



Linn County NEWS



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Commissioners declare emergency for fire districts

ALBANY — Linn County Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker approved a Declaration of Emergency resolution Monday morning that will help Rural Fire Districts apply for assistance from the Office of Emergency Management if their staffing levels fall significantly due to the state’s COVID-19 vaccination mandate.

Healthcare workers in Oregon had until Oct. 18 to get vaccinated or face the possibility of losing their jobs.

Nyquist said the commissioners have been talking with fire chiefs from local fire districts for several weeks. The fire chiefs are concerned that many of their volunteers will not respond to Gov. Kate Brown’s mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations.

Rural Fire Districts rely primarily on volunteer firefighters. Districts like Brownsville, have a paid fire chief, and perhaps a paid part-time office person. All of their firefighters are volunteers.

A sharp drop in volunteers could compromise or eliminate the fire district’s ability to respond to fire or ambulance.

Board Chairman Nyquist said he has been in conversations with the governor’s office for several weeks with hopes there would be some exemption or waiver. But it appears neither will happen.

The governor is however developing a framework to provide the districts with support from the Office of Emergency Management.

But commissioners Tucker and Sprenger — while supporting the resolution — question how effective first responders can be if they aren’t living in the rural



Nyquist



Sprenger



Tucker

communities.

Tucker said the rural fire districts rely on volunteers who are “young family members who are willing to jump on a rig to get to a house fire or a car wreck.”

Tucker said he has asked that the state provide a vaccination waiver if the firefighters would agree to weekly COVID-19 testing.

Nyquist said half of Oregon — primarily rural counties that rely on volunteers — are facing this situation.

Sprenger said she and her husband purchased property nine miles from Scio, knowing full well their fire protection would come from a primarily volunteer district.

But, she said by telephone Monday, they didn’t expect that fire district’s staffing would be negatively affected by a state mandate.

“This is extremely frustrating,” Sprenger said. “The fact that the mandate does not take into consideration any alternatives for fire districts to maintain their volunteers.”

Other rural counties — including Jefferson and Baker counties — have also approved similar resolutions.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Heard from new Oregon RAIN (Regional Accelerator Innovation Network) venture catalyst Nathan Conroy. Linn County is a RAIN participant, as are several communities in Linn County. Conroy said he grew up in rural Benton County, was a teacher and is an entrepreneur, who owns STEMhero, a company that makes data relevant to students in the areas of Science Technology Engineering and Math.
- Approved an amendment to a contract for mediation services between Clarity Mediation & Facilitation and Linn County.
- Appointed Kevin Dimmick of Albany to the Mental Health Advisory Board.

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