

Oregon GOP split on message after insurrection

House lawmakers disavow 'false flag'

By GARY WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon House Republicans disowned an official Oregon Republican Party claim that the riot at the U.S. Capitol was a "false flag" operation by Democrats to politically damage then-President Donald Trump.

A two-page screed featured a "resolution" calling 10 Republicans who voted for the impeachment of President Trump "traitors." It claimed the mob of Trump supporters who smashed their way into the U.S. Capitol in a riot that left five dead and 140 police officers injured was a Democratic conspiracy to set off the "sham" impeachment. The episode was likened to the 1933 burning of the German Reichstag in Berlin by Nazis, who then blamed the fire on others. They called for a "patriot network" to advance their claims.

"Democrats and their enablers are trying to falsely assign blame to the peaceful protesters present that day," the state GOP said.

The hyperbolic language, embrace of dark conspiracies and invocation of Nazism was



John Minchillo/AP Photo

Supporters of former President Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

an inflammatory brew quickly picked up by the Washington Post, CNN and Britain's Guardian newspaper. Twitter and Facebook spread the story around the globe.

In an extraordinarily swift and unanimous rebuke, the 23 members of the House Republican caucus signed a letter rejecting the Oregon Republican Party's official statement.

"There is no credible evidence to support false flag claims," the letter said. "Oregon is in crisis. Vaccines are not going to our most vulnerable, our students are still not in a safe classroom setting, main street businesses are in a tailspin, our health data is a mess and here we are, talking about

a political party resolution."

It wasn't the first time lawmakers had to respond, dismiss or explain some action of a state political party whose decadeslong political right-turn had outpaced even its growingly conservative state representatives. As the party's size and influence has declined, the tension between those who carry the GOP banner outside and those inside the Capitol trying to influence policy has stretched nearer to a breaking point.

The lawmakers' letter didn't mention the House members or Trump's debunked claim that the election was stolen by President Joe Biden.

But with the Republicans

facing a Democratic supermajority in both chambers of the Legislature just as the 2021 session began, many GOP lawmakers complained the state party was trying to score national political points instead of working to win Oregon elections.

"It's none of our business what U.S. House Representatives from other states do," state Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, wrote in a blog post demanding an agenda reset. "Focus, please."

Senate Republicans did not make a group statement, but some also were angry with the timing, topic and tone of the attack.

"I have not seen any credible evidence to suggest that the riot at the United States Capitol was a 'false flag,'" said Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend. "I do not support the Oregon Republican Party's resolution. I find it disheartening that while Oregonians are struggling, these political distractions get in the way of helping them recover."

The uproar intensified when the Anti-Defamation League harshly criticized Republicans for misappropriating the Reichstag fire, a prelude to the Holocaust, to buttress an argument that those who were the target of the attacks were the perpetrators.

"The violence at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th was a large-scale physical assault on our nation's democratic values and institutions perpetrated by right-wing conspiracy theorists, extremists and supporters of former President Trump. That is a fact," the ADL said in a statement.

The Republican lawmakers said they were blindsided by the Oregon Republican Party pronouncement. They were never consulted or even told in advance what was coming from the party's 22-member executive committee of GOP activists.

The state committee has provided fuel for a feud with GOP lawmakers before. The party hosted conservative political firebrand Roger Stone at its 2018 conference in Salem. A squad of Proud Boys, the right-wing group with a reputation for violence, served as Stone's bodyguards, flashing "white power" hand signs at a party after his speech.

Despite the sharply conservative tone of the statement, state GOP chairman Bill Currier has been criticized by some activists as not being conservative enough by requiring a litmus test on issues important to the party's increasingly Trump-oriented base.

Currier said he believes the party needed to be a "big tent" that can create winning coalitions with unaffiliated voters and disenchanted Democrats.

"We need to be more focused on issues rather than trying to decide whether some given candidate meets some litmus test," he said. "The party doesn't pick the candidates, the voters do."

Critics within the party say the hard right turn of the current version of the Republican Party would reject Oregon icons like Gov. Tom McCall and U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield, who spearheaded environmental reforms and equal rights issues.

Jim Moore, a professor at Pacific University, studies public reactions to politics as outreach director from a base named after one of those long-ago Republicans: The Tom McCall Center for Civic Engagement.

"The biggest impact of the 'false flag' assertion will be it driving more moderate Republicans out of the party — those that are still left after five years of Trump and decades of a party moving to the right on all issues," he said.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Inslee loosens virus restrictions in Washington state

Changes for restaurants, other indoor venues

By JOSEPH O'SULLIVAN
Seattle Times

Pacific County and several other counties will be able to relax some COVID-19 restrictions on businesses starting Monday, Washington state Gov. Jay Inslee has announced.

That change will allow restaurants in those counties to reopen indoor service at 25% capacity through 11 p.m. Indoor fitness centers and live entertainment venues — including museums, bowling alleys and concert halls — can also reopen to 25% capacity. Bars that don't serve food, however, must remain closed.

In a news conference Thursday, Inslee announced he was loosening the restric-

tions in two of the eight regions in his Healthy Washington plan.

"We certainly like our progress we've recently made bringing down COVID activity," Inslee said. "And so these are some promising signs we're headed in the right direction."

But, "If we relax too much, we could be back in the horrific days of this with exponential growth," the governor added later.

The announcement allows King, Pierce and Snohomish counties — the Puget Sound region — to advance. Also moving forward is the west region, which includes Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific and Thurston counties.

The announcement brought swift reactions from industry associations, who called the move a step forward — but not far enough to help struggling businesses.

"We appreciate that there's change," said Anthony Anton of the Washington Hospitality Association in a news conference later on Thursday. But, "It's not the change that we need. Seventy-five percent of the regions will still be closed."

Anton called on Inslee to open restaurants across the state to 50% capacity, "And at the end of the day, we know we can do these things safely."

Implemented on Jan. 11, the latest plan divided Washington into eight regions and set four public health benchmarks that each had to meet in order to relax some restrictions. No region, however, has met those four benchmarks.

Under the new requirements, regions must meet just three of those four benchmarks to move to the second and less-restrictive phase.

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