

April 23 Legislative Update

E-Board met for nearly five hours Thursday to allocate coronavirus relief funds. Some of the monies were state General Funds, while others were dollars the state is receiving from the federal government.

\$10 Million for Small Businesses

Small businesses (under \$25) that did not receive support from the federal Paycheck Protection Program will be eligible for a total of \$10 million from the state. The fund will be administered by the Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD).

Rep. Greg Smith (R-Heppner) said 19,000 Oregon small businesses received \$3.8 billion from the Paycheck Protection Program, “but that pales in comparison with the frustration being experienced by many businesses.”

E-Board members admonished OBDD to make sure the money is distributed statewide, not just in the I-5 corridor, and that it be made available to really small businesses.

Details of the program including the maximum that will be available to each business and the specific terms will be worked out in contract.

\$10 Million for those not eligible for traditional Unemployment

Legislators are concerned that some farmworkers, wildfire firefighters, hospitality workers and others fall through the cracks in the traditional unemployment insurance programs. This appropriation will provide up to \$590 per week to those workers.

Details including how many weeks the payment will last and other requirements for the recipients are yet to be determined.

\$50 Million for Oregon’s A & B Hospitals Put on Hold

The Emergency Board tabled a proposal to use \$50 million in Federal Coronavirus Relief Funds to create a loan program for Oregon’s 33 rural Type A & B hospitals. E-Board members strongly support efforts to help financially stabilize rural hospital but they say it should be done as grants, not loans.

Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose) objected to the loan provision saying, “This would be the functional equivalent of throwing a six-foot rope to someone drowning 10-feet from shore.

Hospitals need immediate influxes of cash right now.”

The proposal was to offer 0% interest loans but legislators, especially those from rural communities, said that wouldn’t help. Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Pendleton) said, “I talked to CEOs at the five hospitals in my district and they told me, ‘This program does nothing for them.’”

After extensive discussion, the E-Board tabled the item, saying they want to iron out the details and bring it back.