

Oregon lawmaker introduces bill to ban vaccine passports

BY STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

A state representative from Grant County introduced legislation that would ban vaccine passports in Oregon.

Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, introduced House Bill 3407 last week to “protect the privacy and rights of Oregonians,” according to a press release.

The legislation would prevent any public body — state, local or special government — from issuing a requirement for proof of vaccination from COVID-19.

Owens said in the release that the bill is not an argument over COVID-19 or the vaccine. Instead, he said the bill is about people's rights.

“I believe the choice to get a vaccine is a personal, private medical decision that should be made between an individual and their medical provider,” he said. “And that Oregonians should be free to make that choice for themselves.”

The bill forbids a person or public body from requiring someone to disclose if they have been immunized before accessing credit, insurance, education, facilities, medical services, housing

or accommodations, travel, entry into the state, employment or to purchase goods or services.

The press release said these entities would not be able to require someone to wear a face covering should someone refuse to disclose their vaccine status.

The bill applies only to the COVID-19 vaccinations and would not change any current laws regarding other immunizations for other diseases for schools and children's facilities.

Gov. Kate Brown announced last month that fully vaccinated people are not required to wear a mask indoors in public settings where vaccina-

tion status is checked.

Still, the state mandates businesses, employers and churches to continue requiring masks unless they review people's vaccination cards.

The state epidemiologist, Dean Sidlelinger, recently said that requiring someone to disclose their vaccination status does not violate patient privacy laws when given the option.

Masks are still required in health care settings, jails, K-12 schools, planes, buses and airports.

The bill was requested in partnership with the Eastern Oregon Counties Association.

Airport: Where are people going? ‘It’s all over; people just want to go,’ says one travel agent

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Where are people headed? Bend-based travel agent Bernie Reumann, chief executive officer of Getaways Travel, said U.S. destinations are still top of the list. Florida and California are top spots, but really it's open season across the country.

“It's all over; people just want to go,” he said.

Some are making inquiries about overseas travel.

“The pent-up demand is definitely there,” said Reumann. “People who had prior trips planned are rescheduling and getting on with it.”

When it comes to overseas travel, Reumann said 80% of his clients are asking about Europe.

“Other places like Australia and New Zealand are not open yet,” said Reumann. “South America is not open; you don't want to go down there right now. South Africa is open, so the adventurers are looking to go to Africa. So it's a hit-and-miss situation.”

Reumann said he was planning to make a trip to Bordeaux in August but canceled his plans due to the uncertainty of travel. France may be opening up, he said, but that doesn't mean life is back to normal. He worries that the on-again, off-again lockdowns could cause business closures during his trip. That morning coffee and croissant at the corner bakery in Bordeaux might not happen if all the bakeries in town are closed, he said.

“So we will reschedule that for next year.”

One advantage of foreign travel, said Reumann, is that flights are



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Travelers deplane at the Redmond Municipal Airport on June 8.

still mostly empty. That could mean more comfortable travel compared to crowded domestic flights.

“But if you go over, you may have to quarantine and have proof of tests and vaccinations, and a lot of people don't want to deal with that,” he said.

Those who do start their air journey from Redmond will encounter some improvements at the airport. A 500 -spot parking lot costing \$3.5 million was recently completed. The third TSA line was also installed to speed up passenger lines through security checkpoints.

The 45,000 -square -foot opera-

tions building was constructed at a cost of \$14 million; it houses heavy equipment like snowplows and snow-brooms (trucks that “sweep” the runway). While snow and ice removal takes up a lot of time in winter, the summers are spent doing pavement maintenance and painting.

“It never slows down for us; there is always something depending on the season,” said Mike Wilcox, operations supervisor at the facility.

Bass also upgraded the airport's HVAC system. It now includes a new UV lighting that purifies the air flowing through the vents.

All up, the airport spent \$25 million on upgrades during the pandemic.

Funds to pay for the upgrades came with considerable help from federal assistance packages, including the CARES Act. The airport received \$12 million in funding and is expecting to receive another \$6 million, said Bass.

There were some hiccups, though. Construction of a \$10 million “quick turnaround” car rental facility was put on hold during the pandemic. That could get going again in the summer of 2022, said Bass. The facility will include car washing, detailing and a fueling depot.

As Redmond Airport moves past the pandemic, it will be building on what had been unprecedented growth. The airport is now the 115th largest commercial airport in the country.

Passenger numbers doubled over the five years before the pandemic hit, from 500,000 each year to one million. That volume puts Redmond in the “small hub” category designated by the Federal Aviation Administration. It previously was labeled a “primary non-hub.” Other “small hub” airports include Palm Springs, California, Eugene and Spokane, Washington.

More passengers mean more destinations. The newest nonstop daily flights will be to San Jose, California, starting in September on Alaska Airlines. San Jose is Redmond's 12th destination.

September will also see the return of nonstop flights to Las Vegas on Allegiant Airlines. Chicago, a seasonal flight with United, is expected to return in the summer of 2022.

Bass said he is also working with American Airlines to start a new non-stop flight to Dallas, expected in the spring of 2022. After Dallas, Bass said Minneapolis could be the next non-stop destination.

The East Coast and Hawaii could also be future destinations, but Redmond would first need to extend its runway, said Bass.

“It's on our plan for the next 10 years,” he said.

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Graduates

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“There was just so much going on,” she said. “It was hard to do work on the computer, and I am very good at procrastinating. It's easy for me to stare at a screen for hours and get nothing done.”

After BreAnna realized she was failing school, she and her mom decided online school wasn't working and that she needed to attend in person in order to catch up. She adapted quickly.

“I like getting into routines, and once I got used to everything here, it was easy to do my work,” she said. She credits her teachers with helping her stay focused.

The school counselors really helped me get on the right track, but once I got going it was easy to finish,” she said.

But BreAnna did the hard work herself — she said she's good at math, and she loved her science classes, especially forensics.

She's not sure what she wants to do in the future, though she'll take courses at Central Oregon Community College in the fall.

“I basically failed,” she said. “But I managed to come out of that situation to be able to graduate in three years.”

And she has advice for her classmates. “Even if you're at a low point, it's still possible to claw back up to where you need to be and where you want to be,” she said. “Stay focused and get your work turned in. If you get things done, it'll be a lot easier.”

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