

Stimulus: 'We want it to benefit Umatilla County as a whole'

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where to direct the funding have hardly begun.

"We're really getting definitions right now about how it could be spent," Commissioner George Murdock said, adding that the funding will be coming directly to the county, rather than going through Salem, "where we may get some of it and may not."

The funds come from the American Rescue Plan, which Congress approved on March 10. At \$1.9 trillion, it's one of the largest anti-poverty efforts in American history, intended to boost economic recovery in response to the pandemic and help vulnerable Americans. Republican lawmakers largely oppose the bill for its liberal policies, according to the Associated Press.

In addition to providing hundreds of millions of Americans with one-time payments of \$1,400 and jobless benefits in the form of \$300 per week, the plan is estimated to cut national poverty by a third this year, according to the New York Times. It is also expected to cut child poverty in half through a variety of measures, including expanding rental assistance, food stamps and tax credits for Americans with children.

"We have the opportu-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Vehicles pass through a Umatilla County Public Health COVID-19 mass vaccination site in Pendleton on Friday, March 26, 2021.

nity now to lift up Oregon families and businesses, by immediately investing state and federal resources to help them recover from the devastating economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic," Gov. Kate Brown said of the plan earlier this month.

Oregon's state and local governments are slated to receive more than \$4 billion from the plan. Brown has laid out principles saying that,

on top of helping economic recovery, the funds should address existing disparities made worse by the pandemic, particularly those relating to gender and racial disparities.

Though concrete plans of any kind have yet to be made in Umatilla County, the commissioners had a few rough ideas in mind for how the funding might be used, like improving infrastructure and taking care of public health payments that

have accumulated throughout the pandemic.

"The cost of operating public health in Umatilla County over the past year has been significantly larger than on an ordinary basis,"

Murdock said, noting that the health department has over twice as many employees on staff currently. "We'll be able to use some of this money to offset those costs that we've had."

Murdock said that COVID-19 vaccinations in particular will be a "monumental task" for the county when all Americans over the age of 18 become eligible on the Biden administration's goal of May 1.

In regards to infrastructure, Murdock and Shafer said the county might be able to make modifications and improvements to heating, ventilation and air conditioning in older buildings, which Murdock said is "specifically outlined in those funds."

"It will be able to help us do some modernization that we generally don't have funds to do that will make this a healthier environment," he said.

Shafer said that past budget talks have looked at the central water project near Hermiston, a pipeline that will deliver water from the Columbia River to farmlands near Boardman that could allow for economic growth. Shafer added that mental health services are also likely to be a "key factor" in discussions around the funding.

Commissioner Dan Dorran said that he largely wouldn't speculate on ways the funding could be used, emphasizing that "we have no money until it's in the bank." However, Dorran said he's received calls from special districts inquiring about the money.

"We need to have that discussion of, 'What does stimulus mean to the commissioners,'" he said, adding that the commissioners "have no idea what the technical constraints are going to be on (the funding). We've heard that it's going to be flexible, but we don't know that until we see the guidelines."

Both Shafer and Murdock said they don't want to use the money to add personnel because the money is temporary.

"The (county) will not be using the money to hire more staff," Murdock said. "This is one-time funding and, obviously, if we hire more staff then next year we go, 'Oops we don't have that revenue.' And that doesn't make sense. Whatever we do, it will not be to incur expenses that will come home to roost when the money isn't coming in."

Shafer said he wants county residents to know the commissioners "want to be good stewards of the money and that we get the most bang for our buck out of the deal." Shafer said that discussions regarding the county's use of the funding will most likely begin in mid-April.

"We don't want to spend it frivolously," he said. "We want it to benefit Umatilla County as a whole."

Schools: Hermiston Online! still an option

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of people students and staff came into contact with in the building. Removing a rule that students must come into contact with no more than 100 different people per week allows high school students to move from class to class for different subjects as they would in a normal year.

She said the district had already stocked up on cleaning supplies and hired extra custodial staff to handle sanitizing requirements.

Families who don't want their students to return to the classroom will be able to participate in the Hermiston Online! virtual academy instead.

In the midst of its spring break, the Pendleton School District hasn't made any announcements on its operational plans with its new rules in place. High school and middle school students are set to return to school for part-time instruction on Monday, March 29.

Pendleton Superintendent Chris Fritsch said the district's secondary schools will reopen as advertised, but the district will need until April 12 to formulate a plan based on the new rules.

While the new guidance allows schools to offer more expansive in-person options,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Sandstone Middle School teacher Lucas Eivins leads a lesson on Caesar and Pompey during class on Thursday, March 25, 2021.

Fritsch said the district still needs to answer some logistical questions before it makes any changes, such as how school bus service would work if the district moved K-5 to an all-day schedule or what kind of impacts the state's recommended 36-student cohorts would have locally.

And although the social distancing requirement has been halved, the district still has to determine if its classrooms have enough space to accommodate whole classes while maintaining at least 3 feet of separation.

"We're going to get the tape measures out and see what we can work with," Fritsch said.

With the size, space and age of facilities varying

vastly from district to district, Mulvihill, the IMESD superintendent, said how schools will continue to reopen will depend on the school system.

Mulvihill said he understood that parents were eager to get every school to reopen completely, but Umatilla County still needs to continue driving down case rates if it wants to continue lifting educational restrictions.

Nevertheless, Mulvihill thinks the state's new standards will become the floor for school operations going forward as school start looking ahead to fall.

Mulvihill said he expects districts across the region to begin formulating and unveiling their new plans after the end of spring break.

Brothers:

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both wrenched open a door on the north side of the U.S. Capitol after having already entered and exited the building. They were held back by law enforcement officers.

"The exact example of what the court gave is what the defendant has done," Faruqi said during Jonathanpeter Klein's hearing.

Government evidence that Jonathanpeter Klein coordinated the trip to Washington, D.C., with his brother, was excited about it and proclaimed his allegiance to the Proud Boys, wore tactical gear and carried paintball guns and batons to prior rallies in Oregon, convinced the magistrate judge that pretrial detention was warranted.

"He is more than just a passive participant. He was actively involved," Faruqi ruled during Jonathanpeter Klein's hearing.

"This was an attack on the lawful democratic process and the foundation of our

peaceful society as the transition of power is occurring," the judge said.

Matthew Klein was arrested Tuesday, March 23, in Sherwood and Jonathanpeter Klein was arrested the same day near Heppner, according to the FBI.

The Kleins were among the first group to breach the Capitol about 2:16 p.m. on Jan. 6, after Matthew Klein helped others ascend a wall to gain access to a stairwell leading to the Capitol's Upper West Terrace, according to prosecutors.

The two brothers are charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States, aiding and abetting in the obstruction of an official proceeding, obstruction of law enforcement during civil disorder, destruction of government property, entering and remaining in a restricted building or grounds and disorderly conduct in a restricted building or grounds.

Jonathanpeter Klein's defense lawyer Michelle Sweet had urged her client's release pending trial. She said he can continue to work at

Ruggs Ranch in Heppner and the ranch owner John Flynn could serve as his third-party guardian.

The Klein brothers were living with their parents in South America until February 2020. Their parents lived as missionaries in Argentina and Chile. Jonathanpeter Klein and his brother were home schooled when they were younger, and Jonathanpeter started doing landscaping work at age 15 after a morning of home lessons, Sweet said. He also volunteered as a translator, she said.

The Klein family returned to Oregon on Feb. 24, 2020, and the brothers' parents now live in Baker City. Baker County property records show that Nanci and Jeffrey Klein, the brothers' parents, have property in Baker City and a P.O. Box in Pendleton.

Jonathanpeter Klein worked as a roofer during the day and for Domino's Pizza at night before he decided in mid- to late January of this year to get out of the Portland area because of the politically and emotionally charged environment, Sweet said.

Guns:

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advocates opposed to the bill, and passed it on a 4-3 party-line vote a few days later.

What supporters said

The bill's chief sponsor and floor manager was Sen. Ginny Burdick, a Democrat from Portland and a longtime supporter of gun regulation.

Burdick said under a state law dating back to 1969, possession of firearms in a public building is a felony unless that person has a concealed handgun license. But until 1989, when state law changed to require issuance of licenses to people who met specified standards, Burdick said sheriffs had broad discretion over who could obtain licenses. Oregon now has about 300,000 people with such licenses.

"The events of 2020 are a flashing red light that we need to do something," Burdick said.

She referred to armed invasions of the Michigan Capitol in Lansing — several men were arrested in an attempt to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer — and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., on Jan.

6. (Anti-lockdown protesters also breached the Oregon Capitol during a special session Dec. 21, 2020, but they were confined to a vestibule and police ejected them.)

Burdick said the bill gives local governments flexibility, rather than impose a state policy.

"I think you are safer without a gun; the National Rifle Association thinks you are safer with a gun," she said. "Neither of us gets to decide. The local community gets to decide. That's as it should be."

Sen. James Manning Jr., a Democrat from Eugene and a 24-year Army veteran, said the bill is consistent with a 2008 U.S. Supreme Court decision that recognizes an individual right to bear firearms under the Second Amendment. The decision, written by Justice Antonin Scalia, also allows regulation of firearms in sensitive places, such as schools and government buildings.

"This bill does not take anyone's freedoms from them," Manning said.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, a Democrat from Eugene and Judiciary Committee chairman, said even Tombstone, Arizona, barred guns from town limits back in 1880 as violence grew.

What opponents said

But Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, argued the opposite. He said the bill would deprive thousands of concealed handgun license holders from being able to defend themselves. He also said he could think of only one instance — a 2019 shooting at a Eugene middle school that resulted in police killing a male parent involved in a custody dispute — when there was a conflict.

"What we have here is a bill in search of a problem," Knopp said.

Knopp said if supporters were confident that it had public support, they should vote to put it on a statewide ballot. (A recent survey conducted by DHM Research of Portland indicated 59% support for such a measure, 31% opposition, with most support in the sample from the Portland area and Democrats; however, it mustered 49% support outside the Willamette Valley.)

A motion to that effect failed on a party-line vote.

Sen. Bill Hansell, a Republican from Athena and a former Umatilla County commissioner, said counties do not want the burden of having to decide whether firearms should be allowed in public buildings.

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