

VIEWPOINTS

from Salem and Sandy to The Mountain

Salem Legislature returns

By Anna Williams

House District 52 Representative
With protestors still marching in the streets across our nation on a daily basis, coronavirus cases on the rise in many Oregon communities and no end in sight to the economic uncertainty that has kept many of us up at night, the Oregon State Legislature is convening in a special session to address some of the most urgent issues affecting our state.

As I write this, the legislature hasn't yet convened and we're still finalizing the bills that will be discussed when we do. By the time you read this, we should be well on our way to passing policies that keep families safe and healthy, help them stay in their homes through the economic downturn and more. We're also finalizing the procedures within the legislature that will keep legislators and staff safe and compliant with social distancing guidelines:



this includes a limitation on how many Representatives are allowed on the House floor at one time, and it means that the business of legislating will be slower than we're

used to. Still, there's a lot of important work to be done, and a lot of vital policies to help the people of Oregon.

With regard to pandemic response, the governor has used her executive powers extensively, and I think it's time that the legislature be allowed to weigh in. As a co-equal branch of government, I'm happy she has sought our leadership in creating long-term policies that will support Oregonians in addressing the ongoing crisis.

At the risk of just giving a boring laundry list of bills, I want to keep everyone updated about why

the legislature is going to Salem in the middle of a pandemic. We will be addressing the looming end of the governor's eviction moratorium and providing utility bill assistance to low income Oregonians; we'll also be looking at policies to address mortgage assistance and temporary restrictions on foreclosures for landlords who have stopped receiving rent during the moratorium. Other measures discussed could provide emergency shelter siting to combat homelessness during the pandemic, impose limited legal immunity for emergency isolation shelters and create rulemaking authority to make sure state agencies can react to this and other future viral crises.

I've written here before about the importance of bringing broadband service to rural areas, and one bill we'll be discussing will do just that. As part of an economic recovery plan, the Rural Telecommunications Act will create a \$5 million broadband fund to provide grants to service providers to create infrastructure

in rural areas. While rural Oregonians have needed this sort of assistance for years, it's especially pressing now as we rely more and more on remote conferencing, telehealth and distance learning during the pandemic.

We will be responding to a national call to action by taking up several timely police accountability measures introduced by our People of Color legislative caucus. We will be working to ban chokeholds as a method of restraint, as well as possibly banning the use of tear gas and sound cannons to disperse crowds. We'll also discuss a proposed legal duty for law enforcement officers to report and intervene in fellow officers' inappropriate uses of force, and a law that would require police departments to report officer disciplinary actions to a statewide, publicly accessible database. Finally, with regard to police use of force, we'll discuss a bill that would assign the Attorney General as the independent investigating authority for all use of force cases that

result in serious injury or death.

I'm hopeful that these measures, plus several other time-sensitive issues, will pass with bipartisan support, but I'm bracing for some heart-felt disagreements as we figure out how to navigate the process of legislating during a public health crisis. I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues regardless of party affiliation to get important things done for hardworking families across Oregon.

Finally, we know that this session is only a first step. We will also need to come back to balance the state budget. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make sure we pass a responsible budget that doesn't cause deeper harm to those already impacted by Coronavirus and the recession. If there are any policy or budgetary issues you would like to see us address before the 2021 session, please don't hesitate to write or call and let me know your thoughts: Rep.AnnaWilliams@oregonlegislature.gov, or 503-986-1452.