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GUEST COLUMN

Security and health protocols shape life in Salem

I need to find new descriptions for life in Salem and at the Oregon Capitol. “Weird” is both redundant and insufficient.

Let’s see. State Rep. Mike Nearman, R-Independence, who has happily occupied a position at a far edge of the House Republican caucus, is now accused of opening a locked Capitol door so protesters could enter during the Dec. 21 special legislative session. The protesters clashed with police before being dispersed. House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said all options are being looked at for disciplining Nearman.



DICK HUGHES

The news has been dominated by violent protests, particularly at the U.S. Capitol, but also across the country. Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, who is not aligned with Nearman, has been remarkably prescient about the political potential for such events.

In the aftermath of sometimes-violent protests, the Oregon State Police now will train legislators, Capitol staff, journalists and others on building security protocols, including potential evacuations.

Concrete barricades recently were installed in front of the Capitol, which remains closed to the public because of COVID-19 measures. At a virtual press conference on Thursday, Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, declined to identify the additional security measures being undertaken.

Courtney worries about a “Malheur II” engulfing the Capitol, a reference to the armed occupation five years ago of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. More clashes occurred between groups of protesters this month in Salem, to the point that police stopped even Courtney from reaching the Capitol on Wednesday.

The Legislature met Monday to swear in newly elected, reelected and appointed members — all 60 House members and 17 of the 30 senators. Except, the Senate is down to 29. Sen. Alan Olsen, R-Canby, informed colleagues of his resignation.

The newest addition is Kayse Jama, whom the Multnomah and Clackamas county commissioners on Wednesday



Associated Press

Supporters of President Donald Trump and anti-mask demonstrators held a rally outside the Oregon State Capitol in December.

day appointed to fill the Senate District 24 seat held by Sen. Shemia Fagan, D-Portland, who is the new secretary of state. Jama came to Portland as a refugee from war-torn Somalia, became a U.S. citizen and is executive director of Unite Oregon. He will be the first Muslim member of the Oregon Senate, according to Willamette Week.

There was no joint session on Monday of the House and Senate to hear Gov. Kate Brown’s customary State of the State address. Legislative leaders, not Brown, revealed that her speech would be postponed.

Courtney said a joint session would be unsafe and a violation of the health protocols being adopted in the Senate and House. I asked who decided the governor’s speech would be postponed.

He didn’t know.

Said Courtney: “I didn’t tell the governor, ‘You’re not speaking.’ That would not be in our best interest of the Legislature to say that.”

Said Kotek: “I assume there will be a State of the State address sometime in the future.”

As I’ve noted before, Brown never gave a State of the State speech last year, which is unusual for a governor.

New rules will continue to keep the Capitol closed to the public while expanding opportunities for public testimony via videoconference and email.

“We’ve got a Capitol that, basically, the public is not in (at) this time. We’re going to try hard to get them in as soon as we can,” Courtney said.

The 2021 Legislature formally

begins work on Jan. 19. Under the Capitol Operations Safety Plan that Kotek and Courtney announced, legislative committees will meet by videoconference for the foreseeable future. For weeks and perhaps months, the House and Senate will hold floor sessions only for the formal introduction of bills and moving those bills along to committees.

“All members will have to be adaptable and flexible,” Kotek said.

As officials respond to security concerns, health protocols and other issues, Courtney said, “Your life changes daily around this place.”

Legislators already have submitted around 3,000 bills.

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

THE 2021 LEGISLATURE FORMALLY BEGINS WORK ON JAN. 19. UNDER THE CAPITOL OPERATIONS SAFETY PLAN THAT KOTEK AND COURTNEY ANNOUNCED, LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES WILL MEET BY VIDEOCONFERENCE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. FOR WEEKS AND PERHAPS MONTHS, THE HOUSE AND SENATE WILL HOLD FLOOR SESSIONS ONLY FOR THE FORMAL INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND MOVING THOSE BILLS ALONG TO COMMITTEES.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Misleading

There is a terribly misleading statement in Oregon Public Broadcasting’s and The Oregonian’s otherwise excellent article by Tony Schick and Rob Davis on the risks industrial logging pose to drinking water.

Arch Cape’s proposed property tax levy to buy the forests around our drinking water source is only going to be 40 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. For most property owners, this is only \$100 to \$200 per year.

Since Clatsop County assessed values are substantially less than the assessor’s estimated real market value, the “\$2,300 per home” figure mentioned in the article would represent the cumulative total of increase in property tax payments over 10 years on a home with a market value of about \$1 million.

A reader could misunderstand your sentence to mean that their 2021 tax bill would be significantly increased. Because the community will spend the next four months discussing this levy and the proposed purchase, such a misunderstanding would be really damaging to that discussion.

We do appreciate the many excellent points made in the article, and concur with its conclusions. These are the very reason we feel this investment is so important.

DAN SEIFER
President, Arch Cape Water & Sanitary Districts

True anarchists

On Jan. 6, on national TV, we see the true anarchists in our country; and they’re not kids in leather clothes breaking windows in Portland and Seattle.

They’re President Donald Trump supporters, forcing their way into the U.S. Capitol building to make the government

do what Trump wants, in defiance of the laws and the national election results.

They’d call themselves conservatives, but all that means is they want to conserve their own economic advantages. Wake up, people. You’ve backed a cheap New York crook, who is talented at hornswagging a crowd.

He’s never understood the responsibilities of the presidency, or bothered to try and find them out. He belongs in jail. And, you owe the country a humble apology.

JOSEPH WEBB
Astoria



LETTERS WELCOME

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