

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# The long, strange trip to gun reform

**W**ell, that was anticlimactic. And strange, maybe even bizarre.

On a near party-line vote, the Oregon Senate passed a gun control bill and sent it to Gov. Kate Brown for her blessing.

That was no surprise. But it was a surprise that the Senate spent less than a half-hour debating Senate Bill 554.

Even how the Senate wound up voting on the bill Wednesday was weird, though legal under Senate rules. It illustrated, once again, that whichever political party controls the Legislature determines what happens.

SB 554 comprises 12 pages mandating safe storage of firearms, prohibiting people from carrying guns in the Oregon Capitol and Portland International Airport, allowing schools and colleges to ban firearms on campus and increasing fees for concealed handgun licenses.

Half the bill never got a public hearing in the Senate. Neither was it discussed in a Senate committee. That is because the House Democrats took the version of SB 554 that the Senate had passed 16 to 7 in March after various parliamentary maneuvers and lengthy debate, rewrote the bill to add the safe storage mandates, passed the new bill 34 to 24 and shipped it back to the Senate.

Wednesday's Senate vote was on whether to accept the House's changes. The bill had been listed for Senate consideration next month but sometime May 4 it was added to Wednesday's agenda.

Recognizing that he would fail, state Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod, of Lyons, tried to delay consideration of the bill until June 27, which is the constitutional deadline for the 2021 Legislature to adjourn. "We all know this is going to be a party-line vote, and I really find that repugnant. And I just wish that people would vote for what's right, not what's best for your darn party," Girod said before his motion failed on a 6-18 outcome.

Of course, what is right is in the eye of the beholder.

"As a gun owner for over 50 years, I believe that it's our duty as gun owners



Gov. Kate Brown is reviewing a bill that would impose gun restrictions.

to be responsible in our possession and holding and storing of our guns," said Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, arguing that SB 554 did not violate or infringe on the Second Amendment.

After the brief debate, the bill passed 17 to 7. Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, signed it on Thursday, and it's headed to Brown for review.

The difference between the six votes for Girod's motion and the seven against the overall bill was Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose. Arguably one of Oregon's most independent lawmakers, certainly among Democrats, Johnson joined her fellow Democrats in defeating Girod's motion. That is how politics works. However, Johnson then joined six Republicans in opposing the overall bill, the only Senate Democrat to do so. Four Republicans and the two Independents were gone, presumably to boycott action on the bill.

Now it gets interesting. And expensive.

Assuming Brown signs the bill, as is expected, the law will take effect 91 days after the 2021 Legislature adjourns. That gives opponents a chance to collect enough signatures to force a statewide vote, which also would seem likely.

Oregonians then can expect multi-million-dollar campaigns to sway voters. Imagine what Oregon might have achieved in reducing gun violence if both sides had instead pooled their resources toward a joint, intensive statewide campaign to encourage safe storage of firearms. As with COVID-19 vaccinations and other societal issues, individuals heed the advice of people and organizations whom they trust — and ignore the others.

### Speaking of trusted sources

The Oregon Health Authority should ask Cliff Bentz, who represents Oregon's 2nd Congressional District, to record a public service announcement about the coronavirus vaccinations. The Republican of Ontario said he tries to conclude every interview with two words: "Get vaccinated."

Bentz talked about a variety of issues during a videoconference legislative briefing arranged by Oregon Business & Industry. That included an analysis of his colleagues in the U.S. House: "It's just astounding how normal people are."

He also encouraged Oregonians to make good use of their U.S. senators, Democrats Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. "Ron and Jeff have more power than

they ever have," Bentz said.

### Differing views of Oregon

Urban-rural differences remain an ongoing theme at the Oregon Capitol. Sen. Chris Gorsek, D-Troutdale, spoke to it Tuesday.

"I am very concerned about what is going on, especially in southern and Eastern Oregon, in terms of how people feel about the government of the state. And it seems like we're just kind of letting that pass by and letting that fester," he said, calling on Gov. Brown to start talking with people around the state.

"Leadership demands that we deal with this, and in this case, I think it's the governor."

### Awaiting a conduct report

As of this writing, the House Conduct Committee has not scheduled a follow-up meeting to hear the outside investigator's draft report into the sexual harassment complaint that Rep. Vikki Breese-Iverson, R-Prineville, filed against Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie.

The investigator had said she expected to finish the report by the end of April.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Send a message

I am writing this letter to express my concern for the future of the city of Seaside.

The city has been allowing RV overnight camping on Necanicum Drive for a year now, along with people sleeping in their cars. My neighbors and I have complained to the Seaside City Council, however, it seems they think they have their hands tied and are looking into possible solutions.

Pedestrians have found the sidewalks blocked with the RV campers' belongings, and I have personally stepped in a puddle of urine when stepping off the curb in front of the RV that is parked the closest to the 12th Avenue bridge.

I have seen RV campers spray-painting their RVs, performing body work, etc. These RVs are an eyesore, and happen to be parked across the street from a city park.

I have been told the city cannot do anything due to a federal appeals court ruling related to Boise, Idaho. That ruling prohibits displacing homeless people if there isn't adequate shelter space.

In my research, I have found the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development doesn't consider people living in RVs to be homeless, as the vehicles are designed for human habitat.

My concern is if the RV campers parked on Portland streets find out they can park on the streets in Seaside, they may come in droves.

I suggest the city of Seaside use the anticipated \$1.4 million American Rescue Plan dollars to start removing illegally parked RVs from city streets, and send a message.

DAVE ANDERSON  
Seaside

### Accessible to everyone

I am pleased to hear that the Astoria Library is moving forward in stages to renovate. But, until the library is open evenings or weekends, it is not fully serving our community.

The solution of "go to Seaside on the weekends" that I've heard from the library's social media is inadequate. Let's



## HERD IMMUNITY BRIGADE...

make the library accessible to everyone, beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act compliance changes in stage one.

One day a week, could the library be open from 2 to 6 p.m. instead of 1 to 5 p.m.? What is stopping the library from serving the working, taxpaying Astoria resident?

KELLI GRIFFITH  
Astoria

### No one

The April 29 online headlines in The Astorian, one on top of the other, with

absolutely no irony: "County appeals to governor to lift virus restrictions," and "County reports 14 new virus cases."

Clatsop County has a goal of vaccinating only 70% of its population, and it has not even achieved half of that as of this writing. But the county wants the governor to allow everything to be open for business, with no restrictions?

The endless opening and closing of businesses is frustrating, and there is only one way to stop it. Every single person must get vaccinated. Enough with allowing people to refuse to get vaccinated, and demanding that they have the right to go about life as usual, while it puts the health

and well-being of others at risk.

They're blocking COVID-19 herd immunity. They are solely responsible. Cases in the state keep going up by the hundreds. It's time to require that people get vaccinated. No one has the right to continue to perpetuate a deadly public health risk. No one.

Either everyone gets vaccinated, and everything is able to open up and come back to life, or COVID-19 cases continue to go up and restrictions are imposed, eased and re-imposed, because of a never-ending cycle of illness.

CHRISTINA BUCK  
Seaside