

# Senate clears funds for summer programs and wildfire recovery

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

Money for summer educational and recreational programs, wildfire recovery and other purposes has been included in budget bills on their way to Gov. Kate Brown.

The Oregon Senate voted Thursday to pass three bills to rebalance the current state budget. The House passed them April 1.

One of the bills adds \$250 million for summer educational and recreational programs. It also has \$3.7 million for 11 local governments to repair damage from the Labor Day wildfires and \$20 million for seven local governments to fund shelters — known as navigation centers — that help people find housing and other services. One of those centers is in Bend, which is getting \$2.5 million.

“The past year has been hard on our students and their families. They are struggling with school ... and their mental health. Today, we made sure they have opportunities to learn and play this summer,” Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said in a statement after the vote. “We also passed funding for communi-

ties dealing with homelessness and last year’s fires.”

More than \$1.1 million in wildfire recovery money will be shared by Marion County, the cities of Detroit and Gates, and the Idanha-Detroit Rural Fire Protection District, which lost its truck in the Beachie Creek wildfire.

“The process of rebuilding from fire is just beginning, and this money will provide the first step to help families get their lives back,” Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod of Lyons, who lost his home in the fire, said afterward. “I look forward to securing more funding for my community.”

## Summer programs

Here are details of the \$250 million for summer programs:

- For high school students behind on their credits for the past two academic years because of the coronavirus pandemic, \$71.9 million, with school districts putting up a 25% match from federal pandemic aid they will get separately. Districts qualify for money if half of high school students participate.
- For students from kindergarten through fifth grade, \$93.7 million, with school dis-

tricts putting up a 25% match, for academic or other enrichment programs. Districts will get money based on the distribution formula for regular state aid, but more weight will be given to students at the poverty level. Assuming a cost of \$1,800 per student, the state estimates that up to 70,000 children could benefit.

- For child care, \$30 million, plus \$10 million in federal funds.

- For preschool programs, \$12 million, plus \$11.2 million in federal funds, for one-time activities this summer.

- For summer recreation activities, \$40 million that the Oregon Community Foundation will award in grants to public agencies and nonprofit groups, such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs.

- For parents whose children have disabilities, suffer from trauma or are at risk of placement into the child welfare system, \$1.2 million. The state estimates this program could support about 600 parents.

Money not spent by Jan. 1 will return to state coffers.

## Other spending

- Other items of note: \$20 million total in grants

to seven local governments, including \$2.5 million for the city of Bend, for navigation centers that help people find housing and other services.

- \$20 million from marijuana sales taxes during this budget cycle for the Oregon Health Authority to start work on the new addiction recovery centers that Oregon voters approved in Measure 110 last year. Senate Bill 846, which the Senate passed March 25 but the House has not yet considered, would set the start date for the new centers on Jan. 1, instead of Oct. 1 as stated in Measure 110.

- \$2.9 million to the Oregon Food Bank to enable it to make emergency food purchases. The food bank and its network of 20 regional banks received \$2.9 million in December to cover emergency purchases for the first three months of this year.

- \$15.7 million in federal funds from the National Guard Bureau for construction of a third barracks and associated buildings at Camp Umatilla, an Oregon National Guard training center in Hermiston. The original federal grant for two barracks was \$11.3 million.

■ [pwong@pamplinmedia.com](mailto:pwong@pamplinmedia.com)

# Civics requirement for graduation in Oregon gets bipartisan support

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

Democrats and Republicans in the Oregon Senate are divided on many issues — but not on the importance of teaching how democratic government works.

A 25-3 vote by the Senate on Wednesday approved Senate Bill 513, which would require high school students to complete one semester — one-half credit — of civics before graduation starting in 2025-26. The bill goes to the House, which has similar legislation pending.

Oregon students already are required to complete 24 credits before graduation, four in English and three in math, the rest determined by administrative rule. Lawmakers in 2017 passed a bill, also sponsored by a Republican, to “encourage” districts to offer civics instruction. But it was not a requirement.

Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod of Lyons said civics should be added, given that only 24% of students tested in a 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress — otherwise known as the nation’s report card — were proficient or better in

civics. The average score on civics was 153 of 300.

Girod, the bill’s chief sponsor, said it is common for his staff and that of other legislators to get calls and messages relating to federal, county and city matters.

“This bill plays an essential and critical role in ensuring that Oregon students not only have a grasp of the democratic process, but also learn how to participate in it,” he said. “As a legislative body, we very well know how government works. It is our duty and responsibility to make sure that generations after us do as well.”

Kevin Lepley, president of the Oregon Council for the Social Studies and a teacher at Kings Valley Charter School in Independence, said civics instruction is scattershot now. “There is inequity in civics education where some students receive dedicated focus on the subject while others receive limited instruction scattered across multiple social science classes,” Lepley said in a statement after the Senate vote. “This inequity has real implications for our students and our society and it must be addressed.”

## Shelter

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The money to buy the motel comes from a state program called Project Turnkey, wherein the Legislature allocated \$35 million to be given to governments that applied last year to buy hotels to turn into homeless shelters.

The council entered into the agreement in February and ever since then has been evaluating the property. The property was initially attractive because it had 68 rooms, including a couple of apartments, Economic Development Director Carolyn Eagan said Thursday.

But after weeks of looking at the property more closely, city staff found structural issues that necessitate high-cost renovations. The foundation is a key issue for the building, which was built in 1950, Eagan said. It has needed repairs for a long time, and while some repairs had been done they were “not complete,” she said.

“As we began to uncover and then understand the type of renovations and the degree of renovations, our timeline for opening began to get really pushed out,” Eagan said.

Because the issues are with the foundation below ground



Ryan Brennecke/Bulletin file

The exterior of Old Mill & Suites Motel in Bend.

level, it was hard for the city to get contractors on the ground to estimate what renovations would cost in total, Eagan said, but the city’s best guess was around \$2 million.

The type of work it would take to renovate the motel would also push up against a timeline provided by the Oregon Community Foundation, which is the organization distributing the Project Turnkey money. Per the Legislature, the foundation is charged with distributing this money before June 30, with the assumption being the city would need to make an acquisition by this date as well, Eagan said.

“With concrete you can’t just pour it and just build the next day,” Eagan said.

Eagan said the city might reconsider an agreement with

the owner of Old Mill & Suites Motel if the owner decided “selling the hotel is a priority” and if he understood “the condition of his building.”

There are other hotels the city is considering purchasing, Eagan said, though she declined to name them. The council will be considering new purchase and sales agreements at its meeting April 21, she said.

When asked whether the city feared running into a similar issues with entering a new agreement with a new hotel, Eagan said she thinks there is a healthy understanding of what the challenges are, but that this was not a reason not to do it.

“It’s genuinely in my personal interest to see this be a successful project,” Eagan said. “We are doing everything we

can to deliver on this front.”

In Redmond, a similar project is moving forward. The Bethlehem Inn, which operates a homeless shelter in Bend, has entered a purchase and sales agreement with the Greenway Motel in Redmond on Birch Avenue, near U.S. Highway 97.

Gwenn Wysling, the executive director of The Bethlehem Inn, said the motel has 30 rooms, which will be able to host up to 30 people amid COVID-19 health guidelines and up to 90 people when those capacity restrictions are lifted. Wysling would not disclose how much Bethlehem Inn is offering to pay for the motel.

“It’s a motel in good condition and certainly we’ve been appreciative of the owners working on this,” she said.

The goal is to get the shelter open by June 30. The Bethlehem Inn is looking to hire staff for the new shelter, and Wysling is asking those who are interested to visit the shelter’s website.

“We have done the due diligence to pick a property we feel will serve the Redmond community and the community at large for many years into the future,” she said.

■ Reporter: 541-633-2160, [bvissler@bendbulletin.com](mailto:bvissler@bendbulletin.com)

# Fire, propane tank explosions destroy Eugene homeless camp

The Associated Press

EUGENE — Authorities say a homeless camp caught fire underneath a bridge in Eugene early Wednesday, leading multiple propane tanks to explode and destroy the tents and possessions of people living there.

Noelle Wade, who had been staying there for three weeks, said she woke up in the middle of the night to flames engulfing her tent before other camp residents pulled her out. The Register-Guard reported.

Located under the Ferry Street Bridge, residents say more than a half dozen people had been living there.

The Eugene Police Department said the blaze “most likely” started with a warming fire that was too close to structures and a propane tank. When police arrived, they saw a “large fire under the bridge with multiple explosions,” according to a news release. Officers shut down Ferry Street Bridge because at one point flames shot up the sides of it.

## Breakthrough

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The 168 breakthrough cases in 25 counties are through April 2, according to the Oregon Health Authority statement.

Health officials defined a vaccine breakthrough occurring when a person receives a positive COVID-19 test result at least 14 days after the final dose of any vaccine series.

More than 700,000 people in Oregon are fully vaccinated,

according to state health officials. In about 11% of the vaccine breakthrough cases, the person was hospitalized within 30 days after testing positive, and most occurred in people older than 65 or with underlying health conditions.

In Deschutes County, more than 87% of those 80 or older have been vaccinated, according to the Deschutes County Health Services. In addition, about 80% of the residents 65 and older have received their

first shot as of March 24, health services reported in an email.

“We are concerned about the increase in COVID-19 cases,” said Morgan Emerson, Deschutes County Health Services spokeswoman. “We are making great progress in vaccinating the community, but it is still essential to continue the things that we know prevent the spread of COVID-19 — wear a mask, avoid large gatherings, socialize outside when possible and wash your hands frequently.”

■ Reporter: 541-633-2117, [sroig@bendbulletin.com](mailto:sroig@bendbulletin.com)

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