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CORONAVIRUS

Brown lifts order on elective care

Ban led to hospital layoffs

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Gov. Kate Brown will lift her order delaying elective surgeries and other nonemergency health care procedures in Oregon over the coronavirus.

The procedures can resume on May 1 as long as enough hospital beds and personal protective equipment are reserved for a possible surge in virus cases.

In March, the governor ordered hospitals, outpatient clinics and other health care providers like dentists and veterinarians to cease nonemergency procedures to preserve masks, gowns and gloves to treat people with the virus.

“This order allows them to get back to providing much-needed care for Oregonians across the state,” Brown said during a press conference Thursday.

“Today’s good news is a signal that Oregon is on the right path in fighting this virus.”

“We know that our rural hospitals are essential and the executive order that I put in place

a month ago has been of extreme financial hardship to them and other hospitals across the state,” the governor said. “That’s why we thought it was really important that we move in this direction as long as we can do so safely.”

Brown said Oregon hospitals have asked for a \$200 million stabilization fund. She said the state intends on unveiling a stabilization fund soon, but is waiting for guidance from the federal government on coronavirus relief.

Many hospitals, including Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria and Providence Seaside Hospital, have not experienced a surge in coronavirus patients.

The Oregon Health Authority tracked 406 test results in Clatsop County as of Friday morning, including six positive cases. Four of the people have reportedly recovered and two are still under quarantine.

Statewide, the health authority reported 2,177 cases and 86 deaths from the disease.

An updated modeling report released by the health authority indicates the governor’s stay-at-home order and other social distancing may have helped prevent as many as 70,000 coronavirus cases.

Layoffs

Brown said the Oregon supply chain of personal protective equipment has been restored through conservation and donations. The state has also seen an increase in testing capacity and anticipates more availability. The health authority will continue to loosen restrictions on health care procedures as more testing becomes available.

Dr. Bruce Goldberg, who serves on the governor’s Medical Advisory Panel, said hospital layoffs statewide highlighted the fragility of the health care system.

“And I think one of the ways to be certain that we don’t have any further layoffs is lifting of these restrictions, but I think

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Coffee Girl on Pier 39 pushed tables and chairs into one corner and roped it off to discourage takeout customers from lingering.

Local leaders want a unified reopening

Pressure builds to lift restrictions

By EDWARD STRATTON and NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

With unemployment skyrocketing, people anxious to restart some semblance of normal life and Oregon planning a phased reopening of the economy during the coronavirus pandemic, North Coast leaders want a unified approach that prioritizes locals.

Social distancing appears to be stemming the spread of the virus, but government restrictions are wreaking havoc.

“While we have to be careful, we also cannot stand still,” Gov. Kate Brown said in a statement on her draft framework for reopening. “The shuttering of an economy at this scale has never happened before. Likewise, the reopening of a shuttered economy of this scale has never happened before.”

Reopening depends on the downward trajectory of coronavirus symptoms and cases for at least two weeks, as well as the capacity of hospitals to treat a surge of patients. The state must also ramp up the ability to test for the virus, quarantine new patients and trace their contacts. If the health metrics are met, counties can apply with the state to reopen.

Michael McNickle, Clatsop

County’s public health director, said the county has started to receive more questions about when that might happen. But he wants to let the science drive decision-making. The county has not reported a new case of the virus in two weeks.

“Like everybody else, I’m curious how we’re going to do this,” McNickle said. “I am one of those who think that if we open too soon and aren’t careful we will have a second surge that we’ll have to then maybe think about doing this again.”

Of the 406 test results from Clatsop County tracked by the Oregon Health Authority as of Friday morning, six have been positive, with four so far recovered and none needing hospitalization.

Ellen Heinitz, a naturopathic physician and the county’s community health

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Nicole Bales/The Astorian
A sign outside Cannon Beach.

In Cannon Beach, a sign leaves a sting

Some business owners want softer message

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

CANNON BEACH — State and local restrictions over the coronavirus have hit many North Coast businesses hard. One business owner has pushed back against signs meant to discourage visitors.

“Due to COVID-19 Cannon Beach is closed to visitors,” state the signs set along U.S. Highway 101 ahead of entrances to the city.

The messages are targeted at tourists, but Erin Fenison, the owner of Cannon Beach Soap Co., said customers who live in Clatsop County think the

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Businesses have struggled financially from government restrictions over the coronavirus.

Lenders hopeful for second round of relief

Money meant for small businesses

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

The \$350 billion in the first round of the Small Business Administration’s Paycheck Protection Program to help during the coronavirus pandemic dried up quickly.

Small businesses filed suit against several major banks involved in the federal program, claiming lenders prioritized larger loans that favored their bottom lines over Main Street. After helping local firms secure

millions in the first round, local lenders and business advisers are trying to get more in the queue for a new \$321 billion infusion expected to become available soon.

The paycheck program provides forgivable loans for small businesses to keep or rehire employees during coronavirus-related restrictions. Businesses bring a year’s worth of payroll information to local lenders, who apply with the Small Business Administration.

The Clatsop Small Business Development Center has heard from hundreds of local businesses seeking help. Business adviser Jessica Newhall said the group can’t direct

clients toward banks, but keeps them informed of the easiest path to money.

“Frankly, it worked in a lot of cases,” she said. “We had clients who we were able to shepherd to lenders who were able to make more decisions here locally, versus through some of the national portals. We saw companies from ... two-, three-, four-person enterprises up to

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