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BRIEFING

Industry pushing COVID-19 'passports'

Leading airline and business groups are asking the Biden administration to develop temporary credentials that would let travelers show they have been tested and vaccinated for COVID-19, a step that the airline industry believes will help revive travel.

Various groups and countries are working on developing so-called vaccine passports aimed at allowing more travel. But airlines fear that a smattering of regional credentials will cause confusion and none will be widely accepted.

"It is crucial to establish uniform guidance" and "the U.S. must be a leader in this development," more than two dozen groups said in a letter Monday to White House coronavirus-response coordinator Jeff Zients. However, the groups said that vaccination should not be a requirement for domestic or international travel.

The groups include the main U.S. and international airline trade organizations, airline labor unions and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The White House did not immediately comment.

Baxter, Moderna strike vaccine deal

Baxter International will work with Moderna to help manufacture COVID-19 vaccines, the company announced Monday.

Baxter has agreed to help manufacture about 60 million to 90 million doses in 2021, the Deerfield, Illinois-based company said in a news release. Baxter will fill vials with vaccine and finish the packaging process.

The work will take place at Baxter BioPharma Solutions' facilities in Bloomington, Indiana, which employs more than 700 people on a 600,000-square-foot campus.

"Baxter is honored to provide our deep expertise in vaccine manufacturing to help partners like Moderna bolster the supply of their vaccine," Marie Keeley, vice president for Baxter BioPharma Solutions, said in the news release.

Yellen optimistic about labor market

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the Biden administration is working toward getting the labor market "back on track" by later this year or early in 2022.

"We're really concerned about permanent scarring from this crisis, and it's focused us very heavily on doing everything we can to get back on track as quickly as we can," Yellen said in a virtual discussion with International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva Monday. "By next year I think there's a prospect that — with an all-out effort on vaccination and reopening schools — that we can really get the labor market back on track, later this year or next year."

There were nearly 10 million unemployed Americans in February, almost double the pre-pandemic level, underscoring a lengthy road to recovery for the labor market.

— Bulletin wire reports

Bend's median home price holds in February

Bulletin staff report

The median sales price for a single-family home in Bend remained about the same as it was since the start of the year, but was more than \$100,000 higher than the same period the year before, according to the Beacon Report for Central Oregon.

Home sales held strong because inventory remained low and a large share of the market sales data are in the million-dollar plus category, said Donnie

Montagner, owner of the Beacon Appraisal Group of Redmond. The median sales price was \$575,000 in Bend and \$373,000 in Redmond during February.

And typical of this time of year, the number of sales dropped to 117 in Bend, a decline from the high of 318 sales in the month of July.

"We're in a seller's market," Montagner said, "beyond a doubt. People are discovering the value of Redmond. Redmond is the next step if you're

priced out of the market in Bend."

Homebuyers, especially those from out of town, find Bend attractive, Montagner said. That is what is driving up the median sales price.

"Bend is a jewel in the middle of Oregon, and the other communities around it become in high demand as well," he said.

The Beacon Report uses the median sales price, which is the midpoint value of all transactions in a month.

In both Redmond and Bend, homes

were on the market an average of four days. If no new homes came on the market, the current level of inventory of homes for sale would last about a week. The growth in home prices is being fueled, in part by low interest rates and the lack of inventory.

Sunriver, with a smaller sample size to draw from, has seen more high-end properties sell in recent months, bumping up the median single-family home price to \$771,000 in February, according to the report.



Projects in Central, Eastern Oregon get funding

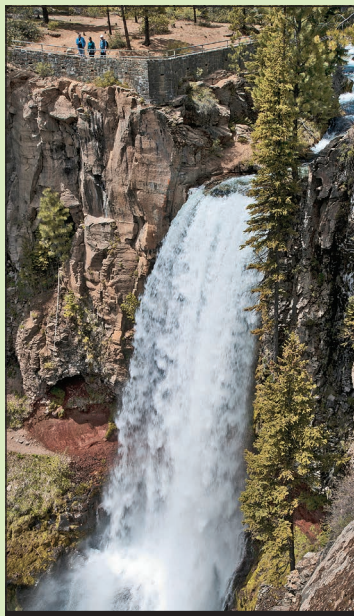
The Observer (La Grande)

The Oregon Tourism Commission has awarded \$913,000 to 34 projects across the state, with more than \$175,000 going to seven projects in Central and Eastern Oregon.

The grants will help fund the development or enhancement of COVID-19-appropriate visitor experiences through the Destination Ready program, according to a news release from the commission, which does business as Travel Oregon.

In Central and Eastern Oregon, grant amounts and the organizations receiving the awards are:

- \$40,000 to the Central Oregon Visitors Association to launch the Navigate Oregon transportation pilot project in partnership with Oregon-based transportation company, Northwest Navigator.
- 12,500 to Discover Your Forest to help install trailhead signs in the De-



Bulletin file photos

ABOVE: In this 2016 photo, a group of hikers stops to take a look at Tumalo Falls from the upper viewpoint while visiting the area. **AT TOP:** The view in this 2015 photo shows Big Indian Canyon toward the Steens Mountain summit.

schutes and Ochoco national forests to promote stewardship.

- \$21,711 to the Greater Hells Canyon Council to help with mapping and trail maintenance operations for The Blue Mountains Trail, a 556-mile thru-hiking experience through Northeast Oregon.

- \$20,000 to the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association for land stewardship and maintenance efforts to prepare Eastern Oregon's most visited public lands for the coming season, including the Wallowa Whitman National Forest, The Owyhee Region, The Steens Mountain Wilderness and the Alvord Desert.

- \$24,500 to the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association for updates to six Eastern Oregon Farm Trail brochures with distribution, and creation of a new on-the-ground kiosk.

- \$25,000 to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to make infrastructure and accessibility improvements to establish Marr Pond as the only ADA accessible fishing facility in Wallowa County.

- \$35,000 to the city of John Day to create a community "pit stop" with food truck stalls, improved parking and new public restrooms.

COVID-19 | Economic impact

Oregon businesses are, by and large, still in business

BY MIKE ROGOWAY

The Oregonian

Scores of beloved Oregon businesses permanently shut their doors during the pandemic, unable to endure the prolonged downturn as safety restrictions limited business — or customers simply stayed away.

With COVID-19 cases in steep decline since mid-January, though, and government restrictions easing, there's reason for optimism that the pandemic's ultimate toll on individual businesses may be less severe than many feared.

Bankruptcies were actually down last year, in Oregon and across the country, despite the sudden recession. And just 5% of bars and restaurants surrendered their Oregon liquor licenses in 2020. Only 6%

of lottery retailers — typically bars — shut down.

Meanwhile, the total number of businesses registered with the Oregon Employment Department increased in the six months after the pandemic began — with an annual growth rate of 3.9%, a little faster than the growth rate in the 12 months before the pandemic.

What's going on? Josh Lehner with the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis notes that small-business income in the state was roughly flat last year. That's largely because of the Paycheck Protection Program, which funneled \$7 billion in forgivable loans into those small businesses.

"Absent the PPP, proprietors' income fell nearly 20%, which is an apocalyptic

drop," Lehner wrote in a new analysis.

It's been an excruciating year for businesses owners and many are just limping along, Lehner told lawmakers last month. It may be some time yet before people feel safe packing back into restaurants, bars, bowling alleys and movie theaters.

Still, it appears that a large majority of Oregon businesses have held up over the past year and for most, the worst may be behind them now.

"The fact that entrepreneurship has remained so strong means the total number of businesses in the economy will continue to increase," Lehner wrote. "Replacing the economic role of the lost firms takes time as does finding a job at a different firm for the laid off workers, but this process is underway."

OREGON

Testimony split on bills to raise, redistribute pot taxes

BY LARRY MEYER

Argus Observer (Ontario)

Two bills introduced in the Oregon Legislature related to marijuana sales tax received support from some city officials during a recent hearing and opposition from marijuana industry representatives.

House Bill 2014 would distribute marijuana taxes by population and location, based on a municipality's share of overall retail sales. Currently distribution is based on population and the number of licensed marijuana businesses.

House Bill 2015 would allow local governments to raise the local tax on the sale of marijuana from the current 3% up to 10%. The increase would need to be approved by the governing body and then go to the voters. The state also has a 17% tax on marijuana.

Ontario Mayor Riley Hill said his city is the second-largest retailer of marijuana in Oregon behind Portland, realizing about \$1 million a year in sales. He estimates about 90% of those sales come from Idaho, but did not provide evidence to support that claim.

The impacts on Ontario include traffic, infrastructure, public safety and homelessness, Hill said.

Ontario resident Cydney Cooke, who also serves on the city planning commission, submitted testimony opposing both bills. Her letter stated that she does not support the city getting any more money. She wrote that the money that has been received to date has not been used "to make any improvements to the lives of citizens," including spending any of it on addressing issues, such as the homeless population.

Casey Houlihan, representing Oregon pot retailers, said legal retailers in Oregon struggle to compete with the black market.

Houlihan said raising taxes would cause an increase in prices on marijuana making legal product less competitive. "We feel that such a steep increase in the cost of retail cannabis is likely to displace a very large and significant percentage of consumers from the legal market," Houlihan said in his statement.

The League of Oregon Cities opposes HB 2014 because it would take money from some cities and give it to others. But the organization supports HB 2015, allowing cities to raise taxes, said Mark Gharst, a lobbyist for the league.

In submitted testimony, Gharst said Measure 110, which decriminalized drugs and was passed by voters in November, will cause a shift in the allocation of state marijuana taxes. The measure takes marijuana tax revenue and allocates it to drug treatment.