

# Supermajority could slip away, but Oregon Dems still in control

By HILLARY BORRUD  
The Oregonian/OregonLive

SALEM — Democrats in the Oregon Legislature have a problem this fall.

Republicans have a fighting chance to claw back seats in the House and Senate — thanks to an unusual number of open seats, a slate with some moderate candidates and an infusion of local and national cash.

Democrats aren't expected to lose control of either chamber. But defeats could erase their 18-12 supermajority in the Senate and cut into their 35-25 majority in the House. That would threaten their ability to push priority bills in 2017, from requiring businesses to provide paid family leave to raising the gas tax for a long-anticipated transportation package.

And yet that setback may only be short-lived.

Even if they lost badly this year, Oregon Democrats have a demographic edge that's likely to widen over the next decade, as the state's urban centers — including suburbs and smaller cities such as Hood River and Bend — continue to grow. Those areas already have more Democrats than Republicans, and more people overall presumably means even more Democrats.

Registered Democrats already outnumber Republicans in 39 of the 60 House districts and 22 of 30 Senate districts, according to an analysis of data from the Secretary of State's office. In a little over a decade, as much as 85 percent of Oregonians could be living in those areas, said Jim Moore, director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University.

Moore said lawmakers will likely redraw their districts after national censuses in 2020 and 2030 and shift seats from rural areas to "the more Democratic population centers."

"At that point, the Republicans are going to be in a world of hurt, because they're not going to have the suburban districts anymore. They'll just have the rural districts," Moore said. "The demographics are everything, they really are."

Despite Democrats' overall registration edge, House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, said several contests this fall are so close — because of open seats in swing districts — they could be coin flips.

Williamson said she's focused on simply holding onto Democrats' 10-vote majority in the House, which puts them one vote shy of a supermajority. With a supermajority, Democrats could pass revenue measures without any Republican votes.

"We see this as a very defensive cycle," Williamson said. "My first and foremost priority is to return to a majority in the House. I think we can't take anything for granted this election cycle."

Moore said this year's most competitive House races are clustered in Portland's suburbs and a district between Salem and Woodburn.

Right now, they're all held by Democrats who've decided not to seek re-election. And the Republicans looking to replace them have largely positioned themselves as friendlier to a wider spectrum of voters.

Preston Mann, a spokesman for Promote Oregon Leadership, the political action committee for House Republicans, pointed out that candidates lost by roughly 1,000 to 1,400 votes in three of those districts — in Woodburn, around Hillsboro, and near Happy Valley and Damascus — in 2014.

But for all their talk of defense,



AP Photo/Don Ryan, File

**Republicans have a fighting chance to claw back seats in the House and Senate, thanks to an unusual number of open seats, a slate with some moderate candidates and an infusion of local and national cash.**

House Democrats have also gone on the attack in some Republican-held districts where Democrats nonetheless hold a registration edge.

Two of those seats, in Wilsonville and out in Yamhill County, are being vacated by Republicans. But the other three are held by moderate incumbents who've defied demographics to win convincingly in past elections: Knute Buehler of Bend, Julie Parrish of West Linn and Mark Johnson of Hood River.

Privately, some political observers wondered why Williamson and Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, have aggressively targeted those districts with so many open Democratic seats to defend, reports *The Oregonian*.

Williamson defended the strategy, saying it was valid to challenge Republicans in areas "where we see a Democratic registration edge."

But House Minority Leader Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, called Parrish, Johnson and Buehler the type of centrist candidates who still appeal to voters in increasingly blue suburban districts.

"They're running very vicious campaigns against all three of them," McLane said of Democrats, "which is a shame because Knute and Mark and Julie have shown themselves to be bipartisan leaders and independent leaders."

For example, Parrish supported Oregon's 2014 ballot initiative to legalize same-sex marriage and has declined to seek endorsements from groups on either side of the abortion

issue, saying "it's not for me to make that decision for someone else."

Buehler, an orthopedic surgeon often mentioned as a 2018 gubernatorial candidate, championed a 2015 bill that made Oregon the second state after California to allow on-demand birth control pills at pharmacies. And Johnson helped Democrats pass an anti-coal law this year that says utilities must serve half their customers' demand with renewable energy by 2040.

Moore said incumbents can remain popular in these districts as they transition from red to blue because voters often prefer centrists in either party.

"Taking on Knute Buehler is a thankless task," Moore said of the Bend Republican. "He's very popular. He's also an avowedly moderate Republican."

In the Senate, voters in Southern Oregon must choose between Republican Alan DeBoer of Ashland and Democrat Tonia Moro of Medford to replace Democrat Alan Bates, who died in August.

Bates, who narrowly won his first election to the seat in 2004, was famed for his bipartisanship.

But last month, Bates' widow took Moro to task for "disappointing" attack ads on DeBoer — suggesting the difficulty Moro could face in claiming the seat.

"It's upsetting to hear of commitments to follow in the shoes of Alan Bates, without understanding that to

follow in his shoes, first and foremost, means a campaign of civility and a willingness to cross party lines for better outcomes," Laurie Bates wrote in an opinion article in the *Medford Mail Tribune*.

The ads in question criticized DeBoer for his support of two development projects during his time as mayor of Ashland. Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said they simply pointed out "in a very above-board way" DeBoer's record.

But Burdick also said losing a seat in the Senate may not change the dynamics in the chamber much. A handful of Senate Democrats already lean toward the center. And one, Betsy Johnson of Scappoose, often votes with Republicans on high-profile bills.

So how might a new balance in the Capitol affect what lawmakers manage to accomplish?

"I think everybody knows we'll be looking at a transportation package," said Williamson, the House majority leader.

Gov. Kate Brown's attempt to raise gas taxes in 2015 failed after Republicans insisted on a repeal of Oregon's controversial low-carbon fuels law. If House Democrats pick up a seat, they could pass an increase on a party-line vote.

But if they lose seats, they'd have to work even harder to pick up Republican support to reach a deal. Even priorities that could pass with a simple majority of lawmakers, such as legislation for paid family leave or a push to limit rent increases, could face headwinds in that case.

McLane, the House minority leader, said Republicans can force Democrats to craft bills with bipartisan appeal if they add seats in the Legislature.

"The only thing that I have seen, or anybody else has seen, that brings Democrats to the table to build consensus is when they don't have the votes to move something," McLane said. "One could say the only thing standing between Oregonians and the insatiable appetite of extreme left-wing Democrats for more money are House Republicans."

Oregon Democrats insist they're not taking anything for granted, despite their increasing registration advantage.

The state has become a national target for Republicans, however, who have either partial or total control of legislatures in 42 states.

"Republicans are at their strongest position in legislatures in the history of the party," said Tim Storey, an elections analyst with the National Conference of State Legislatures. "You can't overstate it."

That's freed up national money to swing races in Oregon, where Republicans say they can remain competitive in by picking candidates who appeal to voters.

"By focusing on candidates who offer real solutions and visions for responsible governance, Republicans have succeeded in putting former Democrat strongholds back on the map, making even the bluest states competitive for GOP gains," said Ellie Hockenbury, communications director for the Republican State Leadership Committee.

But changing demographics loom for the national party as much as they do in Oregon. Does that mean Republicans are destined to give back whatever gains they make this year?

"That all depends," Storey said, "where the Republican Party goes following this election and future elections."

## BRIEFLY

### Washington elector says he won't vote for Clinton

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Democratic elector in Washington state said Friday he won't vote for Hillary Clinton even if she wins the popular vote in his state on Election Day, adding a degree of suspense when the Electoral College affirms the election results next month.

Robert Saticum, a member of Washington's Puyallup Tribe, supported Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary. He said he believes Clinton is a "criminal" who doesn't care enough about American Indians and "she's done nothing but flip back and forth."

He said he has wrestled with what to do, but feels that neither Clinton nor Republican Donald Trump can lead the country.

"She will not get my vote, period," he said in a phone interview with The Associated Press.

### Dems across nation sue GOP alleging voter intimidation

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Lawyers for Democrats around the country are filing lawsuits claiming Republicans and the campaign of GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump are pushing supporters to intimidate and confront voters on Election Day.

Trump has called on his supporters to act as "election observers" in certain areas of the country to help prevent fraud.

In Ohio, a federal judge on Friday issued a temporary restraining order against Trump's campaign and his friend and informal adviser, Roger Stone, barring them from harassing or intimidating Ohio voters during Tuesday's election.

Attorneys representing the Democratic Party argued Friday in New Jersey court that the GOP was coordinating with Trump to intimidate voters, accusations that the Republican Party says are not true in that state or in five other states where Democrats are waging similar battles.

### Clinton sent daughter email, later classified

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department on Friday released a 2009 email chain that shows then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton forwarding to her daughter material that the department classified last year.

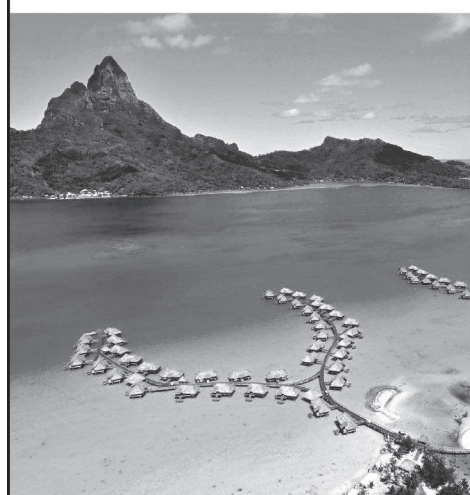
At issue is a December 2009 email that President Barack Obama's trade adviser, Michael Froman, sent to senior White House and State Department staff members. After it made its way up to Clinton, she sent it to "Diane Reynolds," an email pseudonym for Chelsea Clinton.

"See below," Clinton told her daughter. The entire email chain has been blacked out on confidential grounds, the lowest level of classification.

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