

Guest Editorials

Pandemic, Policy, Politics

By Senator Bill Hansell
As I was nearing the conclusion of my first legislative session in May of 2013, someone asked me what my plans were for the interim. That caused me to pause. I had never even thought about it, because in my entire working life, I had never had an interim. But I quickly figured out the answer, which was to keep on serving the citizens of my Senate District, in any way I could.

Had someone asked me in February 2020, "What are my plans for a pandemic?" I would not have had an answer. But I sure do now. So far in this interim, the COVID-19 pandemic is front and center in everything we legislators are doing. Most all of what I am doing falls into three categories of focus: pandemic, policy and politics.

I have learned more about this pandemic, this disease, this plague than I ever imagined. But to formulate good policy you should know what you are fighting and what you need to fight it. The last pandemic was the Spanish flu of 1918 over a century ago. The one thing about the COVID-19 virus, that seems to be universally agreed upon, is the primary method of spreading is through breath droplets. Masks and physical dis-

tancing really do work, which I have been trying to do.

When it comes to policy development and resource allocation, this is where the bulk of my time has been being spent. I would never have guessed that I would be on hours and hours of daily conference calls. But such is life in a pandemic.

One of my high priorities and policy focus has been keeping our rural health care facilities functioning. Decrees from Salem, while probably good for the most part, have had serious impacts on rural hospitals and health care. I have made phone calls, I have worked with my colleagues, I have both authored and signed on to letters to the governor and other officials about the dire straits rural health care is facing. I believe funding, both state and federal, is beginning to be available, but it hasn't been without its drama.

The politics portion is the most frustrating. Why can't we come together across the aisle to do what is best for the citizens of Oregon? The COVID-19 virus is not a Republican or Democrat nor does it pick and choose its victims by party affiliation. This pandemic has made for strange bedfellows at times. From

my perspective, the Senate Republican caucus has been more aligned with Governor Brown much of the time than the other caucuses, including her own.

But at the end of the day this pandemic battle would be a whole lot easier and more effective, if we could leave politics out of the game plan both on the national and state level. However, until that time comes, it will be part of what I need to do, to make sure rural Oregon does not get the short end of the stick. The stakes are too high.

Our office has been and will continue to help in any way we can. Please feel free to contact us if you have issues with which you need assistance. The best way, since we are all working from home, is by email at sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov. We will do all we can to be of help.

In the meantime, stay safe, be smart and mask up in public.

Senator Bill Hansell is from Athena, and during the COVID-19 pandemic is spending most all of his time in his home on Third Street. However, his wife Margaret does have him working outside, when he isn't on a conference call, with an assortment of honey-do projects.

Economic relief, beware of payback traps

By Daniel Van Schoiack, CPA

Last week's article outlined two forms of relief available to business, nonprofit organizations and churches who have experience economic hardship from the COVID-19 restrictions; the Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) and the Economic Injury Disaster Grant (EIDL). Both of these programs were part of the recently passed Cares Act by congress.

Generally a business or nonprofit organization with 500 or less employees can apply for both of these relief programs. However, there is a trap, the amount of proceeds from the PPP that are equal to the amount of an EIDL Grant must be paid back per section 1110(e)(6) of the Cares Act. But as a

Candidate forum April 20

The forum being held for candidates running for Morrow County positions will be broadcast electronically on Monday, April 20 at 6 p.m. The Heppner Chamber reminds those who are interested in participating to sign in to Zoom prior to 6 p.m. at <https://zoom.us/j/287416202>. The meeting ID is 287416202.

Candidates included in the forum will be Joseph B Armato, Jim Doherty, Joel R Peterson and Michael Sweek for Morrow County Commissioner, position one; Theresa Crawford, Glen Diehl and Kelly L Doherty for Justice of the Peace; and Sabrina L Bailey Cave, Cody High, Jaylene Papineau and Eric Patton for Treasurer.

For additional information contact the Heppner Chamber at 541-676-5536 or email heppnerchamber@centurytel.com.

result of last week's crash of the EIDL Grant program, that might not be a big concern to some applicants.

Originally, the maximum amount of the EIDL Grant was \$10,000 per applicant. However, due to the overwhelming number of applicants, there was an unofficial announcement that the amount of EIDL Grants might be reduced to \$1,000 per employee for some recipients, if they receive any payment at all. As previously mentioned, the proceeds from the paycheck protection program are also subject to repayment for failure to maintain or restore average number of employees and total wages to a prior base period. Also, since 75 percent of the proceeds from PPP must be used for payroll cost, it is important to monitor and account for the funds in a separate bank account.

As an alternative to applying for the Payroll Protection Plan, a qualifying employer can use the employee retention credit

where relief is immediate as a credit against federal payroll taxes. The credit applies to 50 percent of wages from March 13 through December 31, 2020. The credit can be applied to a maximum of \$10,000 in wages, therefore the maximum credit allowed is \$5,000. The credit can be applied on any federal payroll reporting Form 941 beginning with the 2nd quarter of 2020. An employer may also request an advance payment for the credit by submitting Form 7200.

It is important to note that an employer may not use both the Payroll Protection Plan and the employee retention credit without triggering a repayment. While the PPP might provide a greater dollar amount of benefits, those who apply must be aware of the payback traps that come with it, including amounts received as an EIDL Grant.

Daniel Van Schoiack CPA is a member of the American and Oregon Society of CPA's.

Due to the State guidelines regarding the Coronavirus outbreak, All Wheatland Insurance Offices will be closed to the public. Employees will be working in a secure location in order to continue taking care of business. Please call 541-422-7410 to talk with an agent regarding any of your insurance questions. You will be able to make premium payments during this time by calling 541-422-7410. Payments can be made by credit card or debit card. For cash payment options, please call the 541-422-7410 number to make arrangements. We all are praying this situation will be over very soon. Please be safe.

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