

# Legislators: \$200 million in relief for tenants, landlords

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“When you go down a path that shuts out the public, that creates anxiety,” he said.

As for the work accomplished by the Legislature during their one-day session, Smith said he was pleased to be able to vote to provide liability relief to schools as they navigate trying to open classrooms safely during the pandemic. However, he didn’t think the bill went far enough, and wished it had also extended protections to other categories, such as the hospitality industry and medical clinics.

He said said the \$600 million the Legislature set aside for additional COVID relief efforts seemed “reasonable,” and said he was glad to see additional financial relief for tenants and landlords pass, but he did question the constitutionality of the eviction moratorium that has been in place since the spring.

“The Legislature has broad abilities, but the ability to break a contract is not one of them,” he said.

Rep. Greg Barreto,



Abigail Dollins/Salem Statesman-Journal

**A right-wing protester screams at Salem police as she attempts to get into the Oregon Capitol during a special session of the state Legislature in Salem on Monday, Dec. 21, 2020.**

R-Cove, could not attend the special session because he is self-quarantining after possible exposure to someone with COVID-19. As of Tuesday, Dec. 22, Barreto was in the 10th day of a 14-day quarantine and has had no

symptoms of the virus.

The state representative said he would have voted for three of the four bills the Legislature ultimately passed.

The bill Barreto would have voted against is House

Bill 4401, which extends a statewide moratorium on evictions until July 1, 2021. The eviction ban, which has been in place for at least several months, had been scheduled to lapse on Jan. 1, 2021. Barreto opposed

HB 4401 because he said too many tenants are taking advantage of the statewide moratorium on evictions.

Barreto said he would have supported House Bill 4402, which protects schools from COVID-19 lawsuits. HB 4402 would prevent a school from being liable if someone contracts COVID-19 through it.

The state representative said HB 4402 is a good bill. However, he does have one reservation, explaining it is unfortunate that while the government is protecting schools, it is not protecting businesses in this way.

Barreto also said he would have also supported the legislation passed that provides more state funding for wildfire recovery, and Senate Bill 1801, which allows restaurants to sell to-go cocktails. Barreto said he supports the sale of take-out cocktails because it will help restaurants. Barreto said he was opposed to earlier to-go cocktail legislation because it would have required restaurants to pay fees that would have made it cost prohibitive for restaurants to offer this service.

“The cost of making a

cocktail would have been more than the sale,” Barreto said.

Barreto said he doubts that the to-go cocktail legislation will provide a major financial boost to restaurants.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, was also excused from the special session while on a family vacation. He said he followed the session and the bills involved, however.

“The one that was particularly important, I thought, was the school liability one,” he said.

Hansell said the \$200 million in relief for landlords and tenants is better than doing nothing, but said he is hearing it would take \$500 million to make landlords “whole” for the rent they have not received this year due to the eviction moratorium. He said he would like to see additional relief for landlords, either through legislation the next session or as part of the overall \$600 million COVID relief funds.

“I’m hoping that discussion is not over yet,” he said.

*La Grande Observer reporter Dick Mason contributed to this report.*

## Unicorns:

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friend, was wrecked after a semitruck collided with it. Tara and their eldest daughter were safe, but the car was totaled and they suddenly found themselves stranded near Knoxville, Tennessee. They held a family discussion to consider their options, including turning around and heading back home.

But ultimately, the Arnolds decided to press ahead with a rental car to complete their convoy across the United States, avoiding further trouble besides the occasional ploy to sneak their pets into a hotel.

It’s taken time to get adjusted to Pendleton, but both Emily and Mindy have experience in small towns.

Mindy grew up in Swansea, South Carolina, a two-stoplight town of 800 that turns into a one-stoplight town when school isn’t in session. Emily’s formative years were more nomadic, but her life included a stint in Pendleton, where her family stayed after she moved on.

Mindy and Emily met in South Carolina in 2017, but started out as friends. They both worked in the health care field, Emily working as a clinical social worker, Mindy as a surgical technician and a clinical manager.

But their friendship started to accelerate into something more as Mindy battled a dangerous form of cancer. In 2019, Mindy needed surgery to remove a mass, an operation that didn’t come without risk. Before heading to the operating room, Mindy made a quick confession to Emily.

“I-love-you-I-mean-it-bye,” she said, making her declaration so quickly that it came out as one word.

Mindy died for two minutes on the operating table, but eventually made it out of surgery after she was revived. Her cancer is now in remission, but the operation still took a toll.

Postoperative, Mindy was using crutches to aid her walking when she slipped and fell. The minute she hit the ground she knew that she wouldn’t be able to walk regularly again. She now uses a wheelchair to get around.

Before moving to Pendleton, Emily, Mindy and their family made a home in Irmo, a small suburb of Columbia, the South Carolina state capital.

But they soon found themselves looking outside the bounds of South Carolina.

As a same-sex couple, Emily and Mindy weren’t sure they would be fully

accepted in the South, where Emily wouldn’t be able to take custody of the girls should something happen to Mindy and their youngest daughter, Bradleigh, was starting to face bullying at school because of her two moms.

Additionally, when COVID-19 hit, the couple saw their work hours reduced during a time when Mindy’s job was already complicated by her disability.

When they began their move to Pendleton, they ran headfirst into the city’s tight housing market. They didn’t secure a house until midway through their trip, as they traveled through Indiana.

They stayed with Emily’s family until the sale on their house went through, and although they’re now settled into their North Hill home, integrating into a new town is difficult during a pandemic.

The Arnold family includes three daughters — Sofia, 18, Elyse, 10, Bradleigh, 7 — and the two youngest haven’t been able to go to school in-person and make friends.

Emily hasn’t been able to introduce Mindy to Pendleton mainstays like a full-fledged Farmers Market on Main Street or the Round-Up.

Mindy said living in a more densely populated area allowed her to sometimes blend in with the crowd, a prospect that isn’t usually possible in Pendleton, especially when you’re a member of a same-sex couple, in a wheelchair and new in town.

Mindy is still adjusting to life in her wheelchair, cycling through three different ones as she looks for work. Mindy was physically active before moving to the chair, including a stint in a women’s football team called the South Carolina Smash. Now, she is learning how to live life in a wheelchair on the fly.

“There’s no YouTube for how to revamp your life for a wheelchair,” she said.

But the challenges of the past couple of years haven’t overshadowed the Arnolds’ joys.

Mindy and Emily were wedded in February, waiting to hold a larger ceremony until the pandemic passes.

And Emily officially completed the adoption process with Bradleigh recently, formalizing their familial bond.

Their family and their journey to Eastern Oregon might be unconventional by Pendleton’s standards, but the Arnolds are taking it in stride.

“We call ourselves the purple unicorns of Pendleton,” Emily said.

## Sleeves: Hospital staff inoculations continue

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utes after the injection.

“We watch for shortness of breath, dizziness, anything out of the ordinary,” Wart said. “We make sure they’re not in anaphylactic shock.”

While allergic reactions are rare, a Boston physician with a shellfish allergy used his own EpiPen after experiencing an allergic reaction to the Moderna vaccine, but recovered quickly.

Vaccine recipients will return for a second vaccination in 28 days. That differs from the Pfizer vaccine, which requires two doses three weeks apart.

The need to monitor vaccine recipients makes vaccinating the community at large a bit more complicated, said Nicol Byram, a registered nurse who gave half the shots on Dec. 28. Byram, who works both for the hospital and the Umatilla County Health Department, said a mass drive-thru vaccination event for the community at large would require a large parking lot, such as the one at the Pendleton Convention Center.

“We are working out the details,” she said. “We’ve been preparing for some time.”

Unlike past drive-thru flu vaccine clinics, Geller said, “it’ll be a slower process to get everyone vaccinated (for coronavirus). People would get jabbed and pull into a parking spot



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

**Galen Thompson, left, a registered nurse at St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton, receives her initial dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine from infection prevention nurse Tracy Wart at the hospital on Monday, Dec. 28, 2020.**

and wait. It’s doable.”

Still needed are specific instructions from the Oregon Health Authority and an ample supply of the vaccine.

Geller said additional hospital employees will

identify of nursing for Good Shepherd, told the *East Oregonian* a few hours later that the morning’s roll-out had gone well. He said staff were excited to receive the vaccine and begin to administer it to others.

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— Brian Patrick, vice president of nursing for Good Shepherd

receive the vaccine this week and beyond, starting with those working in such departments as the emergency room and the cardiac care unit.

Across Umatilla County, at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston, the Moderna vaccine was also administered to health care workers starting at 7 a.m. on Dec. 28.

Brian Patrick, vice pres-

ident of nursing for Good Shepherd, told the *East Oregonian* a few hours later that the morning’s roll-out had gone well. He said staff were excited to receive the vaccine and begin to administer it to others.

“This is the part of the disaster response we’ve been waiting for,” he said.

Patrick said in Good Shepherd’s initial polling of staff, before the vaccine had become available to them, some had expressed some hesitancy about whether they wanted to be part of the first phase of the rollout, but now he is seeing many of those hesitant people ask to be added to

the list as their confidence in it grows. He personally expressed confidence in the vaccine’s safety and effectiveness.

“There is really good science behind it,” he said.

Enough vaccines are coming in for Good Shepherd to begin expanding the vaccine beyond staff, and Patrick said the hospital is following Oregon Health Authority guidelines as it works to move down the list of vaccine eligibility to first responders, nursing homes, health clinics outside Good Shepherd Health Care System and others. He said they will be working together with Umatilla County Public Health and other community partners to make sure the vaccine is distributed as efficiently and quickly as possible.

“We want to make sure we use our resources the best we can,” he said.

Right now, those notified it is their turn to receive a vaccine will visit the hospital to get immunized, but Patrick said as the vaccine’s availability becomes more widespread people will also be able to receive it at local pharmacies. The first doses Good Shepherd received are from Moderna, and he said it is their understanding that Good Shepherd will continue to receive the Moderna version, which is easier for rural hospitals to store and transport than Pfizer’s version, which needs to be kept in ultra-cold storage.

## Levee: Existence of mill race previously unknown

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But water bypassed the levee section near Southeast Third Street for a much different reason.

Instead of breaching the levee section, the water seeped through it, the result of an artifact from Pendleton’s early days. Flood waters threatened the *East Oregonian* offices and some nearby homes and businesses, but city staff were able to drain the water before it did significant damage.

Before the city built the levee, a resident had built a mill race, a channel that carries water to a mill wheel. Instead of demolishing it, the city built the levee over the mill race and listed it in internal documents as “abandoned.” Patterson said modern-day city staff interpreted abandoned to mean in-filled, only to learn they were mistaken during the flood.

“We didn’t know it was there,” he said.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

**Pendleton Public Works crews use an excavator to pack gravel and rock into a hole in the levee behind the East Oregonian office in Pendleton on Feb. 7, 2020.**

The levee was eligible for repairs through a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers program. The corps hired Vancouver, Washington, contractor KEU to conduct the repairs and is covering the costs.

The February flood shattered expectations for how high the Umatilla River could rise, flooding areas thought to be beyond the floodplain and causing com-

munities around the Northwest to fortify their flood protection infrastructure.

In an email, Patterson explained how the flood surpassed authorities’ previous estimates.

“We were also just provided the flow estimate this week for the February event — 28,900 cubic feet per second (CFS) at the Pendleton gaging station location,” he wrote. “The 100-year, or

base flood event, was calculated in the late 1990s to be about 22,500 CFS for this location, with the prior highest measured flow of record at about 15,500 CFS in 1965.”

Patterson said the city’s bridges and levees held strong during the flood for the most part, but city staff will still look at the Umatilla River and McKay Creek with concern during the late winter and early spring now that they know what they’re capable of.

“It doesn’t mean we’ll sleep any easier,” he said. “Probably not.”

Patterson said Pendleton’s flooding events were caused by a combination of melting snow runoff and heavy rain in the Blue Mountains. In upcoming years, Patterson said he’s worried about the possibility of snowmelt combined with heavy rain directly over Pendleton, which would put more pressure on the city’s flood protection system.