

Brown for \$7.5 M in earthquake early warning system

Bill also creates program to improve readiness of quarter-million Oregon households

By SAM STITES
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon would prepare 250,000 households to become self-sufficient following a catastrophic earthquake under legislation advancing in Salem.

The legislation, Senate Bill 1537, also would double the number of monitors that would alert public officials to an earthquake.

The proposals are the latest effort to prepare Oregonians for what scientists say is inevitable — a destructive earthquake in the Cascadia Subduction Zone that would destroy buildings, roads and more.

Some \$3 million is being requested by Gov. Kate Brown to fund “Two-week Ready Oregon” within the state Office of Emergency Management. The program would be administered by the Oregon Military Department and aims to give 250,000 Oregon households the supplies and expertise to be self-sufficient for two weeks following a natural disaster. That means having enough food, water, first-aid supplies and other emergency items to



Professor Doug Toomey is one of the foremost seismologists on the West Coast and oversees the University of Oregon's ShakeAlert program.

Photo courtesy of Oregon State University

keep a household functioning for two weeks.

The legislation, pending before the Legislature's budget committee, would build out Oregon's ShakeAlert system, a network of seismic monitoring stations administered by the U.S. Geological Survey along the Pacific

Coast. The network extends from Northern California to British Columbia and feeds into similar programs at CalTech, the University of California, Berkeley, and University of Washington.

ShakeAlert monitors seismic activity and allows the Geological Survey to

alert counties, cities, utility companies and others before shaking from an earthquake begins. It gives people time to methodically take shelter rather than scrambling in a panic. It also allows utilities to take precautions and shut down critical infrastructure that could be damaged

by shaking.

A total of \$7.5 million would be allocated to the network, which currently has around 120 sensors located across the Willamette Valley and Oregon coast. The goal is to set up 250 sensors in Oregon by 2023.

A team from the Univer-

sity of Oregon would install and monitor the stations. Eight team members at UO work to install new stations in the field and monitor activity. One of those on the team is Professor Doug Toomey, seismologist, geophysicist and one of the pioneers of in the use of ocean-bottom seismology.

“One of the remarkable aspects about the project is how collaborative and well distributed it has been over its development,” Toomey said. “The University of Oregon actually has one of the stronger seismology departments on the West Coast with five active seismologists.”

According to Toomey, the benefit of ShakeAlert is its impact on protecting public safety not only in Oregon, but along the entire earthquake zone.

“If you think of the impacts we have locally in terms of helping people and helping a water utility save water by shutting off valves, that's multiplied by many hundreds along the West Coast,” he said. “Funding from the state is critical not only just for Oregon, but our performance within ShakeAlert impacts the resiliency of California, Washington and British Columbia.”

Also packed within the bill are provisions that would review dam safety across the state and update the state's resilience plan.

Airport: ‘We got an airport that’s \$2 million in debt up there’

Continued from Page A1

clause would stifle business at the airport by creating uncertainty over whether a business could stay long term.

City officials countered that the clause wasn't new to Pendleton airport contracts, and the airport was merely following Federal Aviation Administration rules by including it in leases.

Both sides seemed to reach a compromise over the summer of 2019, when the city approved language that allows tenants to avoid reversion by either paying a “reversion deferral fee” equal to the value of the property at the end of their lease, or pay twice the standard ground lease rate over the life of the initial agreement.

But Pendleton Aircraft Service mechanic Jeff Guenther and Wildhorse Helicopter Co. owner Brad Wahl, representing airport business owners, went to Tuesday's council meeting to say the lease policy hasn't been implemented in the way they thought it would.



A U.S. Army AH-64 attack helicopter makes an approach to land at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in April 2018 in Pendleton.

EO file photo

Reading from a prepared statement, Wahl told the council that airport staff weren't offering existing tenants the reversionary options spelled out when trying to

negotiate a new lease. “We are not aware of any existing or new long-term tenants that have been signed since the policy was

passed,” he said. “The community is missing out on new business development as well as expansion of existing businesses because potential investors are holding out until the uncertainty in the leasing policy is resolved and the outcome is known.”

Rather than scrap the new lease policy, Wahl and Guenther asked the council to send it back to the airport commission to clarify the law. Airport Manager Steve Chrisman and several members of the airport commission were sitting in the audience.

Mayor John Turner called it a “reasonable request,” but warned that airport business leaders would need to include specific examples of the way the policy is hurting businesses.

“We got an airport that's \$2 million in debt up there and I'm leaning on Mr. Chrisman all the time to pay it back,” he said. “Understand, there's not a huge profit margin up there yet.”

The council voted 7-1 to refer the policy back to the airport commission, with Councilor Becky Marks, an ex-officio member of the commission, voting against.

Chrisman didn't speak at the meeting, but in an interview Thursday, he continued to defend the reversionary clause.

He said the FAA supported the clause because it ensured the airport continues to be used for aviation purposes and it can lead to a self-sustaining operation.

Chrisman added that the FAA has granted Pendleton \$23 million for operations and infrastructure since 1995, and he didn't want to do anything to jeopardize that source of income.

While admitting the reversionary clause had become a contentious issue, he said it was within everyone's best interest that the airport commission and the business community are on the same page.

Legislation: Impact of bill uncertain without economic study

Continued from Page A1

small businesses and farmers I've talked to have, and they're nervous,” Lindsay said.

Russell said the bill has been complex and confusing since the concept first was put to paper, but what he believes he knows about it is that there will be an unmeasured impact on local economies and that its benefits are unclear.

“This bill has been amended and changed drastically again and again and again,” he said. “For me, how do you even know what it says? I can't be in favor of something that is constantly changing so much that I can't understand it.”

While this year's legislation remains largely the same as last session's House Bill 2020, which prompted Senate Republicans to leave the state and deny Democrats a quorum to vote on the bill, it also includes some changes directed at easing the economic burden on rural communities, and particularly residents and businesses in Eastern Oregon.

One key amendment dictates that transportation fuel suppliers in the Portland area purchase allowances starting in 2022, while the requirement would expand to all fuel suppliers in counties west of the Cascades in 2025.

Remaining counties would have the choice to opt

into the program, which is expected to raise gas prices. The funds raised will be used for climate investments but will only be eligible to participating counties.

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— George Murdock, Umatilla County commissioner

“That doesn't move the needle for me at all,” Russell said of the amendment.

Russell said he'd been told by a sponsor of the bill

that an amendment would be added that would protect food processors from the costs of regulations proposed in cap and trade but he'd yet to see it be added.

Food processor Lamb Weston recently opened two plants in Morrow County and Russell said he'd been told by the company that

had they known of the costs they'd incur from a cap-and-trade bill, they'd have opened them in Pasco, Washington, instead.

But in addition to opposing what the legislation would do if passed, Morrow and Umatilla county commissioners are opposed to how the Legislature is trying to pass it.

“We're concerned about the fact that landmark legislation of this type was never intended to be passed in the short session,” Murdock said Wednesday. “And further, that the inclusion of an emergency clause basically precludes future input from the citizens of Oregon.”

Critics of cap and trade have consistently high-

lighted that the 2020 legislative session, which is supposed to last just 35 days and end on March 8, wasn't designed for transformational bills, such as SB 1530.

The emergency clause attached to the bill has remained controversial because it allows Gov. Kate Brown to sign it into law immediately after it passes the Legislature. Supporters have argued the bill's purpose, battling climate change, remains an emergency. But those in opposition still wish for the decision to be up to the people.

“This legislation has been extremely divisive for Oregon,” Russell said. “Something this divisive should be voted on by the public.”

Graduate: More than 12,000 associates working toward degrees, certifications

Continued from Page A1

transportation and logistics management.

“It aligns perfectly with what we do here,” she said.

Live Better U currently offers about 30 different degrees, as well as certifications such as pharmacy technician, through various institutions, with Walmart picking up most of the tab. In Palmer's

case, her degree comes from Bellevue University. She started coursework in October 2018, with new courses every six weeks involving homework, tests, video presentations and discussion boards.

Palmer said her cohort of online classmates were from multiple states and represented a diverse array of Walmart positions, from trucking to cashiers to

working at corporate headquarters. She said the network she built has given her access to different perspectives, allowing her to bounce ideas off of associates in other locations and jobs.

“I now have friends from all across the country that I've worked on projects with,” she said.

Charles Crowson, a spokesman for Walmart,

said right now there are more than 12,000 associates taking advantage of Live Better U. After associates finish their degree or certification, there are no stores attached — some are putting their knowledge to use in furthering their career with the company, while others are using it to get a job elsewhere.

“If people pursue (something else), there is no ill

will,” Crowson said.

He said many of Walmart's future leaders will likely come from Live Better U.

“It's a wonderful opportunity for our associates,” he said. “It's really encouraging for our company to see so many people become engaged in it.”

Palmer feels the same way, and as a human resources manager, she

said she is in a good position to spread the word to other employees about the benefits of pursuing a degree while they are in a position to do so for only \$1 per day. So far, she said, there are a handful of other people in Hermiston who have signed on.

“Any time we invest in ourselves and broaden our thinking, it makes us better,” she said.