

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 12, 2020

President Peter Courtney
Speaker Tina Kotek
Joint Legislative Emergency Board
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

President Courtney and Speaker Kotek:

Effective crisis management is a wholly dependent variable: the public looks to government for accurate information shared in a manner that demonstrates confidence as well as competence. This requires us to recognize the requirements our circumstances. We must communicate specific truths within a larger context. We must align our actions with our statements. And we must demonstrate governance through both instrument and ornament. The following is offered for your consideration.

Step 1.

Legislative Leadership should publicly show support for the Governor's ongoing response efforts. Her letter to Vice-President Pence, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McConnell was well considered and on-target. And her declaration of a State of Emergency allows her to bridge bureaucratic quarrels as well as optimize all necessary resources for deployment throughout the state. I believe a small event involving the "top-six" Legislative Leaders would send an important signal. The shadow of the 2020 Legislative Session lingers: many among the public are uncertain of our ability to govern. Certainty is a critical value in the early phases of a crisis response. To that end, we must put other matters aside and focus upon ensuring the public believes we are working in common cause: we must secure the trust reservoir because it may be tests significantly over the coming months.

Step 2.

A Special Session should be called earlier than later because of the potential impacts of the COVID-19 virus. Most people are expecting at least a brief session to finish the budget process. However, this is an opportunity to facilitate specific policies that can serve to strengthen our near-term as well as far-term resiliency posture. The following concepts warrant consideration:

- \$15,000,000 in additional funding for the Resiliency Grant Fund within the Treasury split evenly between equipment for local, regional, and tribal government preparedness and public health response equipment and/or medical supplies. There is an inherent systemic struggle within the healthcare provider community when it comes to pre-staging stockpiles of medical equipment. We need "reserve" capacities that cost-efficiency models cannot respect. The SPIRE Grant program can be reloaded through a budget allocation.
- \$15,000,00 in additional funding for supporting small businesses paid sick leave implementation. This could be accomplished through a tax credit, a stipend, or alternative means. We must send a signal to employees as well as employers that we are "in this response" together. Not all businesses can absorb the absence of workers who self-isolate; this is especially true for businesses with twenty-five (25) or fewer employees.
- \$10,000,000 in contingency funding for the likelihood of a state mobilization of the National Guard. The federal government may approve a partial mobilization under Title 10 or Title 32, but the providing the Governor with the option of having the resources to deploy critical units earlier than later is a "force-multiplier."

- \$15,000,000 in contingency funding for Oregon Health Authority for contagion prevention, response, and recovery programming.
- \$5,000,000 in additional funding for region specific response efforts. A population-based formula for flexible public grants for crisis response could help local, regional, and tribal governments become more willing to lean-forward in taking preventative steps. The unfortunate combination of contagion and the interruption of supply chains resulting from the geographical origin of this virus make flexible funding a critical tool.
- \$5,000,000 in contingency funding for SAIF for supporting the Governor’s range of options under the State of Emergency. These funds would cover potential costs related to increased risks for predominantly volunteer-based emergency services response organizations: this would provide for greater certainty for deployment of hundreds to thousands of predominantly volunteer (underinsured) groups that may be called into service should the crisis worsen.

Step 3.

The Oregon Homeland Security Council should be tasked with developing a reasonable crisis timeline for internal and then external review. It exists to advise the Governor on threats to national and state security: the associated impacts of a prolonged contagion warrant a thoughtful study. Metrics must be determined in order to effectively assess the relative “winning or losing” aspects of this response. Historical comparisons as well as an objective snapshot of what measurements the public can reasonably expect will go far in maintaining a surplus in the trust reservoir. The unknown nature of this specific healthcare crisis is unnerving because of the lengthy contagious period – and the lacking availability of testing kits.

Step 4.

Legislative Leadership should direct the Legislative Policy and Research Office to coordinate with the Senate Committee on General Government and Emergency Preparedness and the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness to review national and state disaster management laws, policies, and programs to develop a list of possible concepts for legislative action in 2021. Some of this work has begun on an ad hoc basis; a message from the Presiding Officers would accelerate these efforts and yield better policy options for decision-makers in 2021.

Step 5.

At the conclusion of this ongoing COVID-19 response there must be a Post-Event Conference with a Reset of equipment, expended supplies, and investments informed by lessons learned. Over the past decade the State of Oregon has too often “moved on” after a potentially catastrophic event: lessons are soon forgotten, investments lose their luster absent the crisis dynamic. We are woefully underprepared for what might unfold over the next four months. While I believe we can – and will – manage this crisis as well as possible, we are already behind when we didn’t need to be. It is critical that we seize upon the recency of this experience and make wise investments to prevent being caught flat-footed again.

Respectfully,



Paul L. Evans
Chair, Oregon House of Representatives Committee on Veterans’ and Emergency Preparedness
Oregon House of Representatives (HD 20)

CC: Representative Rayfield, Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means, Co-Chair
Senator Betsy Johnson, Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means, Co-Chair
Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means, Co-Chair