

U.S. needs to brace itself for more deadly storms, experts say

BY MATTHEW DALY AND ELLEN KNICKMEYER

The Associated Press

Deadly weather will be hitting the U.S. more often, and America had better get better at dealing with it, experts said Wednesday as Texas and other states battled winter storms that blew past the worst-case planning of utilities, governments and millions of shivering citizens.

This week's storms — with more still heading east — fit a pattern of worsening extremes under climate change and demonstrate anew that local, state and federal officials have failed to do nearly enough to prepare for greater and more dangerous weather.

At least two dozen people have died this week, including

from fire or carbon monoxide poisoning while struggling to find warmth inside their homes. In Oklahoma City, an Arctic blast plunged temperatures in the state capital as low as 14 degrees below zero.

"This is a different kind of storm," said Kendra Clements, one of several businesspeople in Oklahoma City who opened their buildings to shelter homeless people, some with frostbite, hypothermia and icicles in their hair. It was also a harbinger of what social service providers and governments say will be a surge of increased needs for society's most vulnerable as climate and natural disasters worsen.

Other Americans are at risk as well. Power supplies of

all sorts failed in the extreme cold, including natural gas-fired power plants that were knocked offline amid icy conditions and, to a smaller extent, wind turbines that froze and stopped working. More than 100 million people live in areas under winter weather warnings, watches or advisories, and blackouts are expected to continue in some parts of the country for days.

The crisis sounded an alarm for power systems throughout the country: As climate change worsens, severe conditions that go beyond historical norms are becoming ever more common. Texas, for example, expects power demand to peak in the heat of summer, not the depths of winter, as it did this week.



James Andrews uses a plastic bag to stay warm and dry while he walks Wednesday in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Mike Simons/Tulsa World via AP

Delays

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In addition to the sixth likely congressional district, Oregon Legislature's 60 House and 30 Senate seats will need new boundaries. Data to redraw the maps was due April 1 — but census officials now say it won't arrive until Sept. 30 — six months late.

"The biggest reason? COVID-19. It's something beyond the Census Bureau's control," Kathleen Styles, the census bureau's top redistricting official said last week.

State officials need the block-by-block data to draw districts that meet federal and state civil rights guidelines.

The late September delivery date is 45 days after Oregon's self-imposed deadline for submitting maps. The mess will land in the Oregon Supreme Court, which will referee whether the Legislature gets a shot at reapportionment, it goes to the secretary of state or some other result. The congressional maps could go to a five-judge panel.

Big population increases over the past decade will add

legislative districts to Central Oregon and the Portland suburbs. But lawmakers and potential challengers won't know what districts will look like earlier than late fall at best.

Expulsion of House member back on track

The winter storm and power outages led the House to cancel a planned floor session this week which would have included a vote on expelling Rep. Diego Hernandez, D-Portland, over allegations of sexual harassment. Hernandez has refused repeated requests by Gov. Kate Brown and top legislative officials to resign. The vote — listed as House Resolution 1 — is now scheduled for Feb. 23.

Legislative logjam

Lawmakers have submitted thousands of new bills and resolutions for the current session — with the overwhelming majority headed for the trash bin.

Concern over possible right-wing violence last month and winter storms this month have put the 2021 session behind schedule from the beginning. The Legislature is constitution-

ally required to adjourn July 1.

Deadlines are starting to loom. Friday is the deadline for drafted bills to be sent from staff to lawmakers. The final day that bills can be introduced is Feb. 23. With the exception of bills that go to Rules or Ways & Means committees, bills that don't hit key deadlines automatically die.

Bills must have a work session — when a bill is brought up for a vote by committee — scheduled by March 19. The work session must occur by April 13. At each point, the number of dead bills grows.

Additional deadlines for floor votes, hearings and work sessions in the second chamber and floor votes in the second chamber are all tripwires for bills to die. By the time the Legislature adjourns, the legislative carnage at each point accounts for the overwhelming majority of legislation.

The logistics of virtual committee hearings and the need to limit floor sessions because of the COVID-19 infection level will make it difficult to make up ground already lost.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said last week

there will be little time left to debate beyond a short list of pandemic-related bills, economic recovery, housing, police reform and the sprawling state budget.

2022 election early birds

It's been just a little over three months since the 2020 election, but candidates are starting to pop up for 2022 races.

Sixteen candidate campaign finance committees have been created. Senate Majority Leader Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, is the biggest name to have a 2022 committee so far. Others include Bud Pierce, who has declared his candidacy for the GOP nomination for the open governor's seat in 2022. Pierce was the 2016 GOP nominee for governor, losing to Brown, who is barred by term limits from seeking another term.

In a separate move, Raiph Huber, a Springfield private security officer, has filed with the Federal Election Commission to create a fundraising committee to run in the Republican primary in the 2nd Con-

gressional District, a seat held by freshman Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario.

While candidacy for Congress must be filed with the state, fundraising is handled by the federal commission.

Exoneration expenses

People who are incarcerated for crimes they did not commit would be eligible for state payments under Senate Bill 499, introduced by Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer.

Oregon is currently one of 15 states that does not automatically allocate money to those exonerated for crimes they didn't commit. The average allocation in states that do offer aid is \$50,000 per year behind bars, according to the Oregon Innocence Project, which works to clear wrongly convicted people.

The group says that 21 people in Oregon who served nearly 90 years cumulatively in prison have been exonerated in recent years. The bill is currently in the Senate Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation committee. No hearing date has been scheduled.

Kropf steps up

Until the past week, new Rep. Jason Kropf, D-Bend, was not listed as a sponsor of any legislation during the current session.

Kotek said it wasn't unusual for freshman lawmakers to go slow at the beginning, and lawmakers have been told that a lot of legislation won't be considered with the heavy workload and limited time.

But Kropf is now one of three chief co-sponsors on House Bill 2593 — to establish a search and rescue card that would defray costs of local government efforts to find lost or injured people.

He's also signed on as co-sponsor of five other bills — a requirement for gun locks, limits on transfers of gun ownerships, plus legal services for inmates, wildfire protection and low-income housing assistance.

Kropf is vice-chair of the House Economic Recovery and Prosperity Committee, which plots the course of the state's comeback from COVID-19. He's also on the House Judiciary and Joint Ways & Means committees.

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