

Republican vs. Republican in U.S. Capitol controversy

Lawmakers in minority in Oregon
Legislature at odds with party officials

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon House Republicans disowned an official Oregon Republican Party claim that the riot at the U.S. Capitol was a “false flag” operation by Democrats to politically damage then-President Donald Trump.

A two-page screed featured a “resolution” calling 10 Republicans who voted for the impeachment of President Trump “traitors.” It claimed the mob of Trump supporters who smashed their way into the U.S. Capitol in a riot that left five dead and 140 police officers injured was a Democratic conspiracy to set-off the “sham” impeachment. The episode was likened to the 1933 burning of the German Reichstag in Berlin by Nazis, who then blamed the fire on others. They called for a “patriot network” to advance their claims.

“Democrats and their enablers are trying to falsely assign blame to the peaceful protesters present that day,” the state GOP said.

The hyperbolic lan-

guage, embrace of dark conspiracies and invocation of Nazism was an inflammatory brew the Washington Post, CNN, and Britain’s Guardian newspaper quickly picked up. Twitter and Facebook spread the story around the globe.

In an extraordinarily swift and unanimous rebuke, the 23 members of the House Republican caucus signed a letter rejecting the Oregon Republican Party’s official statement.

“There is no credible evidence to support false flag claims,” the letter said. “Oregon is in crisis. Vaccines are not going to our most vulnerable, our students are still not in a safe classroom setting, main street businesses are in a tailspin, our health data is a mess and here we are, talking about a political party resolution.”

It wasn’t the first time lawmakers had to respond, dismiss or explain some action of a state political party whose decades-long political right-turn had outpaced even its growingly conservative state representatives. As the party’s size and influence has declined, the tension

between those who carry the GOP banner outside and those inside the Capitol trying to influence policy has stretched nearer to a breaking point.

The lawmakers’ letter didn’t mention the House members or Trump’s debunked claim that President Joe Biden stole the election.

But with the Republicans facing a Democratic supermajority in both chambers of the Legislature just as the 2021 session began, many GOP lawmakers complained the state party was trying to score national political points instead of working to win Oregon elections.

“It’s none of our business what US House Representatives do” Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, wrote in a blog post demanding an agenda reset. “Focus, please.”

The Senate did not make a group statement, but some were angry with the timing, topic and tone of the attack.

“I have not seen any credible evidence to suggest that the riot at the United States Capitol was a ‘false flag,’” said Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend. “I do not support the Oregon Republican Party’s resolution. I find it disheartening that while Oregonians are struggling, these political

distractions get in the way of helping them recover.”

The uproar intensified when the Anti-Defamation League harshly criticized Republicans for misappropriating the Reichstag fire, a prelude to the Holocaust, to buttress an argument that those who were the target of the attacks were the perpetrators.

“The violence at the US Capitol on January 6th was a large-scale physical assault on our nation’s democratic values and institutions perpetrated by right-wing conspiracy theorists, extremists, and supporters of former President Trump. That is a fact,” the ADL said in a statement.

The Republican lawmakers said they were blindsided by the Oregon Republican Party pronouncement. They were never consulted or even told in advance what was coming from the party’s 22-member executive committee of GOP activists.

The Oregon State Committee has provided fuel for a feud with GOP lawmakers before. The party hosted conservative political firebrand Roger Stone at its 2018 conference in Salem. A squad of Proud Boys, the right-wing group with a reputation for violence, served as Stone’s bodyguards,

flashing “white power” hand signs at a party after his speech. The state party didn’t step in when the Portland-area GOP decided to raffle an AR-15 assault-style rifle at a dinner honoring Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King in 2011. The “rifle raffle” was repeated in 2014.

Despite the sharply conservative tone of the statement, state GOP chairman Bill Currier has been criticized by some activists as not being conservative enough by requiring a litmus test on issues important to the party’s increasingly Trump-oriented base.

Currier said he believes the party needed to be a “big tent” that can create winning coalitions with unaffiliated voters and disenfranchised Democrats.

“We need to be more focused on issues rather than trying to decide whether some given candidate meets some litmus test,” he said. “The party doesn’t pick the candidates, the voters do.”

Critics within the party say the hard right turn on the current version of the Republican Party would reject Oregon icons such as Gov. Tom McCall and Sen Mark Hatfield, who spearheaded environmental reforms and

equal rights issues.

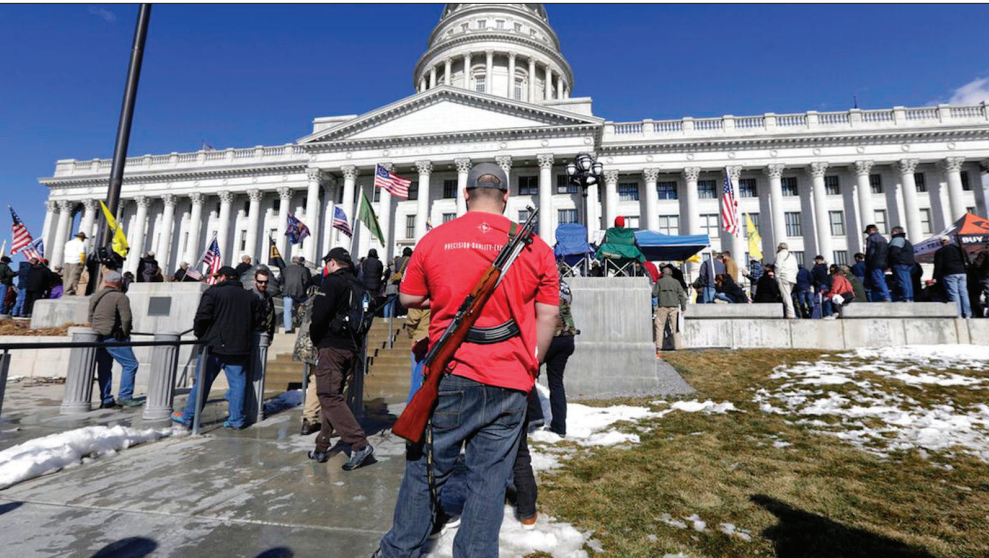
No Republican has won the governorship since Vic Atiyeh in 1982. The state has supported the Democratic candidate for president, win or lose, back to Mike Dukakis in 1984.

The governor, both U.S. senators, and four of five members of Congress are Democrats. So are all the state executive offices: attorney general, treasurer, secretary of state and labor commissioner. The Democrats have 37-23 majority in the House and 18-12 in the Senate.

Republican lawmakers running in 2020 found themselves sharing a ballot and sometimes a stage with Jo Rae Perkins, a QAnon conspiracy believer, who was easily defeated by Democrat Sen. Jeff Merkley. Without strong statewide candidates, Currier and the party committee have been called out by some in the GOP for a “fixation” on launching recall efforts against Gov. Kate Brown that never got enough signatures to even trigger a vote.

Julie Parrish, a former GOP House member who is now a political consultant, said in 2019 a recall was a sign of a party leadership low on good ideas.

“We need a strategy, and a recall isn’t it,” she said.



Rick Bowmer/AP Photo, File

A man carries a weapon during a rally at Utah State Capitol on Feb. 8, 2020, in Salt Lake City. Utah is one of several more states weighing proposals this year that would allow people to carry concealed guns without having to get a permit, a trend supporters say bolsters Second Amendment rights but is alarming to gun-control advocates.

States eye allowing concealed carry of guns without a permit

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Republican lawmakers in several more states want to loosen gun restrictions by allowing people to carry concealed firearms without having to get a permit, continuing a trend that gun control advocates call dangerous.

Fifteen states already allow concealed carry without a permit, including Oregon, and lawmakers in nine others have proposed allowing or expanding the practice. GOP governors are backing the changes in Utah and Tennessee. Another bill expanding permitless carry in Montana has passed the state House.

Most states require people to do things like get weapons training and undergo a background check to get a permit to carry a gun hidden by a jacket or inside a purse. Groups like the National Rifle Association and state lawmakers who support gun rights argue those requirements are ineffective and undermine Second Amendment protections.

The proposed changes come after gun sales hit historic levels last summer — reflected in FBI background checks — amid uncertainty and safety concerns about the coronavirus pandemic, the struggling economy and protests over racial injustice. Since then, a violent mob stormed the U.S. Capitol.

Against that backdrop, the efforts to loosen concealed carry requirements are a frightening trend for

Shannon Watts, founder of the gun control group Moms Demand Action.

“It is dangerous to allow people to carry hidden, loaded handguns possibly without a background check or any training,” she said, adding that the annual rate of aggravated assaults with a firearm has increased 71% in Alaska since the state became the first to allow concealed carry without a permit in 2003.

The proposal in Utah would allow any U.S. citizen 21 and older to carry a concealed weapon without the now-required background check or weapons course. The bill does allow gun owners who want to carry a concealed weapon out of state to get a permit to do so after a background check and safety course.

Newly elected GOP Gov. Spencer Cox has said he supports the idea, in contrast to his predecessor and fellow Republican Gary Herbert, who vetoed a similar bill in 2013.

Supporters of the change argue that other state laws against such things as felons having guns and anyone carrying a firearm while intoxicated are enough to ensure guns are used safely.

“I have that right to protect myself, the Constitution says we have the right. Why are we putting a barrier for law-abiding citizens?” said Rep. Walt Brooks, the Republican lawmaker sponsoring the bill that got an early nod of approval from a House committee Friday. The software company president has represented rural

southern Utah for about four years.

He pointed to a multi-state study published in 2018 by the Journal of the American College of Surgeons that found loosening concealed carry permit laws didn’t lead to more homicides or violent crime. Utah does not require a permit for guns carried openly.

In Tennessee, Republican lawmakers are expected to push again to allow most adults 21 and older to carry firearms — concealed or openly — without a license that now requires a background check and training.

GOP Gov. Bill Lee backed the idea last year, though the proposal and others were put on hold amid the pandemic. The push in Tennessee came after the General Assembly relaxed a state law in 2020 by allowing people to obtain a concealed-carry-only handgun permit that didn’t require them to demonstrate the ability to fire a weapon.

In Montana, the House recently passed a bill to allow people to carry concealed firearms without a permit in most places.

Similar bills to allow or expand concealed carry without a permit have been introduced in Texas, South Carolina, Florida, Indiana, Alabama and Georgia.

In Texas, where some lawmakers bring concealed handguns to work at the state Capitol, the GOP has listed the issue as one of eight legislative priorities. The idea has failed to gain traction for years, though, and the platform’s prospects are once again uncertain.

Fauci: Vaccines can adjust to virus variants

WASHINGTON — Dr. Anthony Fauci said there’s reason to be concerned about the impact of some coronavirus mutations on vaccines, but scientists have plenty of options for adjustments to maintain the effectiveness of vaccines and treatments.

The government’s top infectious disease expert said there’s par-

ticular concern about the so-called South African variant, because lab tests have shown it can diminish the protective power of the vaccines approved to date.

However, Fauci stressed the level of protection provided still was well within what he called the “cushion” of vaccine effectiveness.

Fauci said one vac-

cine that still is in testing is being measured for effectiveness against the South African variant and another strain that has emerged in Brazil. He called that a promising development.

The U.S. Centers for Disease and Prevention reported the U.S. may reach 514,000 deaths by Feb. 20.

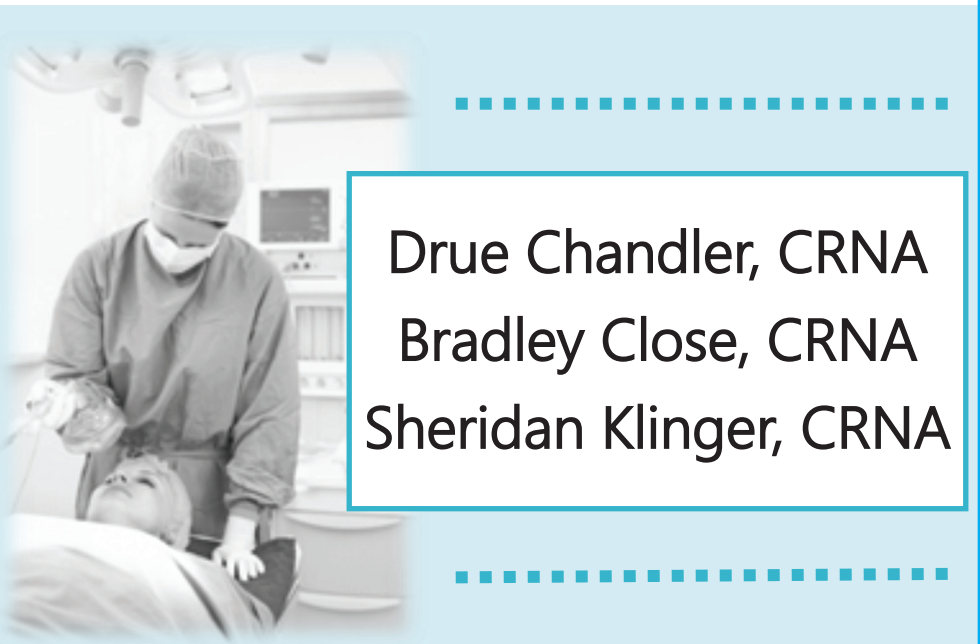
— *The Associated Press*

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