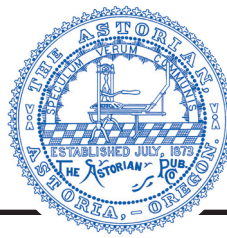


# OPINION



# the Astorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

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**KARI BORGEN**  
Publisher

**DERRICK DePLEDGE**  
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**JOHN D. BRUIJN**  
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## GUEST COLUMN

# Oregon partisan politics at play

Should Oregon legislators still get paid if they don't show up for work (i.e., the minority Republicans)?

Conversely, should legislators still get paid if they show up but merely go through the motions of collaboration and bipartisanship (i.e., the majority Democrats)?



**DICK HUGHES**

Which brings us to an excellent question from a Bend reader: How should success be measured for a legislative session (i.e., success for Oregon as a whole)?

These questions arise because Friday was the 60th day of this year's 160-day session, and

— no surprise — life is not particularly happy in the Capitol.

This week, the House will resort to day and evening floor sessions — nearly 20 hours total — because House Republicans are effectively slowing the process. On the other side of the Capitol, the Senate is considering rule changes aimed at punishing Republican senators if they walk out again. The House adopted such rules already.

With a supermajority in each chamber, Democrats can rewrite the rules over Republican opposition. Meanwhile, Republicans are asking why legislators get \$151 per diem even on days when they work from home.

Ah, partisanship. Depending on one's point of view, each side is standing up for democracy and their constituents, or is being self-righteous and obstreperous.

Things could come to a head when, or if, the Senate votes on Senate Bill 554, which would allow the Legislature and local governments to ban almost anyone, including holders of concealed weapon permits, from carrying firearms in public buildings. Two years ago, the Democrats' gun control legislation contributed to the Senate Republicans' walkout that blocked the Senate from passing bills.

SB 554 is at the desk of state Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, after being approved in February by a Senate committee on a 4-3 partisan vote. Rumors are that it could go to a Senate vote this week. However, the Senate president's communications director, Johnmartin Sherman-Lewis, told me that Courtney had no comment on when that might happen.

On Thursday, U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley was among those who testified remotely to the state Senate Rules Committee, supporting Democrats' proposed bal-



Sarah Zimmerman/AP Photo

Oregon's minority Republicans have used walkouts as a political tool in Salem.

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lot measure that would reduce the quorum requirement for conducting legislative business.

Oregon has an unusually high bar. Two-thirds of members must be present for the Senate or House to vote on bills. Senate Joint Resolution 4 would lower that threshold to a majority of members, thereby preventing the superminority Republicans from blocking business.

The proposal resonates with die-hard Democrats. But most Oregonians, regardless of party affiliation or independence, pay little attention to the Legislature. House Majority Leader Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, told constituents last week that gaining voter approval of such a ballot measure would be difficult. Everyday Oregonians, who are not highly engaged in the political process, see the high quorum requirement as protecting democracy.

**Reading, reading and more reading:** Smith Warner and other Democrats have criticized the House Republicans for demanding that bills be read word-by-word on the House floor before being voted on. That takes up so much time that House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, has decided that the House will meet four days during the week.

The House had been meeting only on

Monday and Tuesday mornings, with the rest of the days reserved for committee and caucus meetings. Little business is conducted on Fridays.

Slowing the legislative process is how Republicans seek to block bad laws and instead gain greater compromise from Democrats. House Republican Leader Christine Drazan, in a recent floor speech, said Democrats were trying to marginalize Republicans' participation. "We are not here to facilitate the ease of the passage of someone else's agenda that harms my community and my state long term," Drazan said.

**Survey says:** Oregonians may pay little attention to life at the Capitol, but they're typically not hopeful about the outcomes. In November 2020, DHM Research and the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center reported: "A recent poll found 80% of Oregonians are ending the year worried about our state's future and concerned about the continuing impacts of COVID-19, homelessness, racial injustice, riots, lawlessness, climate change and more."

"What's even more disconcerting is only 33% of us feel we can come together next year as Oregonians — urban and rural, Republican and Democrat, whites and communities of color

— to make progress addressing these challenges and resetting Oregon."

That "next year" is now, and DHM's current survey found that Gov. Kate Brown's favorability ratings among Oregonians had dropped further. As DHM's John Horvick told Oregon Public Broadcasting: "She has never been particularly popular. ... She has been polarizing. She is as disliked by Republicans as Democrats dislike Donald Trump."

In the survey this month, 11% of Oregonians held a very positive impression of Brown. Overall, only 37% had a very or somewhat positive impression of the governor, compared with 53% for President Joe Biden.

**Balance in Congress:** Oregon has five seats in the U.S. House, all but one held by Democrats. We are projected to gain a sixth seat because the 2020 census results are expected to show that Oregon has gained population relative to other states.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the latest DHM survey is that a plurality of respondents — 37% — said the most reasonable partisan makeup would be to have those Oregon congressional seats held by three Republicans and three Democrats.

Meanwhile, the process of drawing new legislative and congressional district boundaries is in limbo while states await the delayed census results. In a complicated political and judicial process, the Legislature has sued Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, although the two sides say they're actually cooperating.

A court filing from the Oregon Attorney General's Office, which represents the secretary of state, argues that the Legislature can go ahead without waiting on census data, such as by temporarily employing statistics from the Population Research Center at Portland State University.

In contrast, We Draw Oregon, an organization involved in the process, last week asked the Legislature to slow down. In a letter to key legislators, the group wrote:

"We Draw Oregon, the next phase of We Count Oregon, and community-based partners are concerned about how the redistricting process is unfolding. The hearing schedule appears to be politically motivated versus driven by a sincere interest in community insights. The schedule and potential use of alternative data undermine the democratic process we urgently need to catalyze trust and civic engagement."

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Lobbying transparency

I was surprised to read in the March 13 Astorian that the Clatsop County commission has hired a lobbying group "to help protect and advance policy interests in Salem" — \$45,000 of the people's money that could be used directly on projects here in the county is nothing to sneeze at.

As I read about Pac/West Communications, I began to wonder exactly what policy they are going to be advancing.

In 2006, the lobbying group was hired to represent Alaska in their successful campaign to gain access to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil exploration. That was consistent with an earlier effort Pac/West made to reduce the protections of the Endangered Species Act.

Their current president, Mark Truax, has a "special interest" in oil and natural gas. He helped in the successful effort to defeat Proposition 112 in Colorado, which would have expanded setbacks from water sources and housing sites for oil and gas development.

Pac/West's website asserts that they "bring rural Oregonian voices to the capitol." That resonates with the wishes of the #TimberUnity-leaning majority on the commission, for whom "rural representation" is a mantra.

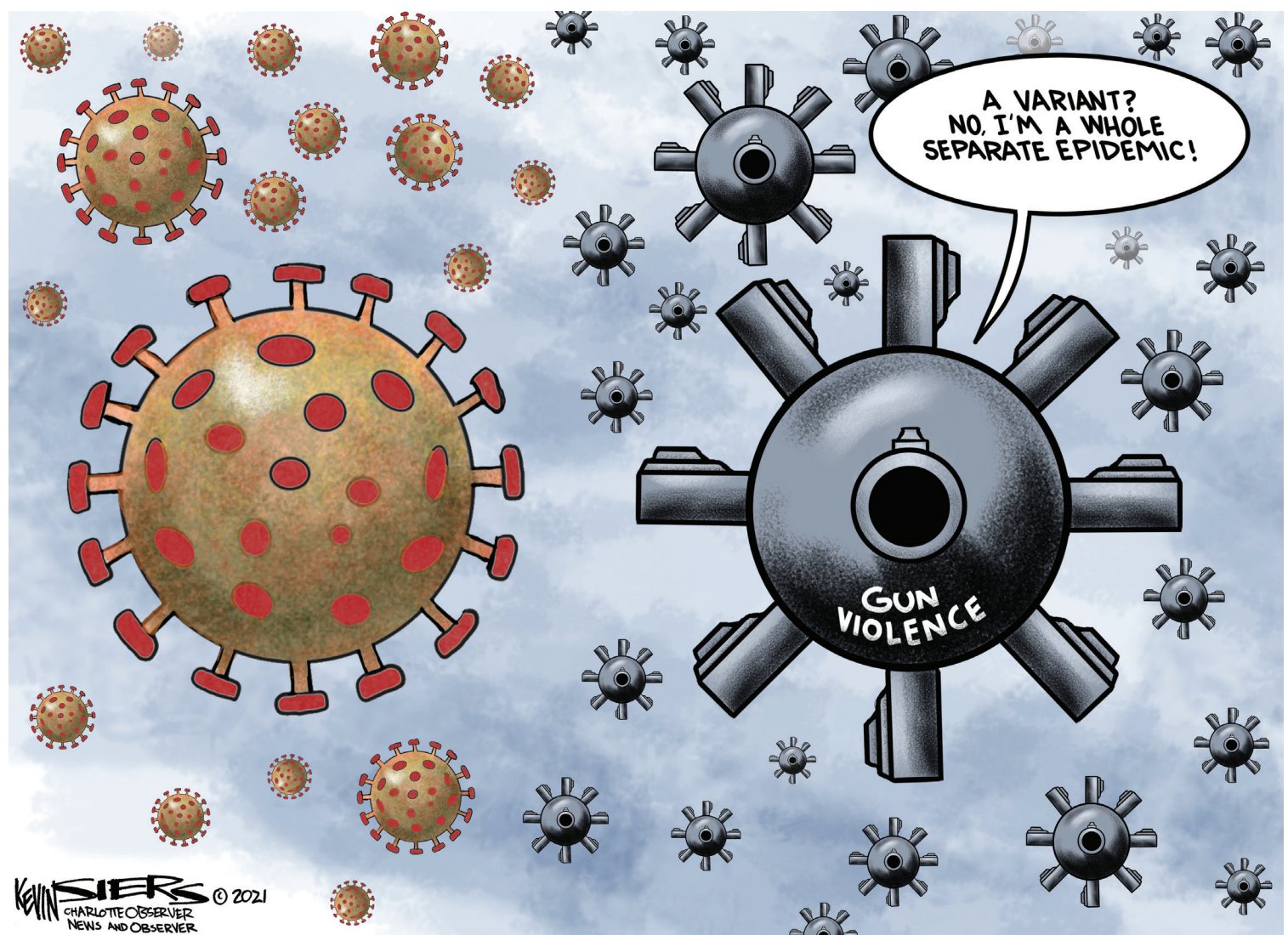
Could defeating climate measures, like cap and trade, that #TimberUnity opposed, be a policy advanced by our lobbyists?

This is a time for full transparency by the commission and thorough scrutiny by the public of how, and for whom, our money is being spent on a lobbyist.

ROGER DORBAND  
Astoria

### Awe

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many volunteers that are helping to



get Clatsop County vaccinated. The organization was much improved for my second vaccination, and I am in awe at the massive effort that is going on all over the country. Thanks again for your service.

DEBORAH ALBRECHT  
Gearhart

### No doubt

I have documented a number of reasons not to wear the required masks, however I will try to explain but one.

No doubt masks do have a few positive results, but they should be weighed against the detriments. Few enjoy the benefits, while all suffer from the negatives.

In my youth, I had an acquaintance who was thinking about his dissertation. He started a preliminary study, with his own funds. He rounded up some subjects in mask-wearing populations. He tested them in ways several months apart, finding mental degeneration.

I finished my work and moved away, losing contact.

It is well documented that the brain is

one of the most oxygen-hungry organs in the body. Wearing a mask interferes with the free exchange of the air we breathe. I suspect that, if one investigated this phenomenon they would find, in the long run, a steadily increasing percentage of carbon dioxide, over that of oxygen, behind the mask.

I think it is but logical that something as delicate as the brain might be damaged if forced to function in an atmosphere deficient in oxygen.

BENJAMIN A. GREAVES  
Seaside