

**Paul L Evans**  
**STATE REPRESENTATIVE**  
**DISTRICT 20**



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

April 6, 2020

The Honorable Kate Brown  
Governor of the State of Oregon  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Governor Brown:

I write this letter to ask you to call the Oregon House of Representatives and the Oregon State Senate into special legislative session prior to April 15, 2020. As a member of the Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response, and a member of a traditionally “swing” district, I can tell you without hesitation or equivocation – there is bipartisan appetite for swift and sure legislative action to supplement your efforts. Accordingly, I believe we must act while there is relative comity – before it is lost.

Your efforts have thus far helped Oregonians recognize the peril of this emergent threat far more than many would have otherwise. Your messaging has been far clearer – far more effective – than that of the US Government. And fortunately, the public is awakening to the awesome scale of this potential crisis. As of this morning nearly 10,000 Americans have died of COVID-19 related illness, and we will most likely surpass 15,000 fatalities (or more) by the end of this week if projected trends continue. Thankfully, here in Oregon mitigation strategies may be working, which will hopefully yield fewer hospitalizations and a reduced rate of fatality for those finding themselves infected.

For good or ill, I have spent much of my life learning how to operate within crisis environments. A career spent as an Air Battle Manager in the USAF taught me how to lead people and manage resources in a sustainable manner. As a senior policy advisor to Governor Kulongoski I gained insight into the mechanical structures and systems of bureaucracies during emergency response and recovery operations. And as a professor of communications who has studied (and taught) crisis/disaster communications – I understand the critical value of expectations management during times of societal chaos and collapse.

We are confronting three (3) simultaneous breakdowns: 1) healthcare capacities; 2) economic security; and 3) trust in governance through Darwinian-Federalism. The healthcare response efforts are improving but they are showing significant “gaps” in services sustainability. Our efficiency-based delivery networks are not sufficient for the “black swan event” that history tells us will happen, often when we are least prepared. The economic impacts of shutting down major sectors of our economy to mitigate contagion spread was the best answer – but it has sent a chill throughout the “service sector economies” that were already struggling to get ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economy. And the trust in governance equation has been put in question because of the quixotic rhetoric (and often misaligned actions) of the Trump Administration.

Accordingly, I ask for a special session to meet these breakdowns head-on. Now is the time for the public to see government, a state in concert with local and county leadership, work in common cause. We can act in unison providing the added authorities and budgetary tools your team requires for the present and future response/recovery efforts. I believe we must do these things sooner than later because of a fundamental lack of capacity at the federal level. Please remember, politics aside, the Trump Administration has been slow to fill many mid-level to senior level posts throughout the federal bureaucracy – as a matter of policy – in demonstration of the supposed lack of need for “Deep State” expertise.

As a lifelong student of crisis communications, I can tell you authoritatively that the US Government, knowingly, or unknowingly, led the public astray during the earliest phases of this crisis. The most important role of any chief executive during times of crisis/disaster is expectations management: maintaining the trust of the public as a truth-teller, even/especially when hard truths must be shared in small pieces (for public understanding). Democracies depend upon the informed consent of the public: consent is a dependent variable – far less certain – far more fluid – than in previous generations. In nearly every imaginable way this President has failed us in this regard. For several weeks the Trump Administration countered growing fact-based evidence about the contagion with a series of conspiracy fantasies, denials, and obfuscation: we lost several weeks that should have been used to bolster our response posture.

Although historians will have the final say, I suspect this crisis/disaster was never understood by the President and his team as a “health” emergency. For it was only after the economic impacts of COVID-19 hit partner nations – and transformed a wobbly Bull Market into a panicked Bear – did the President of the United States and his closest advisors grasp the seriousness of our circumstances. It took valuable time we did not have for the policymakers surrounding this President to recognize the obvious linkages (and risk exposures) between a global pandemic and international economics. Only then, once the collapse of major sectors of our economy became probable, did the President bring the scientific community into the formal response efforts. The net result is a lingering lack of confidence in governance overall – something we must repair while we have time.

Oregonians need to feel as well as see leadership. This is especially true in a time when social distancing is preventing many of the ordinary methods of societal connection that can sustain communities navigating crisis. Calling the Legislature to action will yield tangible policy outcomes, but more importantly it will demonstrate in “real-time” that all of Oregon is working together: that all ideas are being considered, that all fears are being included in the processes of our government response. We legislators can play a role in showing how trust in government is warranted through having an opportunity to do the things we can, share the things our constituents needs us to share, and demonstrate – through votes – our support of your statewide efforts.

In closing, I want you to know that you are not in this alone: you are our leader, we want to follow and support your efforts – and we shall continue to do that. Please consider the value in calling us back sooner than later, to give voice to our constituent’s concerns – and to show a dramatic contrast – to the mixed messages coming out of DC. Thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Respectfully,



Paul L. Evans

CC: Nik Blosser, Chief of Staff, Governor Kate Brown