

Oregon GOP ousts chair, taps new leadership

By DIRK VANDERHART
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — A conservative state senator from Myrtle Creek is the new chair of the Oregon Republican Party, following an event Saturday, Feb. 20, in which Republicans overhauled their top party leadership.

According to multiple Republican sources, state Sen. Dallas Heard handily won the job, beating three-term chair and Adair Village Mayor Bill Currier. Heard, 35, is just one in a slate of current and former Republican senators who now have a central role in steering the party's course. Former Senate Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr., now a Josephine County commissioner, won a contested race for vice chair. And state Sen. Dennis Linthicum, R-Klamath Falls, will serve as party treasurer.

A third sitting state senator, Chuck Thomsen of Hood River, was unsuccessful in his bid to serve as the party's secretary. He was defeated by incumbent secretary Becky Mitts, who also serves as chief of staff to state Rep. Mike Nearman, a Republican from Polk County.

"It's just kind of taking the party in a little different direction, a different type of leadership," Baertschiger said Feb. 21. "No criticism really of the prior leadership. It wasn't like there was some kind of coup."

Inquiries to Heard, Thomsen and a party spokesman were not

answered on Feb. 21.

The leadership swap comes at a time the Oregon GOP has gained national attention for passing a resolution claiming the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol was a "false flag" operation by leftist forces — a conspiracy theory that has been debunked in the weeks since the incident.

All 23 Republicans in the state House of Representatives denounced the statement. Two Republican senators representing swing districts, Thomsen and Bend-based Sen. Tim Knopp, took exception to the statement. Knute Buehler, 2018 Republican nominee for governor, changed his party registration to nonaffiliated following the incident.

Baertschiger was less critical.

"I didn't really see an upside to that, even though there's a lot of questions about the Jan. 6 Capitol incident," he said. "It's going to take a while for the facts to get out. They're starting to come out. I think it's gonna be a mixed bag."

The state GOP also has been criticized in recent years for expending resources running two unsuccessful recall campaigns against Gov. Kate Brown, while at the same time failing to recruit competitive candidates for some statewide offices. Democrats control every executive office in the state and hold supermajorities in the House and Senate, allowing them to pass any bill without Republican support.

It was unclear how Heard and others might seek to alter that trajectory. Heard in recent months has repeatedly garnered attention for his strident stance against state rules requiring masks and shuttering businesses to stem the spread of COVID-19.

When the Legislature met in special session on Dec. 21, Heard tore off his face mask in protest on the Senate floor, and he accused Democratic legislators and the governor of a "campaign against the people and the children of God."

On Jan. 6, the same day as the attack on the U.S. Capitol, Heard addressed supporters of then-President Trump at an "Occupy the Capitol" rally in Salem.

"I'm just kind of at a loss for words as I look at this Capitol building that is yours, the people's, and is currently being occupied by a group of elitists," Heard told the crowd. "Sadly I'm not sure that it's all Democrats that are the elitists, frankly. I am a Republican, but I'm an American first and there are some Republicans that need to go."

Baertschiger said he expected the new party leadership to improve its messaging and organization. He said discussions for mounting a leadership challenge in the party began when he still was in the Senate.

"I think there's a lot of tremendous people that want to get involved with the Republican Party," he said.



Gillian Flaccus/AP Photo

A large tree downed in a weekend ice storm sits atop power lines on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021 in Lake Oswego. Nearly 150,000 customers remained without power Wednesday in and around Portland, nearly a week after a massive snow and ice storm swept into the Pacific Northwest, taking out hundreds of miles of power lines as ice-laden trees toppled.

Power restoration from Oregon storm could take a week more

Associated Press

PORTLAND — Members of the Oregon National Guard delivered supplies to people without power as problems lingered from an ice storm that wreaked havoc on the electrical grid, and a utility official said some communities may not see power for another week.

Almost 39,000 customers remained without power on Sunday, Feb. 21, after Portland General Electric said it had restored power to more than 14,000 customers on Saturday. The utility said more than 400 crews were at work trying to restore power to remaining customers.

Guard members delivered emergency supplies including water and batteries to about 50 residents in Clackamas County, local authorities said.

The worst ice storms to hit the area in 40 years knocked out power to more than 420,000 customers and killed five people, including four who died from carbon monoxide poisoning as they tried to stay warm.

It could take as long as seven days to fully restore power, said Portland General Electric spokeswoman Elizabeth Lattanner. Some customers have experienced multiple outages. The damage and dan-

gerous conditions left behind by the storm that started Feb. 12 were the worst in the utility's history, according to officials.

"We would restore power in one area, move on to the next and then have to go back to that area because additional trees fell or something similar," Lattanner said.

One-quarter of customers lost power multiple times over the course of the three-day storm as ice-laden trees fell on lines.

A layer of ice an inch thick coated power lines and trees, adding 1,000 pounds of extra weight to each span of wire from pole to pole, PGE said.

Wyden: Look before you leap on repealing internet legal shield

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden cautioned critics against being too hasty to repeal the legal shield for information service providers for content posted on their platforms.

Conservative and liberal critics have taken aim at Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, the 1996 law authored by the Oregon Democrat and Rep. Christopher Cox, then a Republican from California. They argue that it has given too much power to tech giants such as Facebook and Twitter.

But Wyden said the law is not one-sided. He spoke Thursday, Feb. 18, at a Multnomah County virtual meeting the Town Hall Project livestreamed on Facebook.

"The people who post content are responsible for what they post. Period. That in effect creates something of a shield for the platform, because the poster is personally responsible," Wyden said in response to a written question read aloud by the mod-



Wyden

erator, Nathan Williams.

"The sword was that the platforms could do more to moderate what was on

their sites, so they could get rid of the slime and the hate and all the horrible stuff.

"Now we all know the platforms have not exactly covered themselves in glory about using the moderation provision; some of them are better than others. But the real issue is ... that if we did not have Section 230, things would still be the same without reform. It's not 230 that is the challenge — it is the First Amendment." He referred to the federal constitutional guarantee of free speech.

Cox left Congress after 17 years in 2005 to lead the Securities and Exchange Commission during the second term of President George W. Bush.

Just before he left office, President Donald Trump vetoed the \$740 billion military authorization bill, partly because it failed to attach a repeal of Section

230. But two-thirds majorities in the Democratic-led House and Republican-led Senate overrode his veto, mostly on other grounds.

"My guess is that the only thing Donald Trump knows about 230 is that it's between 2 and 3 o'clock," Wyden said.

Wyden said Trump's real issue was with Twitter, which flagged some of his tweets, then suspended his account and finally barred him permanently from the platform — mostly stemming from Trump's false claims about the outcome of the presidential election.

Wyden said that while there are legitimate questions about the misuse of the platforms, they also have aided social movements such as #MeToo against sexual harassment and abuse of women, and #BlackLivesMatter against police misconduct and other violence against Black people.

"How we go about dealing with it is the key," Wyden said.

"I want to make sure how we protect constitutionally protected speech.

That has always been hugely important to Oregonians. I also want to protect the ability to moderate, because whatever you think about it, this is a tool that can actually be used for good."

Wyden covered a range of issues during the hour-long virtual meeting, which he has substituted for in-person town halls during the coronavirus pandemic.

He is now chairman for a second time of the Senate Finance Committee, which holds sway over tax and trade issues, Social Secu-

ridy, Medicare and Medicaid, the large federal health insurance programs.

He said his first priority is to advance the relevant parts of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion pandemic recovery plan, including an extension of unemployment benefits, more aid for vaccination and personal protective equipment, and new efforts to reduce child poverty.

Biden proposes to cut the child poverty rate by more than half. A House committee has proposed increasing the child tax

credit from \$2,000 per child to \$3,000 per child between ages 6 and 17 (\$3,600 for each child under age 6), though only for one year. Utah Sen.

Mitt Romney has proposed a still bigger amount, but also to end the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and reduce food assistance. Under Romney's plan, all households with children would get checks, although higher-income families would pay more in taxes; the House plan would set household income limits.



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