

Climate Bill: Senate president's remarks throw Capitol into chaos

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after the legislation passed the House. There are 18 Democrats. The bill must get 16 votes to pass.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, was a solid no.

Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, was leaning no, and on Tuesday told the Oregon Capitol Bureau he would vote against the bill.

Sens. Laurie Monnes Anderson, D-Gresham, and Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, were heavily courted by both sides.

Brad Reed, a spokesman for Renew Oregon, an environmental group that lobbied extensively for HB 2020, said both told him they would vote for the bill.

As of late last week, Democrats pushing the bill said they weren't certain enough votes were there, but they wanted to put it out for a floor vote to see what happened. Courtney, however, is not a fan of voting on bills without knowing they will pass.

"I was personally one of the ones who wanted this bill on the floor because I wanted to raise my hand and say 'yes,'" Burdick said.

Burdick, a "fervent" supporter of the bill, said that Tuesday's announcement wasn't the end of the cap-and-trade idea, but there was no path left in the current session, scheduled to end by Sunday night.

Burdick said she wasn't surprised by Courtney's comments, but she knows others weren't aware of his plan.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, said Tuesday morning that he was "pleased" with Courtney's statement and expected it would pave the way for him and his Republican colleagues to return to the Capitol before the end of the week to wrap up the budget process and other bills.

"We're moving in the direction of returning," he said.

He said while he and the other senators were in different locations (Hansell hasn't revealed his whereabouts) they were working as a team and communicating by phone to decide on next steps.

Renew Oregon, a coalition of groups agitating for policies to address climate change, had already planned a rally outside the Capitol for Tuesday. Thanks to the fuel from Courtney's statements, environmental activists were chanting outside by 11:30 a.m. and had quickly crafted signs condemning the Senate president.

Sen. Michael Dembrow, a key author of the cap-and-trade bill, took to the podium, giving a barn-burner speech out of character for the typically reserved Portland Democrat.

"It is hard to be green, but it is so important for us to keep pushing and pushing and pushing, because the people who organized this walkout, who have fled the state, are counting on us just giving up this battle," Dembrow said, eliciting boos from the supportive crowd. "In fact, they're saying that House Bill 2020, our climate action program, in general, is set up to ruin the people of their districts. And that's the rhetoric they're using to go away and to stay away. In fact, that's not true. That's not why they're gone."

He said he would continue to fight for the concept, as would the Democratic senators with him as he spoke: Shemia Fagan and Kathleen Taylor of Portland, Floyd Prozanski and James Manning Jr. of Eugene, Sara Gelsler of Corvallis, Jeff Golden of Ashland, and Rob Wagner of Lake Oswego.

"We are looking at a couple of very difficult days ahead of us," Dembrow said. "And I need to know that everyone who is here around me is committed to this struggle. Are you? Because, speaking for the people who



Gov. Kate Brown speaks to supporters of HB 2020 on the steps of the Oregon Capitol on Tuesday.

are behind me, we are."

Gov. Kate Brown, emerging from her office after Courtney's speech, declined to speak with a reporter, power walking toward the rally on the Capitol steps to urge lawmakers to pass the climate bill.

"Let me make this perfectly clear: The Republicans are not standing against climate change," Brown told the crowd. "They're standing against democracy. We need to make sure that the legislative branch operates, and we need to make sure that Republicans come back to do their jobs."

She asked the crowd if they had the "passion" and "persistence" needed to pass the bill — cheers.

She raised her fist, then turned on her heel and stepped back into the Capitol.

Republican senators disappeared after talks with Democratic counterparts last Wednesday didn't produce a deal. Republicans wanted the environmental legislation amended, including stripping out an emergency clause so the matter could be referred to voters through petition.

Supporters of HB 2020 say Oregonians voted Democrats into office to enact climate change policies.

"I think it just shows that Courtney is not fit to lead, if

he's not willing to stand up," said Oregon Business for Climate spokeswoman Devon Downesmith.

She added, "The kids are here fighting for their future. And with a supermajority that we elected, where people ran specifically on HB 2020, there's no reason why we can't have it all."

"Well, I just feel this bill is so important," said Jeanne Chouard, a speech and language pathologist from Ashland who came to Salem for the rally Tuesday. "And I was dismayed that the Republican senators wouldn't show up to take a vote on that. They're trying to thwart our democracy."

"Because I work with so many young children, I think it's really important to think about our long-range future," Chouard said. "And I know change is difficult, for many people, we're all going to have to make changes. But in Southern Oregon, we are really feeling the effects already of climate change in our agriculture sector, in the quality of our air, because of the longer, hotter summers that are drying out our forests, we're getting more and more smoke."

Opponents of the bill are planning a Thursday morning rally.

A spokeswoman for Sen-

ate Republicans said Courtney's remarks will "ramp up" negotiations between the Senate president and Senate Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr., R-Grants Pass.

On Tuesday afternoon, the lone person in the Senate Republican caucus office was Justin Brecht, a policy analyst.

He didn't have updated information on negotiations, but said the Republican senators had a conference call planned for Tuesday afternoon.

Republicans didn't seem to be in any hurry to get back to Salem.

"This is good news," Baertschiger said in a statement. "However, we are still trying to sort out the process. The bill itself has been second read and a vote will have to take place. Republicans must be assured that the vote or motion will guarantee the bill's complete end. We need to have further conversations so that the Republicans feel comfortable with the process."

Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, said Courtney's announcement was "wonderful" and he thinks there will be further negotiations between Democrats and Republicans, but he wants more concessions before he's willing to return.

"They want to jury-rig the election that's going to be for the repeal of the gross-receipts tax. That's not acceptable," Girod said, referring to Senate Bill 116, which schedules a January special election if there's a referendum on the tax for public education. "That's one I would not compromise on. And there are several others."

Burdick said the apparent failure of HB 2020 wasn't a win for Republicans, and their actions have frayed already poor relationships between the parties.

"This is not helping anyone in our caucus, it's not

helping anyone in the Legislature and it's not helping anyone in Oregon," Burdick said. "This is an act of — I don't know what to call it — I want to call it terrorism. They are not doing their job and it's fractured the entire institution."

Burdick said Democrats aren't negotiating on any bills with Republicans at this point.

"You cannot negotiate with someone who is not here," she said.

Sen. Mark Hass of Beaverton, a Democratic whip, compared the climate bill to others he spent multiple sessions working to pass.

"Maybe that's how these things go," said Hass, who supports HB 2020. "I would like to see it come up in a special session."

Several Republican senators have fled to Idaho, including Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, who lives near the Idaho state line.

Bentz told the *Malheur Enterprise* Tuesday that he's not sure how Republicans will proceed after Courtney's announcement. He was non-committal about returning to Oregon.

"I don't know what it means," Bentz told the *Enterprise*.

Girod said he and his wife are in Texas, although he declined to say exactly where. Even if Republicans agree to end their boycott, he's not sure there is time for all of them to return and complete the Legislature's work.

"I think that we're a lot closer than we were before the day started," Girod said.

Baertschiger and Sens. Brian Boquist of Dallas, Bill Hansell of Athens, Dallas Heard of Roseburg, Dennis Linthicum of Klamath Falls, Alan Olsen of Canby, Kim Thatcher of Keizer, and Chuck Thomsen of Hood River didn't respond to requests for comment Tuesday.



Travis Johnson, 27, and his girlfriend, Chanika Green, 18, sit in this Shelby, Mississippi, apartment and talk with the nonprofit group Save the Children about their community's fight against poverty.

Census: High-tech tools help with 2020 census in remote areas

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Steven Romalewski, director of the City University of New York's Mapping Service, said the criticism is fair but credited the Census Bureau for using its geographic and aerial technology to gather needed data about the most difficult populations to count.

"The technology alone is no guarantee that you will have an accurate count," said Romalewski, who is mapping "hard to count" communities ahead of the census. "But if you leverage data with satellite imagery, you have the best information before you."

That's what census employees intend to do while avoiding the political battles, Dillingham said.

"The culture of the census dictates us to be impartial," the bureau director said during a recent trip to New Mexico, which has one of the most difficult populations to accurately count.

The state has a sizable Native American population and the highest percent-

age of Hispanic residents in the nation. Bishop said the technology will especially help such areas that have struggled for accurate counts.

Another is Mississippi's majority-black Bolivar County, where only 59.7% of households mailed back their 2010 census questionnaire, according to CUNY's Center for Urban Research.

The national rate was 74% in 2010, according to a Census Bureau news release.

The bureau began using the new imagery technology in 2013, Bishop said. Employees have been double- and triple-checking satellite images and those captured by the Department of Agriculture's National Agriculture Imagery Program during the growing seasons in the continental U.S.

Around 100 technicians are able to examine the entire nation with satellite and aerial images while sitting at their computers. They are assigned specific neighborhood blocks and look for growth and decline

in the number of residential buildings by comparing images from 2009 to the present.

Two hours of canvassing in the field during the 2010 census now takes less than two minutes in the office, the bureau said.

"With that information, we can then decide to use our staff more efficiently" to knock on doors of homes that did not respond to online or phone questionnaires, Bishop said.

The bureau gave a demonstration of the new technology at a conference early this year. Employees showed how they could analyze county subdivisions on maps by looking up a certain percentage of Spanish speakers or those making a certain amount of money.

The specific addresses pinpointed by the aerial imagery are largely kept private, but can be shared with some tribal and city governments to help create boundaries and zoning areas, Bishop said. After a certain period, the information has to be destroyed, she said.

Echo: ERFPD covers a sizable chunk of Umatilla County

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nian reported in 2016 that the county still has about 156,000 acres that lack fire district protection.

"We have a river, a freeway, a railroad. And gas lines. We've got a little bit of everything," said ERFPD Assistant Fire Chief Janie Enright.

Gehrke said ERFPD fights many grass fires, and usually about one structure fire a year.

Balls, a bell, and a barbershop

Echo Rural Fire Protection District, one of the largest fire districts in the state, was formed more than 100 years ago, when a group of volunteer men gathered in Carl Gilbert's barber shop in January 1905 with the interest of starting a fire company.

The company initially raised money by hosting an annual Fireman's Ball at City Hall, according to the city of Echo. Eventually the fledgling company purchased a bell for a little over \$100 — almost \$3,000 today — and the number of tolls notified volunteers where the next call would take them.

Instead of speeding to the scene in a fire truck, the volunteers took one of three manpowered hose carts in the area. And although the hoses sometimes froze, the equipment was all eventually modified to be towed by a pickup truck.

Echo Rural Fire Protection became a district that could collect tax revenue by 1950, when the first fire truck was purchased.

Today, the ERFPD is able to respond to emergencies using an app called Active911, which provides key dispatch details

right to a first responder's phone. But Enright, who joined the fire district volunteer crew in the early 1970s with her late husband, Tom, who was fire chief, remembers a different time completely.

"When we joined, they didn't have a paging system," Enright said. "We had less fire trucks and old equipment."

Instead, there were three fire phones — including one at a local tavern — and whenever the district got a call, the crew would run down to the station to set off the fire alarm.

Enright said the district was somewhat of a pioneer in the 1970s when they began rigging pickup trucks with water tanks, a move that she said the Heppner Fire Department followed suit.

"We didn't have a big budget, that was the best way for us to get out and fight fires," Enright said.

Trucking forward

Today, the district has multiple stations and 16 fire trucks.

ERFPD will be replacing one truck from the 1970s with a 2009 Freightliner, which was purchased at a low cost through the Firefighter Property Program, run by the U.S. Forest Service. Gehrke believes the new truck will be rolling out to calls by early July.

"Even though it's not new, it's new to us," he said, "We run on a very limited budget."

Gehrke said the district brings in about \$96,000 a year in tax revenue, with Echo being the only city in the district.

"It sounds like a lot, but in this day and age, it's not," Gehrke said.

It costs about \$5,000 to properly outfit a single new volunteer in structure and wildfire gear alone.

The ERFPD relies in part on grants from a number of federal agencies and local entities. Last year, a grant from the Echo Community Benefit Fund allowed the district to purchase masks with built-in thermal imaging systems.

"It certainly is more efficient, a little easier for them," Gehrke said, adding that thermal imaging devices are usually handheld, which can slow down the firefighting process.

But the new equipment might not see as much daylight as it could, since the ERFPD is especially strapped for volunteers during working hours on weekdays.

Those interested in volunteering can contact the district on Facebook or reach out to Echo City Hall. The process includes a questionnaire and an application. New volunteers undergo a six-month training period.

Volunteers can help with tasks, such as driving, recording medical information and fighting fires.

"It's not about having to do everything. It's not like you're a paid firefighter. You do what you want to do, we'd just like to know (what)," Gehrke said.

It can be hard to find people who are willing to give up their personal time, Gehrke said.

"If you're able-bodied and willing to give up two nights a month, get out of bed at 2 a.m. and give up a little bit of family time to be on call," Gehrke said. "It's the more the merrier. It takes a lot of people to effectively fight a fire."