

OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

Oregon has divisions even among the same side

'Rules are rules for all to follow."

Those are the words of state Rep. David Brock Smith, of Port Orford, spoken as he acquiesced to House Speaker Tina Kotek's request that he please wear his face mask while speaking on the House floor.

Brock Smith possessed the trifecta of COVID-19 protections: vaccination in April and later a booster shot, plus antibodies from having contracted the coronavirus. On Dec. 13, with the special legislative session getting underway, he got a virus test just to make sure. After all, like Kotek, he had been maskless at events back East. The test was negative.



DICK HUGHES

Still, face coverings are required in the Capitol under legislative rules and state regulations. Rules are rules, and Brock Smith refastened his mask.

What made news was what happened on the other side of the Capitol involving another Republican legislator from southwest Oregon. Sen. Dallas Heard, of Roseburg, was escorted out of the Senate chamber after refusing to wear a mask.

On a day the Legislature showed surprising unity in doling out hundreds of millions of dollars, the contrasting incidents underscored the divides among Oregonians, even ones with similar values.

Brock Smith represents House District 1, which makes up half of Senate District 1, represented by Heard. Both men have had the coronavirus. Both are vocal critics of Gov. Kate Brown's pandemic mandates.

Heard, who also heads the Oregon Republican Party, had been casting his votes from a Senate balcony before coming down to the floor as the Senate prepared to adjourn the special session.

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, told him: "You know you don't have a mask on. You're supposed to have a mask on. So why don't you get up and tell us what you want, and then I'm going to ask you to leave the floor, please."

Heard responded, "Simply put, I'm just exercising the rights of the free people of Oregon."

Courtney asked him to put a mask on or leave the floor. Heard declined, saying he didn't have a mask with him. And so it went. Courtney declared Heard in violation of Senate and state rules, and



The Oregonian

State Sen. Dallas Heard spoke to protesters gathered at the Oregon State Capitol on Jan. 6.

had Senate staff escort him from the chamber.

Heard had pointed out that Brown recently was pictured sans mask at an indoor event in Washington, D.C. Kotek also was photographed maskless at that gala. The U.S. capital didn't have the same mask requirements that the Brown administration imposed in Oregon. Still, it would seem politically prudent for her, or for any Democrat running for governor — which Kotek is — to epitomize mask-wearing and other coronavirus precautions.

If mask mandates remain when the 2022 Legislature convenes in less than two months, the Senate will have to act against members who violate those rules, according to Courtney.

Next year's session already was primed for combat, given that it's an election year. In contrast, the special session was pretty mellow, despite the typical partisan posturing.

It included three of the 20-plus candidates for governor: Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose; Rep. Christine Drazen, R-Canby; and Kotek, D-Portland. Johnson, who plans to shed the Democratic label and run as an independent, resigned two days later to focus on her gubernatorial bid.

None of the three did anything to hurt their chances.

The proposed bills passed handily, and with little drama, which made Kotek the big winner.

"I called for this special session months ago because we had to honor our commitment to keep Oregonians housed during the pandemic. Today, we kept our promise and protected thousands from losing their homes this winter," Kotek said in a statement afterward. "I'm appreciative of the bipartisan work that led to this successful emergency special session to provide relief for every part of the state."

Not everyone was happy. During the floor debates, Drazen feared the state was abandoning the concept of private property rights by continually extending payment protections for renters. "Do we believe in private property rights at all? Do we think that there is a place for people to own housing ... that in fact supports their retirement or that's their income that they've chosen?" she asked.

During Senate debate, Johnson asked why 14 cities — none of them on the coast, which she represents — had been chosen to receive \$1 million each for work on housing and homelessness. Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, who co-chairs the budget committee, said she didn't know. That money was part of the political negotiations for the special session.

And that was why the session ran smoothly. Solid negotiations beforehand. The minority Republicans did not walk out, because their priorities were added to the agenda. They got funding for those priorities, as did progressive Democrats. Each party claimed success afterward.

Kotek's original concept was a one-day special session to help renters facing eviction. Through discussions that included the governor, the legislation morphed into far more, including drought relief, combatting illegal marijuana operations, Afghan refugee resettlement, Oregon Health Plan payments for dentists, and gun violence prevention in east Multnomah County.

The broad scope led Sen. Sara Gelsler Blouin, D-Corvallis, to wonder why outdoor outfitters and guides were getting help but other financially struggling occupations were not.

A bipartisan issue was combating the aggressive spread of illegal marijuana operations in southern Oregon, including human trafficking of the individuals employed in awful conditions. The Legislature approved \$25 million for those efforts, although Johnson questioned whether enough money would go directly to law enforcement.

It's no wonder that cartels have found a home in Oregon, Johnson said, given how the Legislature and Oregon voters have relaxed their attitudes toward drugs.

Legislators emphasized that rural areas are especially dependent on Oregon State Police. Sen. Fred Girod, R-Lyons, said Oregon has only 454 troopers compared with 726 in 1975-77. Meanwhile, the state's population has doubled.

Girod quipped that the electric candles placed on each Senate desk made him happy. "I honestly think maybe the majority party will see the light that we have a problem in rural Oregon," he said, holding up a candle. "We don't have law enforcement."

That drew a retort from Courtney: "Senator Girod, the candles are my idea and have been for years. I had them placed on the desks as a sign of peace and warmth and good cheer. I do not like the candles being used for political purposes or referring to one party or the other. ... So, leave the candles alone."

As the Senate later voted to adjourn, Girod noted that his candle had gone out.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Troubled

I am troubled by recent comparisons between the Jimmy Carter and Joe Biden administrations. Yes, both administrations had huge increases in gasoline prices. Yes, both had a troubled economy. Yes, both had massive inflation. Yes, both had high unemployment.

But, there are key differences between these two administrations. As OPEC consolidated their power in the 1970s, they raised oil prices again and again. Thus, President Carter inherited an energy crisis.

President Biden inherited a country that was oil independent for the first time in 70 years. Within minutes of being sworn in, Biden signed the first of several executive orders guaranteed to both raise gas prices and make America dependent on foreign oil again.

Carter inherited a lingering recession. Although damaged by governors' responses to COVID-19, the economy Biden inherited was fundamentally strong. He quickly set about weakening it.

Carter inherited massive inflation. Biden created it.

That said, the two administrations are not without similarities. Foreign policy experts back then (and historians now) blamed Carter's policies for failing to stop the revolution that turned Iran into an Islamic dictatorship. This led directly to the hostage crisis, wherein 52 Americans were captured and held for 444 days.

Biden's inexplicable withdrawal from Afghanistan created the current hostage crisis, wherein hundreds of Americans and allies are still trapped by the Taliban.

Leave Ole Jimmy alone. Consider an outsider, Carter had little support from the Democrat establishment led by Sen. Ted Kennedy.

DIANE L. GRUBER
Oysterville, Washington

Class of 1963

Holiday wishes to all.

I may have left my gallbladder in

BillDay FloridaPolitics.com

HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS



St. Louis, Missouri, but my heart and soul belong to Seaside. So many from the Class of 1963 are still there, doing amazing work to preserve and promote Seaside.

My wish for Seaside and all who live there is that peace will be yours in 2022.

AUDREY (POWELL) HAYNES
Bickleton, Washington

What else is new?

I don't take issue with Robert Liddy-Coat's worry that The Astorian will become a megaphone spewing govern-

ment propaganda (Dec. 14).

I am more concerned about local papers being bought up by the Alden Global Capital, or Berkshire Hathaway, or the Murdoch family, or Jeff Bezos of Amazon, who owns the Washington Post. As long as this paper can pose as being independent, I'll take my news fair and balanced from The Astorian, thank you.

The most recent Coast River Business Journal extolls the local timber industry, referring to it as the "Clatsop forest, wood sector." Logging and lumbering as an economic engine, in its own words. All true, but logging and sawmilling activ-

ity is referred to as "our" local economic engine.

Sorry, the real wealth "our" forestland generates goes to the investor class. They own the land, the trees, the loggers and their lobby #TimberUnity, and the public relations narrative, published in The Astorian's business supplement.

Additionally, they own "our" state senator, now resigned and running for governor. Of course, none of this is true. It just can't be; it only seems that way to me alone, right?

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside