

OPINION

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GUEST COLUMN

The state of democracy in Oregon

‘T he Twilight Zone,” also known as the 2020 Oregon Legislature, has gone off the air.

Democrats pulled the plug and said it was Republicans’ fault.

When Oregon went to every-year legislative sessions, one danger was that the 35-day session in even-numbered years would devolve into preelection showboating. The 2020 legislative session, which should rank as a national — or global — embarrassment for Oregon, became all about scoring political points and pleasing die-hard constituencies.



DICK HUGHES

Oh, by the way, the deadline for filing for legislative seats and other offices in the May 19 primary election is 5 p.m. on Tuesday.

The demise of the 2020 Legislature will be spun however meets the goals of the politician or interest group involved. Don’t believe them. Like many a relationship status posted on Facebook, it’s complicated.

Nuance and subtlety were absent for much of the 2020 Legislature. It came down to legislative leaders and their assorted partisan caucuses telling the other side, “You’re not going to push us around anymore.”

The state Senate and House quit on Thursday afternoon. The Legislature could not sine die — the formal conclusion of a legislative session — because the Republican walkout meant both chambers lacked a quorum to conduct business.

In retrospect, the animosity that hung over the 2019 Legislature was nothing compared to this year. House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, on Thursday afternoon reflected the views of many Democrats who said they no longer could trust the Republican legislators.

One interest group distributed a press release titled, “Republicans responsible for shutting down 2020 legislative session.” Democrats also have claimed that Republicans shut down government by walking out.

Technically, neither is true. Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, ended the session. And with the exception of the Legislature, state government continued functioning fine in the Republicans’ absence.

The Republican legislative leaders — Sen. Herman Baertschiger Jr., of



Sam Stites/Oregon Capital Bureau

Activists packed the steps of the Oregon State Capitol in February to show support for a cap-and-trade bill.

IN RETROSPECT, THE ANIMOSITY THAT HUNG OVER THE 2019 LEGISLATURE WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO THIS YEAR.

Grants Pass, and Rep. Christine Dragan, of Canby — announced on Thursday morning that Republicans were willing to return Sunday, which was the constitutional deadline for finishing the session.

With an early start on Sunday, the Legislature could have passed scores of bills before the 11:59 p.m. deadline. However, most bills would have required Republican consent to suspend normal procedural rules. Democrats wanted such consent for all bills. Republicans would not agree.

Courtney and Kotek said that would have amounted to letting Republicans pick and choose which bills would live or die, despite the Democrats being the ones in power with supermajorities in both chambers. Republicans said their only request was that the cap-and-trade

legislation be referred to voters.

The House speaker and Senate president also said there wouldn’t have been time Sunday for the debate that bills deserved. The reality is that lawmakers’ floor speeches are mostly for show and have little influence on their colleagues. The ultimate outcomes are known ahead of time.

Democrats say the Republicans violated their oaths of office by not showing up for floor votes to act on legislation. Republicans say they upheld their duty to their constituents by preventing passage of harmful legislation — specifically the carbon bill, Senate Bill 1530 — and they continued to handle constituent work and other responsibilities while gone from the Capitol.

Many changes were made in SB 1530 both during this year’s session

and compared with the version on which it was based — House Bill 2020, which was sidelined in the 2019 Legislature because of a Senate Republican walkout. Democrats pointed to these changes as reasons the revised bill deserved passage. Republicans said the changes were insignificant and could not compensate for the overall flawed policy.

This has been a bizarre five weeks at the Capitol. Republican House members walked out Feb. 25. The Senate Republicans had walked out the previous morning, Feb. 24, after the Joint Ways and Means Committee approved SB 1530 and sent it to the Senate on a near party-line vote.

When lawmakers exited the Ways and Means committee room that morning, they found each side of the Capitol hallway lined with people. On one side were Oregonians applauding the Democratic legislators who had voted for the bill. On the other side were Oregonians cheering the Republicans who had voted against the bill.

Such is the state of democracy in Oregon.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

GUEST COLUMN

Impressed with coordination on coronavirus

A storians have legitimate concerns and are asking good questions about what preparations are being made locally to deal with what experts say is the inevitable appearance of COVID-19.

As the city continues to monitor this evolving situation, I want our neighbors to know that their health and safety are the primary concern of the many local agencies working together to prepare for this virus.



BRUCE JONES

The dedicated professionals in our private sector, nongovernmental, local, state and federal organizations with a role to play are working

around the clock sharing the latest information, refining plans, studying lessons learned from other areas, considering the “what ifs” and focusing on the goal of most effectively and efficiently protecting public health.

The city’s primary touch point is Clatsop County, whose Public Health Department is in continuous contact with Oregon Health Authority, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, our local hospitals, schools, Clatsop County Emergency Management and the U.S. Coast Guard, among others.

I am extremely impressed with the level of coordination and communications taking place.

Many Astorians want to understand how any risk from cruise ships will be managed. We take this risk very seriously. In addition to existing federal protocols, discussions are ongoing between the city, county, Port of Astoria, Coast Guard, cruise lines as well as state and federal agencies as this situation evolves.

Time allows for deliberate, methodical planning. There will be updated guidance in the coming weeks prior to any scheduled cruise ship arrival.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The Oceania Regatta, left, and the Seven Seas Mariner docked at Pier 1 in the Port of Astoria last year.

CORONAVIRUS

Local updates on the coronavirus are available online.

- Clatsop County: bit.ly/39tDGre
- Port of Astoria: bit.ly/2xav3TY

Neither Astoria nor our partners will

make any significant decision in response to COVID-19 in isolation. Rather, any potential decisions about curtailing activities, for example, will be made in concert with our partners and other agencies and health authorities, based on the best available information and recommendations of health authorities, tailored to local risk.

The best action each of us can take as individuals to protect the communi-

ty’s health is to follow the basic guidance which is outlined on a wide variety of public health websites, like regular hand-washing, avoiding touching one’s face, staying home if sick and other steps.

Please rest assured that the dedicated public servants and medical professionals working on this issue are doing so tirelessly.

Bruce Jones is the mayor of Astoria.