

Brown extends pandemic emergency

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown has extended a declaration of emergency as the omicron variant emerges in the coronavirus pandemic.

The latest order will remain in effect through June 30 — more than two years after the first one, at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 — unless rescinded or extended.

Brown said in a statement released Tuesday that the extension was necessary to allow for flexibility in the response to a surge of cases and hospitalizations. But she said the potential surge need not be as severe if people get vaccinated, get a booster shot and wear masks.

“As Oregon prepares for what could be our worst surge

in hospitalizations during this pandemic, I know that this is not the beginning of the new year any of us had hoped for,” the governor said.

“Time and again over the last two years, Oregonians have proven that we will stand with each other in our most difficult times. Your actions have saved lives, and it is because we have worked together to keep each other safe that Oregon still has some of the lowest infection and mortality rates in the nation.”

The declaration will enable the state to use SERV-OR volunteer medical providers in hospitals, provide flexibility in state licensing of health professionals, and ensure access to federal disaster relief funds, such as enhanced food benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assis-

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tance Program.

Brown had rescinded most of her other COVID-related emergency declarations at the end of June.

Some measures aimed at thwarting the spread of COVID-19 and its variants do not rely on emergency declarations, such as the wearing of masks and mandatory vaccinations for public school staff and health care workers. They are covered by agency administrative rules issued under

existing state laws.

An agreement with unions extended the time for state workers to obtain vaccinations.

Brown did invoke other authority for Oregon National Guard members to support hospital workers, and for the Oregon Health Authority to bring in skilled health care workers to help hospitals and long-term care centers.

The health authority, meanwhile, reported five

new virus cases for Clatsop County on Tuesday, 21 new cases over the weekend and three new cases on Friday. Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 2,771 virus cases as of Tuesday.

Fighting the omicron variant surging through the country, President Joe Biden announced the government will provide 500 million free rapid home-testing kits, increase support for hospitals under strain and redouble vaccination and boosting efforts.

At the White House on Tuesday, Biden detailed major changes to his COVID-19 winter plan, his hand forced by the fast-spreading variant, whose properties are not yet fully understood by scientists. Yet his message was clear that the winter holidays could be close to normal for the vacci-

nated while potentially dangerous for the unvaccinated.

His pleas are not political, he emphasized. He noted that former President Donald Trump has gotten his booster shot, and he said it's Americans' "patriotic duty" to get vaccinated.

“It's the only responsible thing to do,” the president said. “Omicron is serious and potentially deadly business for unvaccinated people.”

Biden chastised social media and people on cable TV who have made misleading statements to discourage people from getting vaccinated.

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Boat lift: Expected to be operational for over 50 years

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The alternative method that Hyak has presented is a travel lift, which places slings underneath a ship to hoist it from the water, and wheels to take it to an on-site inspection and repair area.

There are two operational travel lifts nearby, in Newport and Reedsport, that can lift up to 750 tons.

Hyak hopes to bring in larger boats in need of service by building a lift that can hoist up to 1,500 tons.

The projected costs include the lift's design and build by Bergerson Construction, along with associated expenses, including upgrading the pavement at Tongue Point so it can bear greater loads.

The cost is around \$21 million. Dorn is seeking a \$13.9 million grant from Connect Oregon.

Hyak intends to cover

some of the remaining costs with additional public funds: \$350,000 from the Governor's Strategic Reserve Fund and \$7 million in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act.

Hyak, WCT Marine & Construction and Bergerson Construction will also be contributing construction costs.

Dorn said public funding is needed to get the project going and to keep operating costs low for boat operators.

“The infrastructure and this giant travel lift was about \$22 million,” Dorn said. “Without public support, I will never make a return on that. I would have to charge people enormous amounts of money to come in because these are expensive machines to maintain.”

The lift is expected to be operational for over 50 years, given regular maintenance from Hyak.

Dorn said the return to



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The Elton, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers vessel, is under repair by WCT Marine & Construction.

the community will be the creation of 100 new jobs at WCT Marine & Construction and subcontractors, paying an annual average salary of \$70,000 a year. At the time of the application, WCT had 15 full-time employees.

“The metric is job creation,” Dorn said. “We anticipate it would have \$7 mil-

lion a year immediately here in salaries and wages, and that creates a huge tax benefit to everybody.”

‘Skilled blue-collar jobs’

Mayor Bruce Jones, who wrote a letter of support for the project, said the jobs in the maritime sector

would be a beneficial counterbalance to the increasing importance of tourism-related jobs locally.

“(They are) skilled blue-collar jobs that pay good money, living wage jobs, and also are tied directly to the maritime heritage of Astoria,” he said. “To me, it's just probably the most exciting potential economic development in the community for many, many years.”

The mayor said additional benefits would come from the site's relationship with the Marine and Environmental Research and Training Station — Clatsop Community College's maritime career training program, as well as Tongue Point Job Corps Center's seaman program.

In October, the Port's letter of support stated that the project would be mutually beneficial.

“Such capacity will complement the Port's existing capability to lift out smaller vessels for routine maintenance and minor repair (and with the future expansion of the boatyard, the Port will be able to lift out heavier vessels for maintenance and minor repair, thereby amplifying the complementary effect),” wrote Will Isom, the Port's executive director.

Hyak believes it will be the first all-electric, zero-emission mobile lift in the country. The project plans include updated filtration systems to prevent waste and particles from entering the river.

Along with funding applications, Hyak has begun the permit process for the project, including for environmental impact.

Pending permit and grant approval, the project is projected to be completed by the spring of 2024.

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