

Interns: Kruse denied allegations

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Martin-Wyatt and Montgomery also allege that Senate President Peter Courtney, Legislative Counsel Dexter Johnson and Lore Christopher, who handles human resources at the Legislature, knew about Kruse's behavior and failed to prevent harassment at the Oregon Capitol.

It's the second lawsuit against legislative officials to become public since Friday. Gail Stevens, a former attorney for the Legislature, sued Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek. She alleged they failed to protect her from retaliation by the Legislature's head attorney, Johnson.

Stevens first filed a complaint with Christopher, but the legislative human resources director did nothing to help Stevens, according to the lawsuit. Under legislative personnel rules, the next step was for Stevens to file formal and informal complaints with the legislative presiding officers, Courtney and Kotek.

Stevens filed a written complaint with Kotek's office in August 2016. Kotek's chief of staff, Tim Inman, and Courtney's chief of staff, Betsy Imholt, responded by email directing Stevens to take her concerns back to Christopher, according to the lawsuit.

"The presiding officers have a duty to provide employees with immediate protection from retaliation and investigate their reports," according to the complaint. "Inman and Imholt denied plaintiff's request for protection from retaliation."

Stevens sued Johnson in 2017, alleging that he fired her for raising ethical and legal concerns about mismanagement in the Legislative Counsel Office and for requesting higher pay for extra work on personnel matters, which weren't part of her job description.

She also claimed that Johnson downplayed the importance of Stevens' cases, including her work on sexual harassment complaints. Johnson once referred to the sexual harassment complaints as a "soap opera," according to the Stevens' most recent lawsuit filed.

Courtney's office declined to comment on both lawsuits. Kotek, who is named only in the Stevens lawsuit, also declined to comment. Both legislative leaders said they don't comment on pending litigation.

Preventing harassment

Kristina Edmunson, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Justice, which generally defends state leaders against litigation, also said the agency doesn't comment on pending litigation.

Last year, an investigation into Kruse's conduct found he repeatedly touched women inappropriately without their consent. The interns' lawsuit also names Johnson and Christopher. Johnson initiated five complaints to the Oregon Health Authority over Kruse's smoking inside the Capitol building, and he and Christopher met with the agency to argue that Kruse should be penalized, according to the lawsuit.

But neither took similar steps to stem alleged harassment by Kruse, or advocate for civil penalties from the Bureau of Labor and Industries, the interns charged.

Plaintiffs' claim Christopher, Johnson and Courtney could have taken further steps to prevent harassment, such as making sure interns weren't assigned to work with Kruse or setting up cameras in the area of his office.

Johnson and Christopher declined to comment on both lawsuits. "The Legislature and legislative staff do not comment on ongoing litigation," Johnson wrote in an email Tuesday.

Martin-Wyatt and Montgomery are seeking \$6.7 million in damages. They claim that legislative leadership did not do enough to prevent or change Kruse's behavior.

Both were law students when they worked for Kruse, and the complaint alleges that both were subjected to unwanted touching and "sexual banter" from the state senator.

Montgomery worked for him from late 2016 to August 2017. Kruse, according to the complaint, addressed Montgomery as "little girl," "my baby lawyer" and "sexy," multiple times.

After talking to other legislative staffers about Kruse's harassing behavior, Montgomery moved her desk to the office of another legislator, state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose.

"(Montgomery) stopped wearing makeup, wore baggy clothes, and trained herself to listen for Kruse's footsteps so that she could position herself in the best possible way to be protected from his sexual advances," according to the lawsuit.

Kruse denied allegations that he sexually harassed the interns and said they are after money. "Part of the problem we get into here in our world today is when there is 'he said-she said,' she is always right whether it's sexual or not, and that is the kind of the world we live in," he said in a phone interview with the Oregon Capital Bureau.

Avoiding Kruse

Montgomery, who worked for a group of lawmakers representing the state's coastal

areas, claimed in her lawsuit that Sen. Johnson, other lawmakers and staff knew Kruse was harassing her.

The day that then-Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian filed a complaint against the Legislature because of its handling of sexual harassment issues, Montgomery notified Sen. Johnson.

"Montgomery reached out to talk with Senator Betsy Johnson to give her a heads-up that she was proceeding with the complaint process, but that she was trying to keep out the Coastal Caucus, and did not believe it would interfere with future employment," according to her lawsuit. "Senator Johnson was curt during that call, and quickly hung up. Since that conversation, Ms. Montgomery called back multiple times and dropped by the senator's office, on each occasion since Senator Johnson declined to talk with or meet with Ms. Montgomery."

Sen. Johnson could not immediately be reached for comment.

Martin-Wyatt worked for Kruse from January to April 2017. A few months into her internship, Martin-Wyatt obtained more work in another state senator's office to avoid Kruse, who continued to touch her inappropriately. By late April, she felt that she had to leave her internship early.

"Senior leaders and their advisers charged with protecting the Capitol work environment failed to prevent or remedy Kruse's conduct despite it being well-known for years, and despite the foreseeability of what happened to the plaintiffs," the lawsuit states. "Defendants expressed callous indifference to reports of Kruse's misconduct, and fostered an environment wherein complaints were discouraged with threats of retaliation, legal exposure, and negative career implications."

The lawsuit alleges that the office of legislative counsel allowed a hostile work environment to develop at the Capitol. The office "engaged in a pattern of discouraging open communication about the sexually hostile work environment at the Capitol, warning victims that if they communicate about harassment they could be exposed to claims of retaliation and/or defamation," according to the lawsuit.

"Female employees were discouraged or explicitly told by defendant Dexter Johnson to refrain from discussing their complaints about Senator Kruse and other harassers, inappropriately chilling women from reporting."

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Agriculture: FFA 'gave you that extra step'

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possible to get introduced to the agriculture industry.

Students who complete at least three courses in the high school's business or natural resources pathways can earn certification toward similar fields of study in higher education. Keeling hopes the natural resources pathway will help her as she attends Linn-Benton Community College and Oregon State University, with hopes of working in horse training and rehabilitation.

"This will also help if I want to get a job in a greenhouse," she said.

With less than 2 percent of the working-age population now in agriculture, a vast majority of students in FFA and agricultural education are not aspiring farmers. The organization dropped the Future Farmers of America name in 1998 to reflect the growing diversity of agriculture.

"We've been trying to keep relevancy by making our curriculum more hands-on" and career-technical and science-focused, Mackenzie Price, state treasurer for the FFA, said in an email. "That draws in more students because they learn about lots of



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Marcus Rasmussen and Jon Clark depart the Big O Saloon & General Store with their lambs.

industries within agriculture (i.e. welding, horticulture, animal sciences, business management) in hands-on learning opportunities. They learn that agriculture contributes to many industries and is very diverse."

Astoria's FFA chapter, one of nearly 110 statewide, is supported by a small group of Astoria alumni, including Charlie Hall, an instructional assistant at the high school who keeps a flock of sheep on the side.

"It gave you that extra step," he said of FFA. "It was a huge community service promotion, just

all leadership aspects. If I wasn't passionate about it, I wouldn't be involved to this day."

Rasmussen never used to have an agricultural background. But after friends from church convinced him to start raising animals, his family eventually had to relocate from the subdivisions of Warrenton to a farm in Lewis and Clark, where he has a herd of 10 alpacas and three cows, along with sheep, goats and chickens.

"When I grow up, I want to be a cop," Rasmussen said. "But I want to have a farm and sell to 4-H and FFAers."

Bunny: Mathews took questions from the class

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"You'd think that kids would forget," Johnson said. "But there's times — she's such an empath — she says, 'Mom, I just miss him so much. It's going to be his birthday next month.' I knew that was one I couldn't let go."

Johnson, who works as a hairdresser, got help from one of her clients, who found an exact replica of the Uncle Eric bunny online.

Johnson decided to stage a reunion. She showed Ryan pictures of the bunny and told her the toy would soon be coming home. She didn't specify how.

On Tuesday, Astoria firefighters visited Ryan's second-grade classroom at John Jacob Astor Elementary School and brought her the bunny. Johnson hoped that besides being a fun surprise, it might help Ryan see firefighters in a different light.

Lt. Wade Mathews pre-

sented the toy to Ryan, who, looking startled, immediately clasped the bunny tight in both arms. She quietly smiled and swung her feet underneath the table as relatives took pictures and videos.

Mathews took a few minutes to answer questions from the class and to talk to Ryan. Later, he told Johnson that Ryan was welcome to come by the fire department anytime to meet the staff and explore.

"Goodwill embraced me from Day One. They took a chance on me. Goodwill gave me Bridgeway."



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Administration Medical Assistant,
Bridgeway Recovery Services

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