

Lawmakers say COVID-19 aid should go directly to counties

By Sara Cline
Associated Press/Report for America

SALEM — Democratic and Republican lawmakers say county governments should directly receive tens of millions of dollars in federal coronavirus relief funds, rather than having the state government funnel them to Oregon communities.

The Legislature has debated how to spend \$1.4 billion in COVID-19 money for months but last week more than half of Oregon’s lawmakers signed a bipartisan letter — addressed to Gov. Kate Brown, Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem and Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland — requesting a \$200 million payout that they say had been promised to local governments.

“By keeping a disproportio-

tionate amount of the funds, the state has created inadequate resource distribution with significant statewide inequities in the amount of aid provided to local governments to help their communities respond to the COVID-19 pandemic,” the letter, signed by 47 of 90 lawmakers, read.

In April Oregon received \$1.39 billion through the federal CARES Act.

The bipartisan letter specified that according to United States Federal Treasury guidelines, 45% of the funds must be given to local government — about \$625 million.

The state’s Joint Emergency Board allocated \$450 million for state expenses, \$415 million for local governments and indigenous tribes, and the remaining \$525 million was placed in reserve, according to the Oregon Department of

Administrative Services.

Of the funds for local governments, state lawmakers divided up \$215 million for reimbursing local governments and tribes and \$200 million for local governments to pay for COVID-19 expenses such as personal protection equipment, contact tracing and testing.

In a letter by the Oregon League of Cities to Brown, only \$46 million has been released to cities, counties and districts to date.

Lawmakers said in their recent letter that the “need in many jurisdictions far exceeds the resources allocated from the State of Oregon.”

The letter further stated that a number of cities, including Seaside, Brookings and Medford, have already used the funds allocated as counties continue to address

child care, shelter, economic and public health needs of the community.

Lawmakers are asking that the state allocates an additional \$200 million “that the state had previously promised for local governments.”

Frustrations were reignited Monday when the Oregon Legislature’s Emergency Board met and approved using \$105 million of the funds for the state to buy and distribute personal protective equipment to Oregon cities and counties.

Legislative leaders had heard the request earlier in the month and denied it — several lawmakers, at the time, had complained that their counties and cities had not received their share of federal aid.

See COVID-19 AID / Page 5A

News of Record

FUNERAL PENDING
Raelene Florene Maddox: Her memorial service will take place Sept. 5 at 11 a.m. at Gray’s West & Co. Pioneer Chapel, 1500 Dewey Ave., with Pastor Lennie Spooner of the Baker City Nazarene Church officiating. To light a candle for Raelene, or to leave a condolence for her family, go to www.grayswestco.com

POLICE LOG
Baker City Police
THEFT III (Baker County Justice Court warrant): Alan William Wolfe, 33, of 880 Elm St., No. 1, 7:19 a.m. Wednesday, in the 1000 block of Walnut Street; cited and released.
FOURTH-DEGREE DOMESTIC ASSAULT: Justin Michael Shelton, 30, of 400 Second St., 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, on Elm Street; jailed.
FIRST-DEGREE CRIMINAL MISCHIEF and SECOND-DEGREE CRIMINAL MISCHIEF: Alexander Scott Gentry, 26, of 2190 Campbell St., 11:52 a.m. Thursday, at his home; cited and released.
AGGRAVATED FIRST-DEGREE THEFT, RESISTING ARREST and FAILURE TO

APPEAR (Two Baker County Justice Court warrants): Craig Anthony Willey, 42, of Baker City, 3:52 p.m. Thursday, in the 2100 block of Second Street; jailed.
PROBATION VIOLATION (Three Baker County Circuit Court warrants): Austin Mikel Coble, 24, of Baker City, 2:02 a.m. Friday, at 1226 Washington Ave., cited and released.
SECOND-DEGREE CRIMINAL TRESPASS: Trevor James Heath, 24, of Baker City, 4:23 a.m. Friday, in the 1500 block of Campbell Street; cited and released.
FOURTH-DEGREE DOMESTIC ASSAULT: Heather Eve Limbaugh, 46, of Baker City, 8:27 a.m. Thursday, in the 1000 block of Walnut St.; jailed and later released.
Crime reports
FIRST-DEGREE THEFT: In the 1000 block of Idlewood Drive, between May 1 and June 25; taken: a generator valued at \$3,500 belonging to Claire Duncan, 77, of Baker City.
Oregon State Police
FAILURE TO MAKE ANNUAL SEX OFFENDER REGISTRATION REPORT: Michael Scott Tugman, 32, of Baker City, 11:45 a.m. Wednesday; cited and released.

Brown: Travel restrictions possible if virus rate stays steady

By Nick Budnick
Pamplin Media Group

With the spread of coronavirus in Oregon holding fairly steady, Gov. Kate Brown on Friday said she is prepared to impose new restrictions if things don’t improve.

Brown said that to hasten the opening of schools around Oregon for in-person instruction, she is prepared

to impose restrictions on travel in and out of Oregon, and potentially other restrictions, too.

Defending her past decisions as a balancing act, Brown said, “unfortunately, it’s still not enough. Our infection rate is still too high to get all of our kids safely



Brown

back in classrooms at most of our schools this fall.”

She said the current infection rate is still way too high.

“If we cannot improve our trajectory over the rest of the month,” she said, “unfortunately I will need to add more restrictions.”

Under the latest projections, she said, it looks to be about 200 days be-

fore schools can reopen for classroom instruction. But with significant improvements that figure can be cut to as little as six weeks.

Oregon health officials in the same press conference said that the latest modeling report indicates that the state continues to hold steady in transmission rates, with each case of coronavirus leading to one more.

That reproduction rate needs to drop from 1.0 to .75, they said.

However, Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen said he thinks the modeling report is lagging the current situation. He cited encouraging signs in recent weeks that he said show improvement, such as a drop in confirmed cases and in the rate of positive coronavirus tests.

TOUR

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The group at times brought together more than 30 people from throughout the state and region.

“I’m just really excited for this,” Lamb said. “To start at the ground level and see it come to fruition is really exciting.”

Part of the group’s research included visiting centers in other communities such as Pendleton, Boardman and the Earl Boyles Elementary School in Portland.

“This will be a great asset in the community along with our community partners for the young families in our town,” Lamb said.

Along with providing preschool and kindergarten classes in one location, the Baker Center will be a one-stop shop for other family services.



Chris Collins/Baker City Herald

The main entrance to the new Baker Early Learning Center will be on the east side of the former North Baker School Building at 2725 Seventh St.

Angela Lattin, who will direct the Baker Early Learning Center, said partners who will be included in programs are the Department of Human Services, Advantage Dental, Building Healthy Families and Head Start.

“We’re talking with others who would be a good fit for young families,” she said. “Some will rent space and some will come in to offer services.”

Cassie Hibbert, project manager with the Wenaha Group, which has an office in Pendleton, led the Aug. 13 tour along with Lattin and Josh Rohner of Sid Johnson & Co.

Rohner is a grandson of the namesake of the longtime family owned Baker City construction business, which was hired as the general contractor on the project.

A 1995 Baker High School graduate, Rohner said he spent his K-5 years at North Baker Elementary School, and many other family members also spent part of their childhoods in the building.

The total cost of the project is \$2.3 million. Grant funding totals \$200,000. Other money to help pay for the project includes \$1.8 million from the state Student Investment Act; a District contribution of \$96,158; and \$80,000 from the state Preschool Promise fund.

The original three-story North Baker tuff stone construction, which dates to 1909, had a new section added to its north side in the 1950s. A wing was added to the south end of the building in the 1970s.

In its reincarnation as the Baker Early Learning Center, the ground floor of the building’s north end will house four Head Start classrooms of 20 students each. The funding to expand the Head Start program at the new Center comes through the state Department of Education’s Oregon Preschool Promise Program, said Robert Kleng, director of Eastern Oregon University Head Start, which serves Baker and Union counties.

Kleng said the Preschool Promise funding allowed the



“I knew if we applied our energy and kept pulling, we’d find a way to get it done.”

— Mark Witty, superintendent, Baker School District

Baker Head Start program to increase its numbers from 60 preschool slots to 95. Eighty of those students will move to the refurbished classrooms in the North Baker building.

The remaining 15 slots will be for 3-year-olds who will remain at the Baker Head Start Center at 1927 16th St. Future plans call for developing a blended care center for children from birth to age 3 in that building, Kleng said.

Meals will be prepared at the Head Start school and delivered to the North Baker building where the preschoolers will be served family-style meals as is the tradition in Head Start classrooms, he said.

Five classrooms at the south end of the building have been remodeled as kindergarten classrooms.

When school starts Sept. 8, kindergartners, along with Baker students at all other grades, will be taking classes remotely rather than in their classrooms due to the coronavirus pandemic.

When in-person classes resume, meals for kindergartners will be prepared at Baker High School, a few blocks to the north, and driven to North Baker. The kindergartners also will eat together in a family-style setting in their classrooms, Lattin said.

She hopes preschoolers, unlike older students, will be able start their year with in-person sessions when their classrooms open Oct. 5.

The Baker School District closed the North Baker

School in 2009 as part of cost-cutting measure when state funding for schools was reduced because of the economic recession.

Since then the building has provided space for a variety of uses. It has housed the Baker Web Academy and Baker Early College, which moved earlier this year to the former Ellingson Lumber Co. office building at 3000 Broadway St.

The North Baker Education Center, as it has been known in recent times, also has been home to Building Healthy Families, Marla’s Mall, and in past years has provided space for summer programs.

Eagle Cap Innovative High School classes and the District’s alternative school program will continue to operate on the third floor of the building. Students in those programs will enter the building from the west side by buzzing in to communicate with their teachers, who will let them in as needed.

The other entry will be via the east side of the building at the school’s traditional front door, which will also include new safety and security measures.

Students in Baker Technical Institute’s Culinary Arts program also will continue to use the former school cafeteria, which is getting upgrades as well. Those students will be admitted by their teacher during class periods.

Marla’s Mall, which provides free clothing and other necessities to community

residents, will be relocated to a new yet-to-be-determined site, Witty said.

Community partners will have their offices on the second floor, which had housed the Web Academy and Baker Early College. Future plans also include hiring a private child care provider to be housed on the ground level, Lattin said.

In addition to the changes that can be seen, such as the new flooring, new windows and new cabinets, other necessary, but less obvious, work is taking place. That includes asbestos abatement throughout the building and electrical, plumbing and fire alarm upgrades.

The Board also got the chance to see the improvements that are taking place outside on the school grounds.

A parking lot is under construction on the west side of the property where parents will park to deliver their children to the learning center.

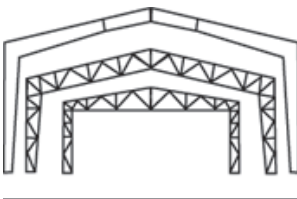
Basketball hoops moved from that area will be placed in a former parking lot on the north end of the building for use by neighborhood children. And the District is working with Head Start to provide an all-inclusive playground in a fenced playground area on the property.

“It’s nice to see the building rehabilitated,” Witty said. “I’m just thrilled to death that everything came together. This will be an asset for the community.”

A formal grand opening is planned for 10 a.m. Friday, Oct. 9, Lattin said.

“It will be in-person to the extent possible, depending on COVID guidelines,” she said.

A family activity designed as a drive-thru event is planned for Saturday, Oct. 10. More details will be announced later.



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We want to thank Heart 'n Home Hospice, especially Seth Payton, for his fast response time and the courteous and kind manner in which our family was treated. We would also like to thank Gray's West & Co. Pioneer Chapel for their kind and loving spirit.

The family of Tena Willis