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It's Time to Give Struggling Businesses the Relief They Deserve

Senate GOP bill would compensate businesses for losses due to lockdowns

SALEM, Ore. – Today, the Senate Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness had a public hearing on [Senate Bill 531](#), which would compensate businesses for actual harm done by lockdown executive orders.

The testimony from the business community was compelling, and highlighted the difficulties of keeping workers employed, businesses open, and providing for their own families.

Jim Zupancic, the owner of Stafford Hills Club, a fitness center in Tualatin, testified to the hardship of the fitness and wellness industry. He estimated that around 400,000 people from across Oregon have canceled their memberships to gyms and fitness centers, representing an extraordinary loss to a sector that is largely made up of small businesses. There has been no public evidence that any COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred at gyms or fitness centers.

“We know the best way to get working people back to work, is to support the businesses who sign their paychecks,” said Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod (R-Lyons), the chief sponsor of the bill. “This bill provides tangible relief to support a strong economic recovery for working Oregonians.”

Senator Girod noted in his testimony that in 2007, the Legislature passed HB 2185 which established a principle that businesses be compensated for losses incurred during an emergency declared by the Governor. He added that the bill would provide a much-needed check on executive authority.

JL Wilson, a representative for the Oregon State Chambers of Commerce, which represents thousands of small businesses around Oregon, emphasized damage done to small businesses and the urgent need for this legislation: “If there was ever a bill you could pass for small businesses this session, this would be the one.”

Wilson also noted that while big box stores have, in many cases, done well during the pandemic, small businesses have been disproportionately impacted by the Governor's executive orders.

Laura Edmonds of the North Clackamas Chamber of Commerce added, "We hear over and over again that small businesses are the lifeblood of our communities, yet here we are watching them bleed out."

"Chair Manning and other members of the committee expressed support for making our small businesses whole," continued Sen. Girod. "I hope that he sticks to his word and passes this bill out of committee."

SB 531 is co-sponsored by fellow Republican Senators Kim Thatcher (R-Keizer) and Lynn Findley (R-Vale).

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