

# Oregon Gov. Kate Brown delivers State of the State address

By Peter Wong  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Kate Brown gave an unusual state of the state talk, her next to last as Oregon's governor.

The virtual address Thursday wasn't unusual. It's become commonplace in the 10 months since the coronavirus pandemic swept through the world and health protocols call for social distancing.

Brown herself noted that Thursday was exactly one year ago, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed the first COVID-19 case in the United States, that she convened a state team to prepare for a potential outbreak. Brown issued her first executive orders on the pandemic March 8; most are still in effect.

What was unusual was that Brown invited four other speakers to join her virtually for 45 minutes to discuss her priorities of ending the pandemic

and promoting vaccinations, recovering from the Labor Day wildfires, and advancing racial equity.

They were:

- Dr. Antwon Chavis, a pediatrician at Doernbecher Children's Hospital/Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, who spoke about how the pandemic affected children and families.

- Chief Christiana Rainbow Plews of the Upper McKenzie Rural Fire Protection District, who directed efforts against the Holiday Farms fire even as her own home burned.

- Reyna Lopez of PCUN farmworkers union based in Woodburn and Paul Solomon of Sponsors Inc. of Eugene, both members of the governor's Racial Justice Council, which recommended steps toward racial equity that Gov. Brown included in her proposed 2021-23 budget.

Echoing the "Build Back Better" campaign theme of President Joe

Biden, who took office the day before, Brown said it was not enough for Oregon to recover from the pandemic, the resulting economic downturn, and the wildfires.

"We must recognize that going back to the 'way things were' will not move us forward," she said. "Every difficult turn of this past year has only proven this point, further exacerbating existing disparities ... The first step to creating opportunity is recognizing that racism is endemic to our systems, impacting every part of our culture and our economy. I am committed to ensuring that the world we build as we emerge from this last year is a more equitable one."

Brown has two years to go in her second term. She leaves office on Jan. 9, 2023.

## A different address

The Democratic chief executive passed up the traditional forum

during an odd-numbered year. A personal appearance at a joint session of the Oregon Legislature in the Capitol in Salem. Leaders deemed it too risky to gather so many people in the House chamber for what could have been a super-spreader event.

Instead of relying on her own words, or quoting others, Brown turned to four others to help her make her points.

Among Brown's priorities in her budget, which she unveiled Dec. 1:

- Proposed investments to expand access to affordable health care.

- Broadband expansion statewide to ensure that every single school across Oregon is connected to the internet.

- Support to help communities create response plans and fire evacuation routes so that they are better equipped for future fire seasons.

- More than \$10 billion invested in K-12 schools and early education so that Oregon can close the opportunity gap and build an antiracist cur-

riculum that is honest about the past.

- \$250 million in affordable housing, homelessness prevention and rental assistance.

- Prioritizing criminal justice reform.

Brown acknowledged that her proposed two-year, \$25.6 billion budget from the tax-supported general fund and lottery proceeds — though up \$2 billion from projected spending for the cycle ending June 30 — isn't enough to meet the state's needs in education, public health and health care, and other services. For example, the proposed state school fund is barely above the current \$9 billion that Oregon's 197 districts share.

"It is a budget built on sacrifice and hard choices," she said. "While our state can deliver the core services that Oregonians expect us to, it doesn't go far enough to heal the pain of 2020."

State lawmakers have until June 30 to complete work on around 100 bills that make up the budget.

# Brown defends giving vaccine priority to teachers

Oregon one of five states where inoculation of those 65 and older has not begun

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown said Friday that she will stick with her controversial plan to vaccinate school staff ahead of elderly residents.

"My priorities have not changed," Brown said during a press conference.

The current state vaccination priority list calls for an estimated 100,000 K-12 teachers, school staff, child care workers and preschool employees to be eligible for vaccination Jan. 25.

Residents 80 and over will be eligible two weeks later, on

Feb. 8. The minimum age will drop five years each week until those 65 and over are eligible on March 1.

Eligibility does not ensure availability. Brown has set a goal of the state's program administering 12,000 shots per day. With the current vaccines requiring two shots spaced several weeks apart, the goal means 6,000 residents would be fully vaccinated each day in the near future.

Oregon is one of only five states in the nation where the inoculation of those 65 and over has not begun. As of Friday, it is the only state to prioritize educators and staff ahead of older residents.

Oregon has an estimated 767,500 residents who are aged 65 or over out of a total population of about 4.2 million.

The state ranks 11th in per-



PMG file photo

**Gov. Kate Brown, at a May press event, wearing her social distancing mask in public.**

centage of elderly residents at just over 18%.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state's top infectious disease expert, said the Oregon Health Authority had not made estimates of the number of people who could die because the starting date for older Oregonians' eligibility was moved back two weeks.

OHA reported Thursday that COVID-19-related deaths had "surged" to 195 the previous week, the highest weekly toll to date. It broke the record set the prior week. According to OHA statistics, those aged 70 and over have accounted for 77% of the state's COVID-19 deaths.

Extrapolating those numbers, 390 Oregonians would die over a two-week period based on current rates and 300 would be over 70. OHA has not responded to a request for comment on the estimate.

Brown and health officials were able to point to some good news during the press conference. OHA reported 849 new COVID-19 cases and 11 new fatalities on Thursday. The report showed a contin-

ued gradual decline in cases and hospitalizations at a time when the state had previously forecast both would rise this month. A feared "Christmas spike" in cases due to residents traveling and gathering for the holidays has been shallower than expected.

Thursday marked the fifth day in a row with fewer than 850 cases. The current positive infection rate is 5.9% of tests, still above the 5% target set by the OHA to indicate infection rates are not growing rapidly.

The state also updated its vaccination numbers, saying 253,711 shots have been given since the vaccines began arriving in Oregon late last year.

When the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines became available, The Centers for Disease Control guidelines identified health care workers who are

likely to come into contact with COVID-19 patients at the top of the priority list.

The CDC also called for inoculations for nursing home residents and staff, a group that accounted for just 5% of infections, but 36% of the nation's more than 400,000 deaths.

The facilities have accounted for 53% of deaths in Oregon, one of 13 states where more than half of COVID-19 fatalities are in residential nursing homes.

Most states have followed the CDC guidelines in deciding the ongoing priority groups. Older Americans, who are disproportionately more likely to suffer severe and fatal cases, were next on the CDC list. People with medical conditions that put them at risk of severe illness or death were also listed.



# Solutions

## Certified Public Accountants

*For All Your Tax Preparation and Accounting Needs*

**Call today for an appointment with one of our tax specialists**

**541-575-2717**

**Anna, Clayton, Amy, Lauri, Baxter, Mitch, Carli, Jeff, Bob, Melissa & Harmony**



***Building value through service, knowledge, and integrity. Satisfaction guaranteed!***

**\* Tax Preparation \* Accounting \***  
**\* Bookkeeping \* Payroll \* QuickBooks \***

**Solutions Certified Public Accountants • (541) 575-2717**  
**101 NE 1st Avenue, John Day, OR 97845**