

Brown extends deadline to file income taxes until July 15

■ Critics say extension could create cash-flow problem for the state budget, while proponents point out that coronavirus restrictions have hurt business

By Dick Hughes
For the Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregonians will have until July 15 to file their personal income taxes with the state, Gov. Kate Brown said Wednesday.

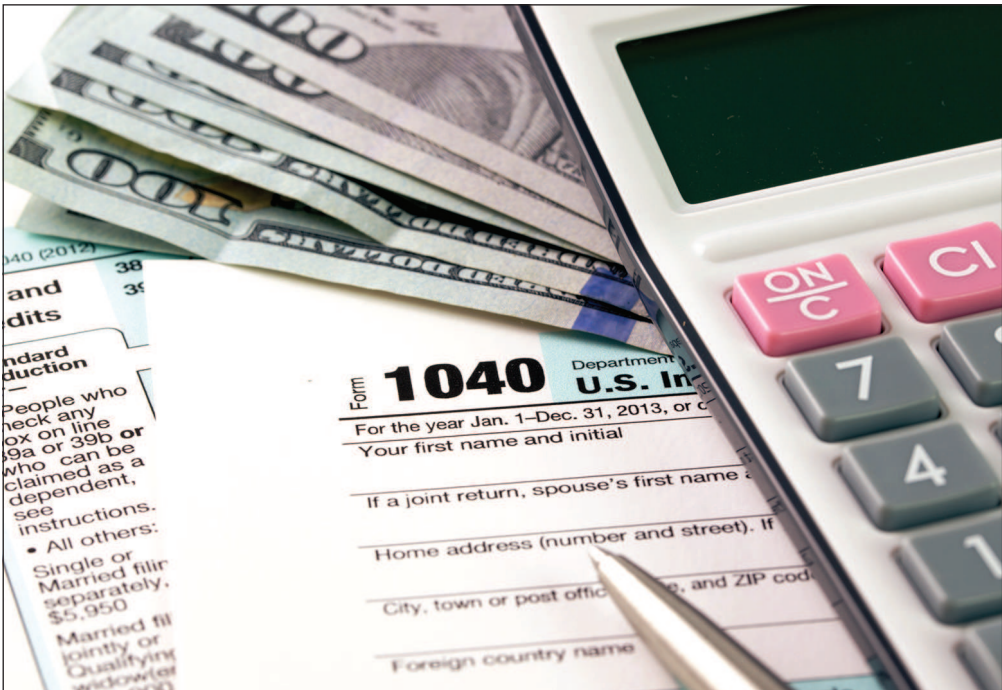
But any quarterly payments for 2020 still will be due on April 15.

The IRS has extended its deadline to July 15 for filing personal and corporate federal tax returns, making payments, contributing to an IRA for 2019 and making the first quarterly estimated tax payment for 2020. However, for those making quarterly payments, the “second” payment for 2020 still is due on June 15.

Wednesday was the deadline for the Oregon Department of Revenue to announce whether it will extend the state deadline.

A full-fledged delay until July could create up to a \$1.5 billion cash-flow problem for the state budget, Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, co-chair of the Legislature’s Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response, said in a committee meeting Tuesday.

“That’s a huge cash-flow problem, which probably takes many of the items we want to help with off the



Dreamstime / TNS

table, I’m afraid,” he said.

His comments drew a strong response from Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend.

“Cash-flow problems, really? The government just shut down about 90 percent of our businesses in the state of Oregon, who now have massive cash-flow problems. And the whole reason to delay the filing and payment is for them to be able to catch up,” Knopp said.

“So for the government to, at this point, claim poverty or

to claim cash-flow problems after what they’ve done to business, quite frankly just seems incredibly hypocritical.”

Knopp said the deadline should be delayed so businesses could recover and have sufficient cash flow to pay their taxes. Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, agreed and added, “I can tell you right now businesses across the state are laying off.”

Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, urged the state

government to stay disciplined: “That means we find out who’s in trouble and who’s not. I don’t want people who are doing just fine to hide behind those of us who really are struggling.”

Bynum, who co-owns several fast food restaurants in the Portland area, added that she probably wouldn’t have the cash to pay all her taxes.

“I’m one of those businesses that looks like it has a lot of money,” she said, “but it goes out faster than I can keep it.”

SCHOOLS

Continued from Page 1A

Witty said families could support that effort by providing a work space for their children and by setting a schedule for their study time.

Children should be assured that the staff is working to provide educational opportunities for them while they are at home, he says. And that includes older students who are preparing to transition to colleges and other post-secondary educations.

“We will be doing our utmost to be sure that their needs are cared for,” he said.

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is expected to

have more information about adjustments in graduation requirements for seniors by the weekend or Monday morning at the latest, Witty said.

“We have been given some indication that credits will be reduced for our seniors to make sure that everybody that is on track can graduate on time,” he added.

Once the ODE provides the information, Witty said he will meet with the Baker School Board to make necessary policy changes to accommodate ODE’s plan. The Board has scheduled a Zoom video conference session Tuesday from noon to 2:15 p.m.

The meeting, which had been set for Thursday, March 26, was re-

scheduled to Tuesday to allow time for receipt of ODE’s information.

Seniors can email Adriene Oster, who directs the Future Center at Baker High School, at adriene.oster@bakersd.org for help with scholarship applications and post-secondary planning. More information also is available by calling the Baker High School office at 541-524-2600.

Witty also assured families that free meal deliveries for ages 18 and under, whether students or not, will continue at area schools. He asked that those picking up hot lunch meals and the next day’s breakfast foods remember not to congregate at the sites. He reminded people to move quickly and efficiently to help

the process move smoothly and to protect others at the sites.

Meals are delivered from noon to 12:30 p.m. at Haines and Keating schools; 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. at Brooklyn and South Baker Schools; and from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Baker High School. Those who need help accessing the meals should call the District Office, 541-524-2260, Witty said.

The District is working with Child Care Resource and Referral to provide emergency child care for essential health care and emergency service workers.

More information is available by calling CaSandra Zeller at 541-523-7838 or Angela Lattin at the District Office, 541-524-2260.

Zeller can be reached by email at czeller@umchs.org. Lattin’s email address is angela.lattin@bakersd.org

Witty advised parents to expect weekly communication from teachers and building principals. The staff also will be available by email or phone to provide information and to answer questions.

He urged families to follow the health protocols as directed by the Oregon Health Authority and Baker County Health Department to protect vulnerable loved ones.

“Be safe,” Witty said in closing. “And we will be in communication on a regular basis as we move forward through this unprecedented time.”

Elections officials confident about May 19 primary

■ With the possibility of coronavirus restrictions continuing, Oregon’s vote-by-mail system gives the state a major advantage

By Jeff Mapes
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon elections officials say they’re confident about proceeding with the state’s scheduled May 19 primary — but they say it would be very different if they were talking about bringing hordes of would-be voters to thousands of polling stations amid the coronavirus pandemic.

“It would be really difficult,” said Multnomah County elections director Tim Scott. “I feel for the states that still do most of their voting on election day.”

Seven states and Puerto Rico have already postponed their primary elections, and more delays may be in the works. And if the pandemic continues next fall, it could also jeopardize the ability of voters in many states to participate in the November presidential election.

As a result, the mail voting system pioneered by Oregon and also used in Washington state is now getting new support nationally. Several voting rights groups are pushing for a major expansion of mail balloting. And U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, is partnering with Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minnesota, on a bill to require every state to provide the option of a mail ballot in the November election.

Wyden, who gained his seat in 1996 in the nation’s first all-mail election for a senator, said he now has a new pitch for the GOP majority in the Senate:

“What I’m telling my Republican colleagues is, ‘Look, we could be faced with a choice,’ he said, “of



Jerry Tomaselli / ChicagoTribune-TNS

either people not voting or people voting by mail. I don’t think that is even a close call, and I hope you won’t either.”

Wyden said his bill would provide \$500 million in new federal election aid for the states. Among other things, this would help states to pay the extra cost of mailing a ballot to every voter who asks for one. Voters could return those ballots by mail or drop them off at elections offices. The bill would also expand early voting centers now used in many states.

Mail voting has already become more popular around the country. Beyond Oregon and Washington, three other states — Colorado, Hawaii and Utah — now mail ballots to every voter. And many states have liberalized their absentee-ballot laws.

All told, nearly 27% of all voters cast their ballots by mail in the 2016 presidential election, double the

rate in 2004. And 40% voted early in some fashion.

But in 34 states, the majority of voters still cast their ballots on election day. And many of those states require voters to explain why they can’t vote at the polls before they can receive an absentee ballot.

As a result, many election experts say a dramatic move to mail balloting could be difficult.

“I think the nation is far away from” an Oregon-style system, said Charles Stewart, an elections expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A major expansion of absentee voting is more achievable, he said, although “it would be a big lift in many places.”

He said there are numerous administrative and technical requirements for mail balloting that Oregon and other states developed over the course of several years. And he said voters could also be suspicious of a sudden change in how

they vote.

Wyden and other mail voting supporters say they think states can successfully build on their current absentee-ballot programs, particularly with the help of federal aid.

Wyden also needs to overcome the traditional opposition from many Republicans who think mail balloting helps increase turnout among voters who lean Democratic. Wyden argues that older voters — who tend to skew Republican — may most need a mail option this year because their health risks from the coronavirus are higher.

Former Oregon Secretary of State Phil Keisling helped found a nonprofit called the National Vote at Home Institute, which promotes mail voting and provides help for elections officials. Keisling said the institute has received a surge of calls from states that want to expand mail balloting.

So far, it’s mostly been presidential-only primaries that have been delayed. But Keisling said some 44 states are soon scheduled to begin their regular primaries that include balloting for everything from members of Congress to city council members.

“We have a crisis on our hands about ‘small-d’ democracy and we need elections beginning with the primaries and continuing into the fall that maximize voter accessibility,” Keisling said. “They darn well need to take seriously about it being the only option to have.”

Democratic National Chairman Tom Perez has urged states to stick to their scheduled primary

schedules while providing easy mail ballot options as well as early voter centers to reduce crowding.

Still, that doesn’t mean Oregon won’t face any hurdles from the epidemic in its May 19 primary. Oregon and other states have increasingly urged people to stay at home and practice “social distancing.” That makes it harder to ensure the mail ballots are properly processed and counted.

Marion County Clerk Bill Burgess said he’s already worried that most of his temporary election workers are in a high-risk category for the coronavirus because they are over 60.

“Staffing may be much lighter than in a usual election,” Burgess said. He explained that he may run additional shifts around the election so he doesn’t have as many workers on duty at any one time. And both he and Scott, the Multnomah elections director, said they plan to reconfigure seating so that elections workers are not seated next to each other.

Scott also said he plans to “look at alternative sources for staffing,” including seeking to recruit Multnomah County employees who have been idled by the shutdown of many normal activities.

Burgess, who is also president of the statewide association of county clerks, said it may take longer to report election results on election night.

“Speed,” he said, “is not going to be as important as the accuracy and safety of our workers while we go through this.”

POLICY CHANGE STARTS SUNDAY

Baker library ceases item checkouts for at least 2 weeks

■ Due dates extended, late fines forgiven

Starting Sunday, March 29, the Baker County Library District will take a two-week pause in allowing people to check out items through the drive-up window, which had been open even after the library was closed due the coronavirus.

“For the past four weeks, I’ve been closely following the trajectory of coronavirus spread in our nation and northwest region,” Library Director Perry Stokes wrote in an email to the Herald. “The time is now to pause all physical services given that COVID-19 case counts are growing exponentially in nearby Oregon and Idaho counties, and our health care systems need time to ramp up to meet the coming siege.

“This additional pullback is part of the library’s tactical withdrawal strategy to maintain safety while providing limited services,” Stokes wrote. “We know this is an additional hardship for many, but the health and well-being of our staff and community must be our top priority.”

From March 29 until at least April 13, library patrons will be directed to digital resources only, such as downloadable eBooks and audiobooks from Library2Go.

All due dates will be extended, holds will be frozen, and late fines forgiven during this period. To help patrons get started with Library2Go, library staff will be available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. by phone, 541-523-6419, or email, info@bakerlib.org.

“This additional pullback is part of the library’s tactical withdrawal strategy to maintain safety while providing limited services,” Stokes wrote. “It is important to remember that we are fortunate to live in a time in which digital resources enable us to stay connected and continue to share materials though isolated at home. This not only safeguards physical health, but bolsters mental health, as well.”