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WA-18

## Update on Impacts of COVID-19

Hi everyone,

I want to give you an update and let you know that I really miss our community meetings! I enjoy the discussions and exchange of ideas that happen in small community groups. Unfortunately, it looks like it will still be some time before we can participate in that type of meeting. If you wonder about the PUD's position on issues or have questions, please call or email me. If you are thinking about them, others probably are, too. Also, I would be grateful for input on topics for future Ruralite articles.

Even with COVID-19 restrictions, your PUD employees are still working every day. Some are working remotely; some are traveling directly to their job sites. Many are working staggered shifts. All employees are using the latest information, experience and directives on how to work safely. I continue to be impressed with their efforts to serve you, and I am proud to be a part of this team.

Most, if not all, of Gov. Jay Inslee's proclamations are in effect at least through December. I expect them to be extended again. Two of these proclamations directly affect you:

First, public meetings—in our case, our commissioner meetings—are still held via conference call and not in person.

Second, these proclamations include a moratorium on disconnecting customers for nonpayment of their bills. If this continues through spring, some customers could be up to a year behind on their power, water and wastewater bills. Some of these folks

have been legitimately impacted by COVID-19, and some have not. I have also heard Olympia is considering requiring utilities to set aside 1% of their retail revenues as COVID-19 support to help customers who are behind on their bills in 2021.

These two items together could amount to nearly \$600,000 in funding directed by proclamations from the governor's office and not by your elected commissioners. Local control is why PUDs were created more than 80 years ago. I struggle with this loss of control over how we handle our funds, which is, in fact, your money. I know your commissioners are struggling with this idea as well.

It is not that your PUD staff and commissioners do not acknowledge the impacts COVID-19 has on our communities. Quite the opposite is true. We created a small business support program and continue to provide a low-income elderly assistance program. These programs have already provided almost \$150,000 in direct relief to customers in need.

I would also like to remind you Operation Warm Heart is still in place for those of you who would like to help those most in need. We appreciate the support of the Goldendale Ministerial Association. This group reviews applications for Operation Warm Heart funds. This is truly neighbors helping neighbors—a philosophy that will help us all get through this pandemic.

**Jim Smith**  
**General Manager**