

Winter Magazine 2020

Oregon Original by OFA President Matt Truax

The 2nd Special Session of 2020

In early August, the Oregon Legislature concluded a one-day, 2nd Special Session of 2020. The intended focus was on rebalancing Oregon's perceived shortfall. Also included were policy bills ranging from policing reforms, bonding investments, unemployment benefit changes and distributing COVID federal relief dollars. To account for the deficit, the legislature passed bills borrowing \$400M from the State's Education Stability Fund. The Legislature directed state agencies to consolidate programs and leave positions unfilled to save toward the General Fund. The Legislature did not freeze or reduce government employee pay raises or cost of living adjustments. A 3rd Special Session is expected following the November election wherein wildfire relief and emergency moratoriums on rental evictions will also be discussed. The 2021 Legislative Session is anticipated to be held virtually. Legislative leadership has said they will not allow the general public into the Capital building until there are widespread COVID vaccinations. Mandates for businesses billed as "workplace protections" for employees are also anticipated.

Four Ballot Measures Qualified for Oregon's November General Election

Measure 107 Allows future laws limiting campaign contributions

Measure 108 Increases tobacco taxes

Measure 109 Legalizes the use of psilocybin in controlled therapy settings

Measure 110 Decriminalizes possession of drugs including heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines and redirects marijuana tax revenues to treatment programs

Noticeably missing from this list is a ballot measure that would require an independent commission to establish legislative and congressional districts.

Oregon Wildfires

Following Labor Day there were extensive wildfires throughout the state of Oregon. OFA lobbyists worked with government officials to monitor destroyed fuel infrastructure and in waiving the Hours of Service restrictions to allow for fuel deliveries. There were also periods wherein the self-service ban was lifted. 2020 has been one of the most destructive fire seasons on record. Over a million acres burned and destroyed thousands of homes and businesses. Unusually high winds and dry conditions led to the rapid expansion. Five separate fires exceeded 100,000 acres as numerous towns and cities were forced into mass evacuations. Air quality was of significant concern as the AQI in several regions exceeded 400. This impacted outdoor workers, and with masks already in high demand due to COVID, supply and availability were further stressed.

Statewide Masks, Face Coverings or Face Shields are Required

As of October, masks, face coverings or face shields are required statewide for offices and indoor public spaces (i.e. grocery stores, pharmacies, public transit, personal services providers, restaurants, bars and retail stores). Masks, face coverings or face shields are required in outdoor public spaces when physical distancing of at least 6 feet is not possible. Children age 5 and up are required to wear a face covering. People with a disability or medical condition may request accommodation from the business if they cannot wear one.

Ready Schools Safe Learners

In late July, the Oregon Department of Education updated “Ready Schools Safe Learners” and put in place metrics for in-class and online learning. The County metrics for in-class learning that must be met for the preceding 7 days, included fewer than 10 positive COVID cases per 100,000 in population and less than a 5% positivity rate.

COVID Tests

As of Tuesday, October 13th, there have been 749,375 COVID tests with 35,878 (4.79%) reported positive. There have been 605 deaths. Of the positive tests, 2,817 (7.5%) confirmed hospitalizations. Testing trends show that daily cases increased through June and early July, then began to decrease through August and rose again following Labor Day. These increased numbers put additional pressure on those students fortunate enough to be in-class and will keep many others online – likely through the remainder of 2020.

Quarterly Revenue Forecasts

In late September, Oregon state economists released their quarterly revenue forecasts. Overall, the message was surprisingly positive. Oregon is not expected to have a revenue shortfall because corporate and personal income taxes are up from previous estimates. The positive revenue forecast credited the infusion of unprecedented federal stimulus resources. Unemployment numbers peaked in May at about 14% and have come down to 7.7% as of August.

Cap & Reduce Program

Lastly, the Oregon DEQ has started the administrative process for implementing a “cap & reduce” program for the State of Oregon. The program is designed to reduce carbon emissions in the manufacturing and transportation sectors. After holding a series of workshops, the DEQ will begin “townhalls” on the topic before initiating the rules advisory committees where the policy will be debated before going to the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) for adoption. Due to the DEQ administrative process, we do not anticipate the subject of cap-and-trade to return to the Oregon Legislature in 2021.

On behalf of OFA, stay safe and be well.