, he considered leaving the sheriff’s office but stayed on after he moved out of his home due to marital trouble. Pointer said the sheriff had threatened to remove him from the house, despite lacking the legal authority to do so.

“He told me in a phone conver-

sation in mid-December, ‘Sorry about your situation and what you have to go through, but it looks like I have you now and you financially need this job, so you are going to have to stay and help me win the election,’” Pointer said.

Former reserve deputy Jim Gray also said Rasmussen has a reputation for retaliation.

“Boyd can be very vindictive and doesn’t like to be questioned,” Gray said.

In the Department of Justice investigation Union County Emergency Manager JB Brock said a lot of the issues at the sheriff’s office are caused by Rasmussen’s retaliatory actions. Brock said when he quit search and rescue for his position with Union County, Rasmussen tried to get him fired on several occasions. When contacted for further explanation, Brock said he could not comment further.

“All I can say is I was contacted by the Department of Justice and I cooperated with the DOJ investigation and what was reported was the result,” Brock said.

Keeping silent on complaint findings

In the course of the investigation, several people said there were complaints against Pointer alleging stalking, sexual intercourse while on duty and working on personal business while on duty, and that Rasmussen was aware of the behaviors and reports but failed to act accordingly.

Pointer said Rasmussen did an internal investigation into the accusations and found nothing to be wrong, but Pointer said Rasmussen did not disclose his findings with the rest of the department.

Personal favors from on-duty officers

Pointer said there were occasions when Rasmussen used employees for personal favors.

In one instance, he said Rasmussen told him to bring the county credit card to Boise, where Rasmussen was staying on personal business, because Rasmussen’s card wasn’t working. Another time, Pointer stated, Rasmussen asked him to drive to Boise to pick him up from the airport.

When Pointer declined, another deputy went. Pointer said Rasmussen told him, “The taxpayers can pay me to get back to my county.”

The Elgin contract

Both letters brought up the issues with the contract the sheriff’s office created with Elgin in 2011, in which Rasmussen received compensation for his time in addition to his salary. The Department of Justice determined Rasmussen pocketed more than \$7,000 for the work.

County commissioners at the time found out about the contract with Elgin through The Observer’s reporting.

Commissioner Mark Davidson said the county board was “appalled” at the informal Elgin contract, the investigation reported.

The DPSST Police Policy Committee meeting discussing Rasmussen and other law enforcement officers is available for viewing Thursday, Aug. 20, starting at 10 a.m. on the DPSST Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/DPSSTOregon>.

IMESD

Continued from Page 1A

“It will allow students to have more flexibility,” Koenig said.

Online students will continue to be counted among their school district’s students, which means school districts will receive funding from the state for them.

All 18 school districts the IMESD serves will be part of the Virtual Learning Academy.

A number of these school districts already offer their own virtual learning programs, including the La Grande School District, which launched the La Grande Learning Academy about three years ago. Such programs will become a part of the IMESD Virtual Learning Academy and gain tools to help them to continue to succeed, Koenig said.

The online program at each participating school district will have its own name. For example, the La Grande Learning Academy will retain its name, and the Cove School District’s online program will be the Cove Virtual Learning Academy.

The Cove School District previously provided internet-based platforms for students for credit recovery and some college courses.

Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit said the

IMESD’s program will benefit all students.

“Developing new options for our learners with support from the IMESD has really been positive for our district,” Pettit said in an IMESD press release.

The IMESD virtual academy model also will give districts the opportunity to allow students to combine online and on-site classes.

In some instances IMESD’s online academy will expand school district curriculums. For example, the Helix School District has had a difficult time retaining Spanish teachers in recent years and presently does not have one, Koenig said.

This school year, Helix will be able to offer instruction in the languages because the IMESD Virtual Learning Academy has a Spanish teacher, and online Spanish instruction will be available to all of the district’s on-site and online students.

“The pandemic has created a lot of uncertainty and unease relating to education; however, we have an opportunity to pull from these trials the pieces that work,” said Erin Lair, IMESD’s director of teaching and learning, in the news release.

“We must be ready to embrace a landscape in education that is forever changed, one that focuses on the importance of connection to community and multiple modalities to meet the needs of our students.”

Information on enrolling in IMESD’s Virtual Learning Academy is available at local school district offices.



Pettit

SCHOOLS

Continued from Page 1A

The county has reported five new COVID-19 cases the last two days — two on Tuesday and three on Wednesday, according to the Center for Human Development. The county’s case total stands at 403.

Union County became the 14th county in Oregon to reach 400 cases, though the spread of the coronavirus has been much lower than during the June outbreak. To date, there have been 15 new cases during the month of August.

There remains two deaths reported in the county attributed to the virus, and there are 355 active cases, though Oregon Health Authority last month ceased active calls of patients to see if they had

recovered, so the number of active cases could be much lower.

The state has 23,870 cases of COVID-19 and 408 deaths after reporting 203 cases and 11 deaths Wednesday. Oregon had its lowest new case count in six weeks Monday when there were 192 cases. It was the first time the state reported fewer than 200 cases since July 6.

Presently, the survival rate of known cases in Oregon is 98.29%. That rate increases to 99.1% for people under 80 years old, and 99.5% for people under age 70. Of the known cases, 8.15% have resulted in hospitalization. The positive test rate is holding at 4.53%, and the state is approaching one-half million tests conducted with 499,915 reported by OHA as of Wednesday.

METEOR

Continued from Page 1A

route via triangulation.

Hutson said she believes the meteor or space debris probably burned up before it hit the ground. She said typically fireballs such as the one McClurg reported appear much closer than they are but turn out to be hundreds of miles away.

McClurg reported her sighting to the American Meteor Society.

Meteor sightings reported in Northeast

Oregon in recent years include one that appeared at 5:31 a.m. on Feb. 19, 2008. The late Dick Pugh, who was with the Cascadia Meteorite Laboratory, told The Observer in 2008 the meteor hit between Tollgate and Elgin. No one has reported finding remnants of that meteor, which would have been a meteorite once it hit the Earth.

Meteorites can fetch a good price. Meteorites from the moon and Mars can go for \$1,000 a gram, but even common meteorites sell for a few dollars a gram.

TEN DEPOT STREET

Open
Fri-Sun
5pm-8pm

“Real Food for the People”
Take-out
Menu
Updated
Weekly

www.tendepotstreet.com
541-963-8766
tendepotstreet@gmail.com

La GRANDE
AUTO REPAIR
975-2000
www.lagrandeautorepair.com

Joe Horst

MOST
ADVANCED
TECHNOLOGY
AVAILABLE
ACDelcoTSS

SHOP SAFE-SHOP LOCAL

Union County
Chamber of
Commerce
www.VisitUnionCounty.org

The Union County Chamber of Commerce would like to thank everyone for shopping safe, supporting local and doing your part to keep Union County open.

Quick · Convenient · No Appointments Required

From illness to minor accidents, getting the non-emergency medical care you need will soon be even more convenient for you and your loved ones.

Grande Ronde Hospital Urgent Care is under construction at 10303 S. Walton Road across the parking lot from Grocery Outlet in Island City. Our current Walk-In Clinic will relocate and expand services to provide you with the best possible acute care with no appointment required!

Open *seven days a week* beginning 9.14.20.

grh.org/UrgentCare

Opening 9.14.20

Nicole Cathey

Reed & Associates for
excellent service *LOCALLY!*

An Independent Insurance Agency
Reed & ASSOCIATES

Medicare, Auto, Home
insurance and Annuities

Kevin Reed

10106 N. 'C' • Island City 541-975-1364 Toll Free 1-866-282-1925 www.reed-insurance.net