

Brown sets special session on rental aid, protection for tenants

State stopped taking applications for rental assistance as of Dec. 1

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown has called a special session of the Oregon Legislature to extend temporary protections against eviction for tenants awaiting rental assistance.

She also said she wants lawmakers at the Dec. 13 session to approve up to \$190 million to replenish rental assistance, until more federal money comes in, and to help tenants make the transition once that rental assistance ends next year.

More than 10,000 households have passed the 60-day grace period that lawmakers set during the 2021 session to prevent evictions if they have applied for rental assistance. (The “safe harbor” was set at 90 days

by action of boards in Multnomah and Washington counties, and the Beaverton City Council.)

The Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services stopped accepting new applications for rental assistance as of 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 1. The agency announced weeks ago that pending applications — an estimated 20,000 await review — would exhaust Oregon’s \$289 million allocation from the U.S. Treasury for assistance. It has paid applications for about 22,000 households with the help of extra staff, an outside vendor and community action agencies in Oregon counties.

Lawmakers set aside a total of \$200 million in state funds for rental assistance during a special session nearly one year ago. But all of that money was spent by June.

“I am continuing to work with federal officials at U.S. Treasury and the White House to secure additional federal emergency rental assistance

funding for Oregon, but it is clear that a state solution is needed to address the urgent and immediate needs of Oregon renters,” Brown said Tuesday in her announcement of the special session.

“And, we must begin laying the groundwork now for the transition to local eviction prevention services after federal pandemic emergency programs draw to an end.”

Senate President Peter Courtney, the Legislature’s senior member, has gone through 26 of the 46 special sessions in Oregon history — counting the Dec. 13 meeting — and has presided over 11 of them. He has seen runaway special sessions with no apparent ending, though he was not in charge of them.

“Special sessions are the most difficult of all sessions,” the veteran Salem Democrat said. “Everything must be carefully planned. We have a lot of work to do. I hope we will be ready.”

The Democratic leaders of the housing committees in both chambers say they have been working for months to craft a plan that can win legislative approval. The statement by Rep. Julie Fahey of Eugene and Sen. Kayse Jama of Portland said this:

“After months of work, we have developed a proposal to extend the state’s bipartisan safe harbor protections and provide additional funds for direct rent assistance that will benefit both tenants and housing providers. As we head into the holiday season and the coldest winter months, this special session package will prevent heartbreaking evictions and support small housing providers who have made major sacrifices throughout the pandemic.”

Representatives of Stable Homes for Oregon Families have taken part in the talks, as well as previous legislative efforts. Their statement:

“We also appreciate all the state

lawmakers who have been working together on a solution. Tenants are counting on the legislature to ensure no one loses their home while their applications are pending and also to provide additional funding to help keep people safe and stable during this time of ongoing economic upheaval.”

The Democratic majority leaders in both chambers, Sen. Rob Wagner of Lake Oswego and Rep. Barbara Smith Warner of Portland, are responsible for rounding up votes. Their statement:

“From the start of the pandemic, Oregon has committed to protecting individuals and families at risk of eviction. We can take action in a special session to ensure this doesn’t happen and that we keep our promise to Oregonians. No one should lose their housing because of administrative delays.”

Republican leaders in either chamber did not issue statements.

Commission mandates production of cleaner trucks

By SIERRA DAWN
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Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon’s Environmental Quality Commission, a governor-appointed panel, has approved the Clean Trucks Rule, a mandate aimed at cutting emissions by requiring production of cleaner trucks.

Advocates say the rule will benefit the environment and public health; critics say it will hurt truck manufacturers and raise prices on trucks, which farmers and ranchers rely on for shipping.

The commission approved the rule at its meeting Nov. 17. The rule has two parts. First, it mandates manufacturers boost production of electric trucks. Second, it requires new medium- and heavy-duty

WASHINGTON OKs CLEAN TRUCKS RULE

Washington has now joined Oregon in adopting California’s clean trucks mandate. Washington State Department of Ecology announced late Nov. 30 that the agency approved California’s Advanced Clean Trucks Rule Nov. 29.

diesel trucks sold in Oregon to meet stricter emissions standards.

The first rule requires up to half of the new medium- and heavy-duty trucks, buses and vans sold in Oregon by 2030 have no emissions, and up to 75% be electric by 2035. The second requires all new heavy-duty diesel vehicles sold in Oregon to emit 75% less nitrogen dioxide than current levels starting in 2025 and 90% less by 2027.

The rule only applies to manufacturers and does not require anyone to buy the trucks.

After California, Oregon is the second state to adopt the rule, which will go into effect in 2024 and apply to 2025 or later models.

Advocates say the rule will decrease tailpipe pollution contributing to smog and ozone formation, promote cleaner air for disadvantaged communities and reduce diesel exhaust that may cause cancer, lung disease and other health problems.

“The transportation sector alone is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon, so this moves us toward cleaner air,”

said Rachel Sakata, senior air quality planner for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. “We’re on a path to zero emissions.”

Critics say the rule will raise the price of new trucks, will rapidly push a fleet of electric vehicles on a state that doesn’t have sufficient infrastructure set up yet and will unfairly penalize truck manufacturers.

“It is never the right decision to increase the cost of goods, which these rules will do,” said Shelly Boshart Davis, a state representative whose family runs a trucking business.

Trucking industry leaders estimate the price of a new heavy-duty electric truck will be \$58,000 more than a comparable diesel unit.

Sakata, of DEQ,



Don Jenkins/Capital Press, File

Oregon’s Environmental Quality Commission, a small regulatory body, on Nov. 17, 2021, approved the Clean Trucks Rule, a mandate aimed at cutting emissions by requiring production of cleaner trucks.

confirmed the \$58,000 estimate is reasonable but said that cost would be defrayed by long-term savings on fuel and maintenance.

Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of government affairs at the Oregon Farm Bureau, said because many businesses can’t afford the higher price tag, she expects the rule will have the oppo-

site of its intended effect, prompting businesses to buy trucks out-of-state or keep older trucks.

“You’re gonna have folks holding onto vehicles for a lot longer than they would have,” said Cooper. “Farm and ranch families and local Oregon businesses will actually be disincentivized from purchasing new trucks.”

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