

# Oregon Capitol closed to public until March

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Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Legislative committee hearings will be virtual and the Oregon State Capitol building will be open to only authorized personnel for at least the first two months of the 2021 session to protect against spreading COVID-19, according to a plan released Thursday.

The Capitol will stay closed to the public until Marion County enters the "lower risk" category as defined by the Oregon Health Authority and Gov. Kate Brown. Currently, the county is in the "extreme risk" category.

The earliest changes could be seen in March, dependent on the number of coronavirus cases.

More than 1,550 Oregonians have died from COVID-19.

"We do not want our actions at the Capitol worse," House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said. "In fact, we want to model best workplace practices so the people's work can get done safely."

Various changes to the ways the Legislature conducts business are expected to be made.

- Floor sessions will be rare, with daily sessions of the Senate and House of Representatives not occurring until April.

- The galleries in both chambers — normally reserved for the public — will be utilized for voting to expand the space between lawmakers to abide by social distancing guidelines.

- Members will be allowed only one legislative aide on-site, with other aides and interns working remotely.

- Face masks will be required, certain hallways will be one-way only, no communal food will be available, eleva-

tors will have occupancy limits, hand sanitizer and masks will be available, and the basement café and Capitol Club office will be closed (the latter at least until the public is allowed into the building).

"The seriousness of what the Oregon Legislature is about to try is very, very great," Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said. "Because of this virtual issue, because of the threat of violence, because of disease ... this is a new way of governing that we are going to attempt."

The stated goal of the plan is to balance the safety of those in the building with transparency of process, opportunity for significant public participation and ability to complete the Legislature's work.

Kotek said the mostly remote session does present the Legislature an opportunity to innovate in ways it should have done for some time.

For example, more emphasis will be placed on seeking input from around the state by allowing for the public to submit audio and video testimony to committees for the first time and extending the public record for all public meetings by 24 hours.

A public outreach campaign will also be established so people better understand the legislative process and how to participate, whether remotely or in-person.

Courtney promised the Legislature's work would still be accessible to the public.

"Every session, Oregonians make their voices heard on issues they care about. We need these voices," he said. "This plan will make the legislative process more accessible to Oregonians across the state."

Republicans have voiced their de-

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## Goals

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lowed in the building were encouraged — and later required — to wear masks and socially distance.

Committee hearings were held over video conference and streamed on the Legislature's website.

Legislative leadership is expected to release their plan for how they will manage the 2021 session on Monday.

The state Constitution requires that legislative sessions in odd-numbered years last for no longer than 160 days.

Here's a look at Salem-area legislators' bills:

### Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem

Senate President Peter Courtney will be making another run in 2021 at a bill that would allow community colleges and public universities to merge. So far, the idea has not gained much public traction among higher education administrators.

The concept would allow a community college and a public university to merge after submitting a detailed plan to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

Courtney said mergers would give people more access to higher education.

"This would be the kind of change that shows we mean it when we say we want people to get educated," Courtney said.

He also plans to introduce a bill that is intended to remove some of the barriers to building affordable housing op-



**A man rides a bicycle past newly installed cement blocks placed outside the Oregon State Capitol Building in Salem on Wednesday, Dec. 30.**

CONNOR RADNOVICH / STATESMAN JOURNAL

tions.

### Sen. Deb Patterson, D-Salem

Newly elected in November 2020, Sen. Deb Patterson has not had long to propose bills for the upcoming session. She was also made the chair of the Senate Health Care Committee, which she said is going to take up a majority of her time.

But one bill she will have would extend SNAP benefits — also known as food stamps — to include personal hygiene products.

She is proposing an additional \$10 per month per person that could be used on items such as toilet paper, tooth brushes and soap. These items are essential and covered by government assistance, she said.

"They should have a way to purchase those if they need help," Patterson said.

### Rep. Raquel Moore-Green, R-Salem

Rep. Raquel Moore-Green will serve in her first "long" legislative session this year, having been appointed to represent House District 19 in July 2019, after that year's session had already concluded.

She will introduce a bill that would create an Oregon Cleanup and Beautification pilot program within Oregon Corrections Enterprises.

The program would provide additional opportunities for adults in custody to work and gain skills they could use in a career after release, Moore-Green said.

She will also have a bill that would create a Kidney Disease Prevention and Education task force that would create a statewide plan to raise awareness of kidney disease and the importance of early detection.

"The onset of COVID-19 has magnified the importance of understanding the impact that preexisting health conditions play in our overall health," Moore-Green said.

### Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth

With the specter of 2020 and its cascading crises still hanging over us, Rep. Paul Evans' top priority in 2021 is to reform the state's emergency management structures and systems.

He is introducing a bill that would establish the Oregon Department of Emergency Management as a new independent state agency, vested with authority over public health emergencies, quarantines and massive wildfires.

The new department would oversee

the state's emergency response system, which was widely criticized following the Labor Day fires where many residents reported not receiving any notice of the encroaching wildfires.

The bill would also establish the State Fire Marshal as an independent state agency and task the department with establishing guidelines for wildfire buffer zones that produce defensible spaces.

### Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer

Following a similar bill introduced in the 2020 short session, Rep. Bill Post is introducing a bill that would regulate products using kratom, sometimes used for managing chronic pain or recreationally.

The Food and Drug Administration says there is no evidence of kratom being an effective or safe treatment.

Post's bill would disallow anyone under the age of 21 from purchasing kratom products and set penalties if kratom products are produced or sold while contaminated with dangerous non-kratom substances.

He will also be re-introducing a bill that would allow behind-the-counter sales of products containing pseudoephedrine, such as Sudafed. Post said this change would lower some health care costs.

Reporter Connor Radnovich covers the Oregon Legislature and state government. Contact him at [cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com](mailto:cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com) or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich.

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## Brentano

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The 68-year-old Brentano was appointed to the Board of Commissioners in 2003 and won election in 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016, some without opposition. He opted to not run for re-election in 2020.

In his years as a commissioner, Brentano put in great effort in areas like public works, public safety, parks and waste management, an industry he worked in for 30 years.

In 2014, it was revealed by Canadian media that Marion County's solid waste burning facility in Brooks had been incinerating the bodies of aborted and miscarried fetuses through a medical waste agreement with a company in British Columbia.

"We ran back to this building and within two hours we stopped the movement of those babies," Brentano said.

Among the challenges he faced in his time on the three-person board was when Courthouse Square, which was completed in 2000, was condemned in 2010.

He was part of the task force that included citizens like Gene Pfeifer of Silverton that worked to renovate the al-

ready failing building, and it was repaired and reopened in 2014.

Other new buildings were added, such as one for the juvenile department and a public service building within the county's existing budget.

From his background as a volunteer emergency technician, Brentano brought an experienced perspective to public safety.

"This type of pandemic was exactly what was on Sam's worry list," Carlson said.

He said he will spend much of his time in retirement fishing — something he frequently does now — and with family.

Brentano identifies with the western novels of Louis L'Amour. He likes that the good guy always won and saw a representation of himself in the heroes of those novels.

"This person rides for the brand, and that means loyal. The other is that person could be someone to ride the river with, so that's someone who's steady and dependable and resourceful," Brentano said. "I think I like the stories because, I think that's who I am and if it's not, it's who I want to be."

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