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OREGON SENATE

Bill would keep data regarding outbreaks public

Senate Bill 719 currently sits in Senate Committee on Health Care

By PHIL WRIGHT
La Grande Observer

SALEM — A proposal for a bill to compel the state to keep aggregate data relating to reportable disease investigations as public information remains alive in the ongoing 2021 Oregon Legislature.



Dembrow

Senate Bill 719, which had a public hearing last week and has a work session on Wednesday, March 31, is currently in the Senate Committee on Health Care. According to the text of the proposal, "Aggregate data derived from information obtained by the authority or a local public health administrator in the course of an investigation of a reportable disease or disease outbreak are not confidential or exempt from disclosure" under specific sections of Oregon's public records law "unless the data could reasonably lead to the identification of an individual."



Hansell

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, does not serve on that committee, but explained most bills that did not have a hearing or work session by March 19 were dead in the Senate. A bill can't exit a committee to head to a floor vote without a work session. Oregon's constitutional limit of 160 days for the Legislature, he said, firms up scheduling to consider new laws. But at this point in the session, he said, plenty of proposals are done.



Power

SB 719, though, is pitting public interest in information about the coronavirus against health agencies concerned with revealing an individual's private health information.

Two Portland Democrats, Sen. Michael Dembrow and Rep. Karin A. Power, are the chief sponsors of the bill. Hansell said they were liberal progressives who tend not to want to infringe on people's privacy,

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Maria Corona receives her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during an event for farm and food processing workers at the Sage Center in Boardman on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

Priority population

More than 1,000 agricultural workers vaccinated during first-of-its-kind clinic in Morrow County

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — Maria Corona knew she wanted to get the vaccine. Three months earlier, eight of her family members tested positive for COVID-19. So had many of her co-workers and neighbors.

"I was really concerned," said Corona, who, at 49, spends half the year working in food processing plants and the other half working in the fields near her home in Boardman. "You hear a lot in the news that people are dying, so you get afraid."

The day after Corona learned through Facebook that she and her co-workers were eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, she hopped in her Dodge Caravan and made her way down to the SAGE Center, where state and county health officials were offering doses to farmworkers in a four-day clinic that was the first of its kind.

"In order to not infect other people, to feel safe with your family and to be secure is what's most important," Corona said through a translator after getting her vaccine on Wednesday, March 24.

Akiko Saito, deputy director for the COVID-19 response and recovery unit, a joint division between the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Human Services, said the clinic was a "pilot project" specifically geared to immunize a community long understood to be especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

In all, officials vaccinated



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Staff at a COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic at the Sage Center in Boardman administer doses of the COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

over 1,000 agricultural workers at the clinic, according to the Morrow County Health Department.

Saito said state officials are looking to hold similar efforts statewide. State officials recently conducted a survey with 585 agricultural facilities that showed more than 21,000 workers were eligible for the vaccine.

"We're working with our local public health authorities to connect agricultural, migrant and seasonal workplaces to see if they can do an event(s) like this" across Oregon, Saito said.

The clinic began two days after Morrow County received approval from the state to move ahead and start vaccinating farmworkers after sufficiently providing doses to all other eligible groups.

At least 20 counties, most

of them east of the Cascades, received approval from the state last week, including Umatilla County.

The change also comes just in time for harvest season, which brings thousands of jobs to the area. Morrow County Public Health Director Nazario Rivera said harvest season can bring as many as 8,000 workers to the region annually.

"We want to make sure we get some of these vulnerable communities," he said. "We know with the season changing to spring, a lot more farmworkers are going to be out there. So if we can get them now, before the season starts, it'll be a lot easier to get them vaccinated, rather than having to ask them to take time out of their busy schedules

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OREGON HOUSE

Bill would extend right to overtime for farmworkers

Farmers say House bill would threaten agricultural industry

By JAMIE GOLDBERG
The Oregonian

SALEM — It's not uncommon for Javier Ceja Manzo to work more than 10 hours a day harvesting crops in Woodburn.

In his decades as a farmworker, he has worked in extreme heat, heavy rain and snow. Like many other Oregon farmworkers, he didn't miss a day of work during the wildfires in September 2020, despite the air quality reaching hazardous levels.

Yet, he doesn't receive overtime pay during those long work days, and he said he can barely cover his basic expenses with the income he does take home.

Democrats in the Oregon Legislature are trying to change that situation. A House bill introduced in January would require employers to pay farmworkers overtime if they work more than 40 hours in a week, the same rights that most nonfarm workers in Oregon already enjoy.

But the bill faces strong opposition from farmers, who say they operate on thin profit margins and that the requirement could threaten Oregon's agriculture industry. The added wages could potentially put small farms out of business and lead to fewer shifts and less pay for Oregon's estimated 174,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers, lobbyists for farms and nurseries say.

Advocates, meanwhile, say overtime pay for farmworkers is long overdue and a matter of racial justice and equity. Studies estimate that more than 90% of Oregon farmworkers are Latino.

"Every dollar is very important to pay what is necessary," Manzo wrote in testimony supporting the bill. "We do not have the privilege of taking our family to a restaurant or buying gifts for our children. We also do not have time to spend with our children. We are forced to work without having opportunities."

'We can't continue to ignore this'

While the majority of hourly employees in the United States receive time-and-a-half pay for the hours they work beyond 40 hours a week, farmworkers were intentionally excluded from that mandate back when the Fair Labor Standards Act passed in 1938.

Oregon farmers say that exclu-

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City looks at Despain for future upgrades

Pendleton has banked more than \$1.5M to do North Hill street repairs

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The city of Pendleton is targeting Northwest Despain Avenue for future repairs, but Public Works Director Bob Patterson said the city won't start determining what those repairs will look like until later this fall.

Stretching from North Main Street to Pendleton High School, Despain acts as a major collector road for the North Hill neighborhood. Heavy use throughout the years has caused wear and tear on the road, and Patterson

said the city has banked more than \$1.5 million in federal gas tax revenue to do repairs on that street.

But Patterson said the scope of the repair job still needs to be set. Besides figuring out whether the city wants to overlay Despain with a new layer of asphalt or order a more pricey reconstruction job, Patterson said other upgrades like widening certain sections of Despain are still on the table.

The city recently spent \$1 million to widen a section of Southwest Byers Avenue, but Patterson said the reasons for widening Despain would be different.

With on-street parking located on both sides of Byers, Patterson

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The city of Pendleton is weighing options to upgrade Northwest Despain Avenue.



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