

Broken trust in Oregon House

Special session drama could hamper Oregon Dems’ 2022 agenda

By **SARA CLINE**
The Associated Press/Report for America

SALEM — The recently concluded redistricting special session at the Oregon Legislature was marked by a broken deal, a Republican walkout and accusations of “cheating” that have reignited tensions on the state House floor.

And the fallout from the special session may linger, bleeding into next year’s legislative session.

“It seems extremely likely to me that (the last special legislative session) indicates heightened tensions, polarization and likely more extreme maneuvers — particularly from Republicans — in the state Legislature in the next year,” said Christopher McKnight Nichols, an associate professor of history at Oregon State University.

The 2022 regular legislative session was already looking like it would be filled with friction, as the division between political parties has expanded in recent years. While the majority Democrats are hoping to continue work on bills surrounding racial equity, police reform, immigrant rights and economic recovery following the pandemic, they will need enough Republicans to show up in Salem for them to conduct business.

And right now the GOP is in no mood to accommodate the party that they feel double-crossed them.

“The most valuable thing we have here is our word,” Republican Rep. Suzanne Weber said on the state House Floor on Monday, Sept. 27. “So when the deal was broken ... I lost trust, and when trust is gone I genuinely don’t know how this institution can work.”

The most controversial moment of September’s redistricting session was when



Abigail Dollins/The Associated Press, File

Lawmakers meet in the Oregon House of Representatives on June 23, 2021, at the Oregon State Capitol in Salem. The recently concluded redistricting session at the Oregon Legislature was marked by a broken deal, a Republican walkout and accusations of “cheating” that have reignited tensions on the state House floor.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat, rescinded a power-sharing deal with GOP lawmakers. The agreement, reached in April, had given House Republicans an equal say in redrawing political maps in exchange for them to stop blocking bills with delaying tactics.

The even split on the House redistricting committee essentially granted the minority party veto power over the state’s new political boundaries, which included a sixth U.S. House seat.

But Kotek — who is running for governor in 2022 — voided the deal on the first day of the special session, saying Republicans weren’t engaging constructively.

“As far as I’m concerned, we held up our end of the bargain as long as we could,” Kotek said following the conclusion of the redistricting session.

Republicans say they were cheated, as Democrats cleared the path to pass maps they wanted.

“She lied and broke her promise not just to us but to Oregonians,” Minority Leader Christine Drazan said.

Republicans initially walked out, denying the House a quorum to vote on and pass maps. However, GOP law-

makers returned Sept. 27 at which point Drazan put forward a motion to have Kotek formally censured.

“When she chooses to break an agreement made in good faith, she is harming the institution,” Drazan said after Democrats passed new political maps largely along party lines.

Drazan’s motion failed, 33-14, with Democrats voting against disciplining their leader and two Republicans opting to leave the chamber.

But hurt relationships and broken trust have some wondering if frustrations on the House floor will impact next year’s legislative session.

Kotek did not hesitate to place blame for the heightened tension that has marked the House in recent years.

“I’ve had my challenges with Republican leaders, but not to the level that I’ve had with Leader Drazan,” Kotek said, noting she has led the chamber through nine regular and six special sessions.

Drazan said in an interview with The Associated Press that if “divisions get greater and majority and minority status gets more and more separated” then it’s “going to hurt Oregon.” But the exact effect the special session will have

remains unknown.

“It seems to me, that every indicator right now is that it’s going to be a much more heightened and tense environment. And much more politicized — even more than it has been, increasing the likelihood of walkouts and the likelihood of allegations of bullying and unconstitutional behavior,” McKnight Nichols said.

The divide in Oregon’s legislative chambers have been expanding over the past few years — as the minority party says they are not being heard and Democrats argue Republicans are not willing to compromise.

Republicans have relied on delay tactics and walkouts, halting action at the state Capitol in recent years.

In May 2019, a series of walkouts by Republican senators began to block a school funding tax. They returned after Democrats scrapped bills on gun control and another that would have limited religious exemptions from vaccines. The next month, Republicans again did not show up to the Capitol in order to stop a cap-and-trade bill.

Walkouts and delay tactics continued in 2020 and 2021.

If Republicans do seek to influence next year’s session with parliamentary delays or walkouts, it might be their last opportunity, as a coalition of Democratic allies have begun pursuing measures on the 2022 ballot that would penalize lawmakers for blocking legislative action by walking away, and effectively eliminate their ability to require bills to be read in full.

While Republicans criticized Kotek’s broken deal, the fallout also prompted State Rep. Janelle Bynum, a Democrat, to announce she will once again pursue the House speakership, saying “repair work” needs to be done.

“If the session proved anything, it’s that we need a reset,” Bynum wrote in a Facebook post.

Oregon sues two counties over gun law enforcement

By **KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum sued two Oregon counties Friday, Oct. 1, to stop their efforts to get around Oregon’s new gun laws.

During the last legislative session, Oregon lawmakers required gun owners to securely store their weapons when not in use. The bill also banned the possession of guns in the state Capitol and at Portland International Airport and paved the way for public schools and universities to enact their own bans.

In response, Yamhill and Harney counties adopted new ordinances circumventing the state law.

Each county has declared itself a “Second Amendment Sanctuary,” in which the new state firearms laws are void. Their ordinances prohibit county officials from upholding the new state gun laws by imposing fines, criminal charges and even the possibility of civil suits for any enforcement action.

The Oregon Department of Justice lawsuit filed Oct. 1 asks the courts to void the local ordinances because state law declares counties don’t have the authority to regulate firearms.

Rosenblum is not happy officials, who enforce the state’s laws, might be prosecuted and subjected to private lawsuits, “Gun safety laws exist to help keep guns out of dangerous hands and keep people safe. A county commission simply doesn’t get to override state law in this way,” Rosenblum said in a written statement. “The laws of Oregon remain fully in force — and fully enforceable — notwithstanding these invalid ordinances. No officials should be frightened out of properly doing their job by the threat of illegitimate criminal charges or bogus lawsuits.”

Harney County Judge Pete Runnels, the head of the county’s administrative branch, declined to comment on the state action.

Other Oregon counties have enacted similar ordinances. Rosenblum hopes suing Harney and Yamhill counties will block similar efforts elsewhere.

“These actions will hopefully send the message that we are prepared to preserve the rule of law across our state,” she said.

September 25, 2021

Governor Kate Brown

Attn: Citizens' Representative
900 Court Street, Suite 254
Salem, Oregon 97301-4047

Dear Governor Brown:

On September 15, 2021, Union County Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution to request the State of Oregon exempt Union County from the vaccination mandate that will go into effect on October 18, 2021. Per the description of this resolution in The Observer (September 16, 2021), the Commissioners are concerned the mandate will result in a shortage of health care and public safety workers. They claim the mandate could cause people to leave their jobs. They further argue the best way to address this potential shortage is for the state to withdraw its COVID-19 vaccination mandate for Union County. We, Citizens of Union County for Health and Safety, strongly oppose this resolution for the following reasons.

- Union County COVID-19 infection rates skyrocketed after management of COVID-19 control was turned over to local officials (all state restrictions ended June 30, 2021), per their request (March 18, 2021 letter to you). The number of cases almost doubled in less than 3 months once the County Commissioners were in charge (1,501 cases on June 23, 2021** and 2,727 cases on September 19, 2021*). The Commissioners did nothing to stem the spread of the pandemic in Union County. No countywide programs were initiated promoting vaccinations, mask wearing, and/or social distancing. The Union County Sheriff's office was opposed to these well-documented safety practices as noted in Sheriff Bowen's letter to you on August 13, 2021. Our elected county officials promoted business as usual and this laissez-faire approach was apparently responsible for Union County developing one of the highest infection rates in the state (as of September 19, 2021 Union County is ranked 8 out of 36 counties in case count per 100,000 people*). We have a higher case count than any county in western Oregon.
- Over half (54.2% as of September 18, 2021) the adults in Union County are vaccinated and the percentages are slowly growing. Vaccines are FDA-approved, readily available at no cost and the scientific evidence clearly demonstrates their effectiveness. There are no other FDA-approved treatments that prevent or cure a COVID-19 infection.
- Our public health and government facilities and local businesses are not safe if staffed by people who are not vaccinated or tested frequently for potential infection. We contend that the Union County Commissioners, and Sheriff Bowen, are representing a vocal minority of people in Union County who instead of unemployment could choose vaccination.
- Union County residents who attended US public schools were required to be vaccinated against a wide range of highly communicable diseases including measles, polio and diphtheria. Members of our armed services are also regularly vaccinated because they live in close quarters and may deploy to countries where they may be exposed to other serious, debilitating diseases, e.g., yellow fever, hepatitis. These vaccine requirements have not raised strong opposition by the public, indicating Union County residents understand the public health benefits of vaccination against a highly transmissible disease.
- Staff shortages will not be resolved by lifting the mandate because workers, vaccinated and unvaccinated, who test positive for COVID-19 will not be able to work due to quarantines, illnesses managed at home, long-term hospitalizations and/or death. As the rate of infection rises, the number of workers on sick leave will increase. It is also likely some infected employees will miss work chronically due to the long-term effects of the infection.

In conclusion, we do not support the Union County Commissioners' resolution to withdraw the COVID-19 vaccination mandate for Union County. We encourage you to continue to require COVID-19 vaccinations after October 18, 2021. We think vaccinating as many people as possible is the best approach to keeping residents of Union County and the State of Oregon safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Citizens of Union County for Health and Safety

Patricia L. Kennedy, Sandy Ryman, Margaret L. Mead, Louise Squire, Leonard F. Paur, Sarah M. B. Stutzman, Mary Rowland, David Stutzman, Cindy Frick, Margaret Owens, Xenogeny Smith, Heidi Klammer, Barb Zukin, Pamela Swanger, Jessica Lackaff, Pat Nearing, Bob Joseph, Letha Joseph, Linda Reser, Sharon Porter, Donna Betts, Matt Cooper, Juanette Cremin, Daniel Kelly, Kay Firor, Kent Osterberg, Ellen Krieger, Margaret Sparks Richey, Laura A. Mahrt, John E. Rinehart, Doreen Stevens, J. Michael Frasier, Mike Shearer, Ira Cohen, Anna Morgan-Hayes, Joseph Hayes, Karen Ludwig, Bridgett Naylor, Amelia Diaz Ettinger, Nancy Bachman, Sarah Watson, Jan Watson, Ed Mosiman, Heather Stanhope, Jennifer Tyler, Steve Stanhope, John Richey, Susan Badger-Jones, Sandra Roth, Tim Welch, Donna Rainboth, Nicole Nowak, John DeNault, Rebecca Tilley, Mitch Wolgamott, Kathy Goodman, Lin D. Granger, Dale R. Hughes, Laura Erne, Maxine Hines, Annie Burnham, Donna Quinn, Carol Messinger, Eve Koltuv, Dwight Dill, Anna Maria Dill, Max Koltuv, Cathy Webb, Arlene Young, Roger Goodman, Maureen Kelly, Glen Scheele, Debera White, Betty Brown, Jeri Watson, Teresa Smith-Dixon, Martin Birnbaum, Ken Watson, Kathy Benson, Lyndall Shick, Meldy J. Lim, Bill Riley, Randy L. Knop, Joel D. Clark, Brenda Jackson, Pam Barlow, Zach Spoehr-Labutta, Rosemarie Elbert, John C. Anderson, Content Elizabeth Anderson, Linda Birnbaum, Richard Minogue, Kate Pfister-Minogue, Mary McCracken, Cheryl Hudson, Caralee Anley, Dora Boyd Cohen, Runa Parvin, Svea Ross, Steve Antell, Linda Palmer, Cheryl Simpson, Bruce E. Anderson, Cheryl Campbell, Brian J. Campbell, Jerome Campbell, Mary Karl, John Zakrajsek, Tasha Marshall, Dave Felley, Susan Eder, Steve Eder, Valerie Morrow, Priscilla K. Coe, Sarah Fischer, Nicholas Hackney, Linda Overlock, Tom Woodruff, Linda Carlsen, Sandra K. Coulson, Peter Barry, Anne Morrison, Michael Howard, Bryan Tolle, Michelle Tolle, John Thurber, George R. Mead, Gary Miller, Ruth Brandt, Emelie Montgomery Jones, Ellen Hartstirn, Mike Boldt, Karen Antell, Joe Corsini, Kenneth Chasteen, Ellen Chasteen, C. Fuji Kreider, Jim Kreider, Nicole Howard, Dianne Lewis, Mark Lewis, Colleen Nelson, Michael O'Connor, Ellen G. Campbell, Dale W. Campbell, Tracey K. Tracy, Vivian Young, Keith Blanchard, Sharon Blanchard, Barton Barlow, Sherri Mannor, Leland Mannor, Michael Daugherty, Shelley Cimon, Alana Robocker, John W. Evans, Carol Haddock, Richard Haddock, Danae Yurgel, David Tift, Cori Brewster, Kent Coe, Nella Parks, Michael Hatch, William B. Stinchcomb, Charles A. Lyons, Norm Cimon, Robin Jolin, Dick Kenton, Ronald Austin, Tawnia Murphy, Sarah West, Anne McNamee, Heidi Van Schoonhoven, Shannon Garrison, Ben Walker, Shannon Donovan, Meg Hawks, Austin Hawks, Charles W. Jones, Chris Buford, Sarah Buford, Darilyn Parry, Ethan Schowalter-Hay, Amy Jayne, Hazel S. Spiegel, Rick LePage, Janet Marrs, Lori Shields, Toby Neuman, Meghan Moore, Cara Campbell, Dustin Deckert, Anne March, Kevin March, Cheryl Cosgrove, Douglas Ross, Jan Goodrick

Cc: The Observer, The Oregonian, Union County Commissioners

* Source: Oregon Health Authority Covid-19 Data Dashboard ** Source: Center for Human Development website

Paid for by: Citizens of Union County for Health and Safety