

Kotek says Senator Kruse should resign

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — House Speaker Tina Kotek said Monday State Sen. Jeff Kruse, a Roseburg Republican accused of sexual impropriety, should resign. “I personally think he should (resign), but I’ll let the process run out,” Kotek said.

The investigation into those allegations will wrap up soon, according to legislative leadership.

Kotek is the highest-ranking member of the Legislature who has said she believes he should resign.

Two sitting Democratic lawmakers — Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, of Beaverton, and Sen. Sara Gelser, of Corvallis — have formally accused Kruse of unwanted touching.

Gelser made the first public allegation of inappropriate touching by Kruse in late October, followed by Steiner Hayward. An outside investigator is looking into the allegations.

Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, and leadership



Timothy J. Gonzalez/Statesman-Journal via AP, File
In this Feb. 2012 file photo, Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, speaks at the Capitol in Salem.

in both parties in the Senate were fairly mum on the issue last week, instead saying that they believe the outside investigation should run its course.

House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, said in a statement in November that the Legislature was “committed to changing a toxic culture but that cannot happen while Sen. Kruse remains.”

The impending conclusion of the report does not mean the end of the process,

however.

The Senate Committee on Conduct has to review the report and make a recommendation as to whether the Senate should discipline Kruse.

Kotek also said that she thinks that the Oregon Legislature ought to reassess the formal complaint and investigation process.

Although the way Oregon handles formal complaints is being upheld as a national model — as state legislatures across the country deal with

allegations of improper conduct by members as part of the rising tide of the #MeToo movement — Kotek said she thought it was “clunky.”

However, it’s also the first time, at least in recent memory, that the formal process for harassment complaints has been used.

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said in a press conference last week that he thought that issues surrounding the Kruse investigation could “dominate” the short legislative session, which began Monday and can last up to 35 days.

Back when the allegations emerged in October, Courtney relieved Kruse of his committee assignments and removed the senator’s office door, due to simultaneous allegations that Kruse had been smoking inside the Oregon State Capitol building.

Kruse declined a request for comment from the EO/Pamplin Capital Bureau on Monday.

Paris Achen contributed reporting.

HERMISTON: Idea for the project dated back about 10 years

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Clint Spencer, planning director for the city of Hermiston, called the festival street plaza the “cornerstone” of the city’s urban renewal agency. The agency was created in 2013 as a way to feed revenue from increasing property values downtown back into the district for projects that will continue to revitalize downtown.

Money from the Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency has been used for façade grants and other small projects, but much of the revenue is paying for the festival street project. Moreno & Nelson Construction of Walla Walla won the contract for construction with a bid of \$857,165.

The project will include placing the street and sidewalk on the same level,

decorative brickwork, landscaping, lighting, and removable posts that will be able to block traffic from the area during events.

At Monday’s groundbreaking Drotzmann and Spencer thanked the downtown business owners who had served on a committee to help design and implement the festival street. Drotzmann noted that the idea for the project dated back about 10 years to the time of Mayor Bob Severson.

Spencer said there will be some inconvenience during the construction phase but access to all businesses would be maintained.

“We hope everyone adjusts to the traffic flow soon,” he said.

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STATE: Three years since Brown succeeded Kitzhaber

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between the skills Oregon’s workers have and the skills that our growing businesses need,” Brown said.

She announced that she would launch a new program designed to provide job and skill training to help fill the gap. Dubbed “Future Ready Oregon,” the program’s goal is to “close the skills gap between the workforce we have the workforce we need to fuel Oregon’s economy,” she said.

The program would earmark \$300 million to career technical education classes in the 2019-2021 state budget. Without providing details, Brown said the program would make hands-on learning programs available at every public school district in the state. The program also would offer apprenticeships in high-needs industries such as information technology, health care, advanced wood manufacturing and high-tech manufacturing. Such programs already exists in Bend and Eugene, she said.

The plan includes legislation to help mid-career construction professionals to start their business by among other things, waiving all state fees and formal education requirements for those who have worked in construction for at least eight years.

She said she is directing Business Oregon to invest in rural areas, communities of color and Oregon’s nine tribes.

An example of such an investment is state funding of broadband and infrastructure to increase competitiveness in



Molly J. Smith/Statesman-Journal via AP
Gov. Kate Brown greets members of the Oregon Senate as she arrives for the State of the State address Monday at the Oregon State Capitol in Salem.

rural industries, she said.

Her plan also involves directing the Higher Education Coordinating Commission and Business Oregon to collaborate to match high-growth industries with job training programs.

In addition to job training, she said the state needs to continue to address the high cost of housing.

Her office is scheduled to announce several pilot programs in the coming weeks to address the state’s housing shortage and high cost of housing.

Brown delivered the speech in the House of Representatives at the Oregon State Capitol, and footage was streamed live on the Oregon Legislature’s website.

The address kicked off the

79th Legislative Assembly and a 35-day policymaking session.

This month marks three years since Brown, previously the secretary of state, succeeded Gov. John Kitzhaber, who resigned amid an influence-peddling scandal, and her first anniversary as elected governor. She is seeking reelection later this year, having almost completed the remainder of Kitzhaber’s term.

A pressing issue this session is adjusting the state budget to account for a projected \$280 million in unrealized tax revenue due to recent federal tax reform.

A week before session commenced, leaders in the Senate extinguished most of hope of passing a state “cap and invest” program for industry this year, which is a policy priority for House Democrats and has the support of the governor.

IMMIGRATION: People encouraged to speak up at Wyden’s open town halls

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event. He said he grew up in Hermiston, where the immigrant community can feel isolated and plenty of its members feel fear, which in part drives people to these events. He said similar communities exist from La Grande to the Tri-Cities in Washington, and these gatherings are about unifying people and urging them to action.

“We are a community,” he told the crowd. “Maybe it’s time to start acting like it.”

Kenzie Spooner with the Walla Walla group said the notion that people can’t do anything is the misconception she most wanted to dispel. She said she started coming to meetings to learn more, and now she is a member of the group and can contribute.

“In fact, there is a lot everyone can do,” she said.

Kathleen Cathey helped drive home that point. She is the Eastern Oregon representative for Democratic U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden. Cathey said Wyden was in Hermiston in 2013 for a town hall meeting, and members

of Hermiston’s Hispanic Advisory Committee and local Latinos packed the place. All those bodies shifted the conversation to immigration reform, which remains one of the senator’s top priorities.

She encouraged participants to mobilize likewise and have their friends and family speak up at Wyden’s open town halls in Oregon, including the one Sunday in Hillsboro. She said that kind of action moves the conversation forward.

The Rev. Juli Reinholz of Pioneer United Methodist Church of Walla Walla was on hand. She said these forums are worth attending for the educational benefit alone.

Rojas at the end of the Walla Walla coalition’s presentation said people from all walks of life make up the United States, and whether someone arrived yesterday or has had family here for hundreds of years or more, the county is great already.

People need to know that, he said.

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