

Oregon House Republicans could replace their leader next week

By DIRK VANDERHART
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Republicans in Oregon’s House of Representatives are expected to hold an atypical vote next week that could shake up their leadership going into the 2020 elections.

According to three sources familiar with the matter, pressure is coming from several newer Republican lawmakers — including Rep. Christine Drazan, R-Canby, and Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles — who are urging new leadership as the caucus looks to gain back seats in the House.

Sources say that Drazan is hoping to unseat House Minority Leader Carl Wilson, R-Grants Pass. Wilson was elected leader last November, when former Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, stepped down following a deflating mid-term election. As the party’s leader, Wilson would play a key role in shaping Republican campaign strategies in House races next year.

The proposed leadership swap is also said to be driven by Shaun Jillions, a lobbyist and frequent Republican ally in the Capitol. As a representative of Oregon Realtors and wood products companies, Jillions can

steer large donations to Republican candidates. He is said to take issue with how Wilson approached a controversial bill to charge polluters for their greenhouse gas emissions this year.

All three sources familiar with the possible coup declined to speak on the record, citing the secrecy of internal caucus discussions and fearing bruised relationships in the Capitol. But the House Republican Office confirmed Tuesday that a leadership election has been proposed.

“We do have a House Republican Caucus meeting scheduled for Monday,” spokeswoman Tayleranne Gillespie said. “There has been some indication that a leadership election might be held at that caucus meeting, but that has not been confirmed at this point.”

There are few hard-and-fast rules for when lawmakers of each party elect a leader for their caucus, but a September election in an odd-numbered year is atypical when there is a sitting minority leader. More usual would be a vote next November, after an election



Jillions



State Rep. Cedric Hayden, R-Roseburg, left, and House Minority Leader Carl Wilson, R-Grants Pass, speak on the House floor at the Capitol in Salem in April.

in which every House seat is on the ballot.

Support from a majority of the House’s 22 Republican lawmakers would be required to force an election that could bounce Wilson. It’s unclear whether Drazan has the votes to win such an election.

“Caucus leadership has

always been decided by the members of this caucus, not outside interests,” Wilson said in a statement Tuesday. “I believe that I have served this caucus well, and plan to continue serving as House Republican Leader.”

Reached Tuesday, Drazan, Bonham and Jillions were all unwilling to talk

much about the situation.

“I am not prepared to have a conversation about this right now,” Drazan told OPB.

Pressed about rumors that she’s hoping to replace Wilson as leader, and that she has support from Jillions, she said: “How the caucus structures itself

and how they elect leadership and how we approach our own organizations is entirely up to our caucus members and not the lobby or anything else.”

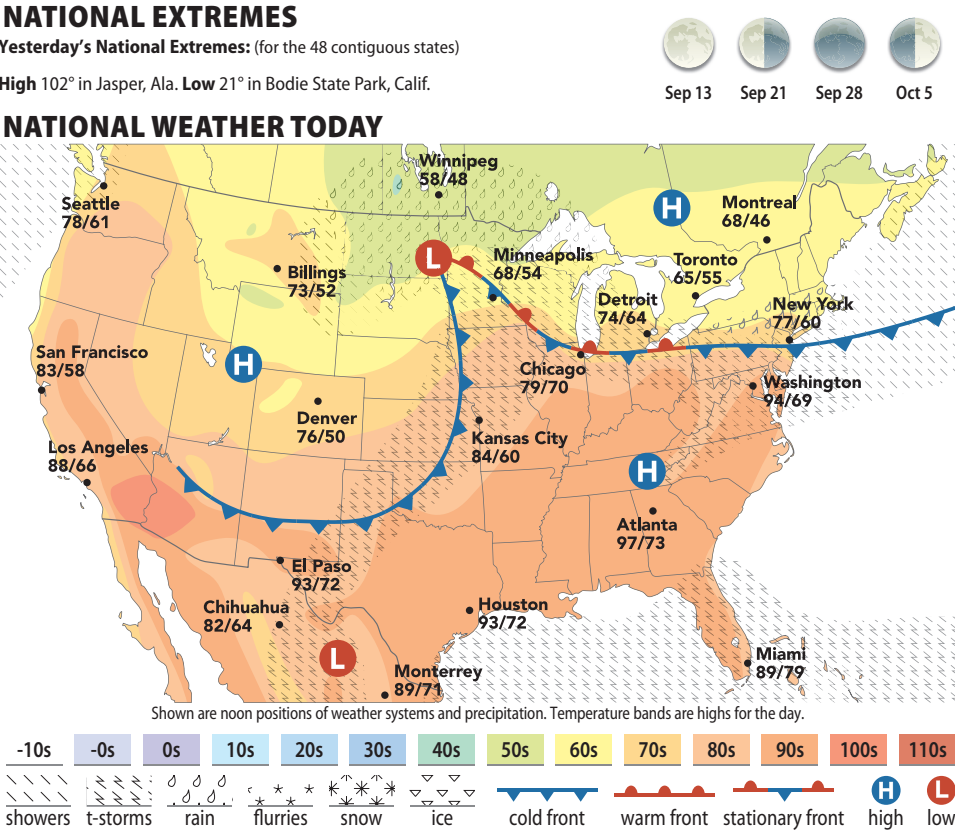
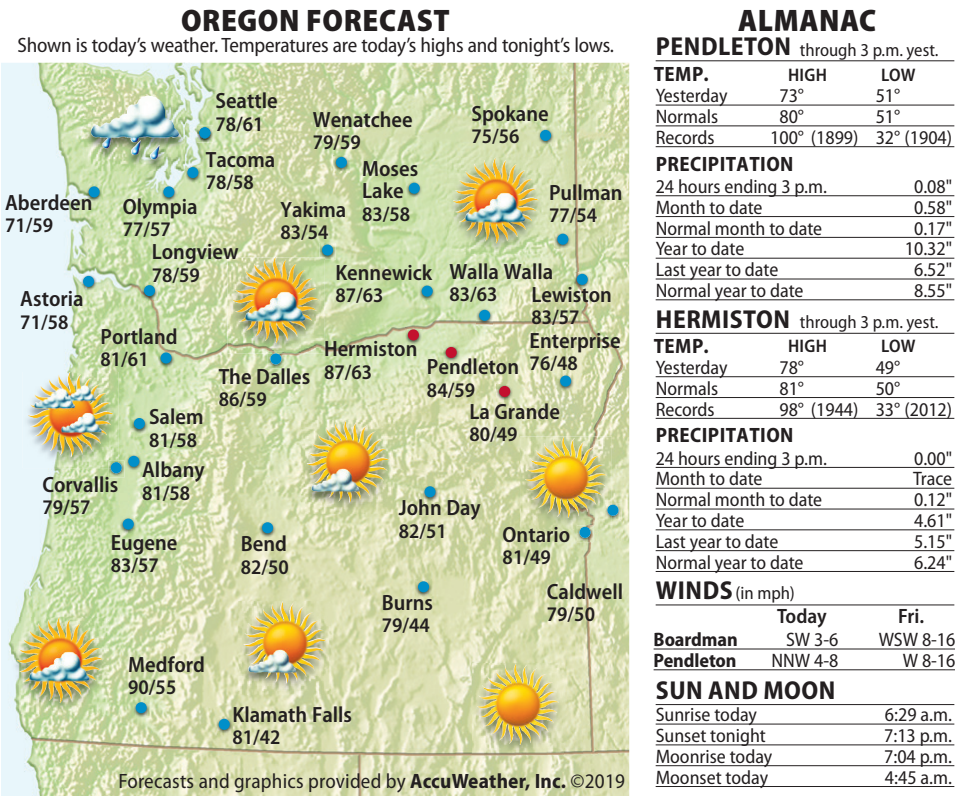
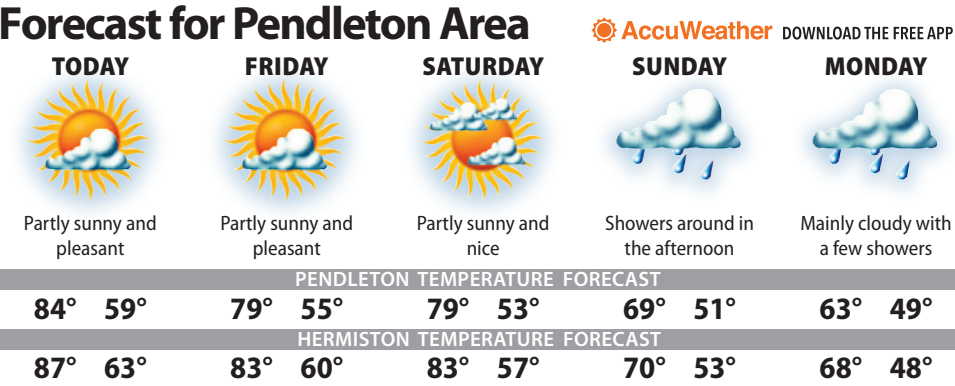
Drazan, a freshman lawmaker who has worked as a senior staffer for House Republican leadership and helped direct campaigns for the party, also complimented Wilson.

“He has worked very hard under very tough circumstances,” she said. “And he has the full respect of our caucus, and that includes me.”

Bonham, who was appointed to the House in 2017 and won election to his seat last year, also said he would “take a pass” on questions about the proposed leadership vote. But he made clear that he’s focused on beating back Democrats’ supermajority next year. By holding more than three-fifths of the chamber’s 60 seats, Democrats are able to pass revenue-raising bills without winning Republican support.

“Being in the superminority sucks, and the big push to try to reintroduce some balance to Oregon is all that our caucus wants,” Bonham said.

For his part, Jillions called talk that he is pushing for Wilson’s ouster a “distraction.”



Strickler tapped to lead ODOT

Head of highway division replaces Matt Garrett, who stepped down in June after leading agency for 14 years

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon’s transportation commissioners have chosen Kris Strickler, head of the Oregon Department of Transportation’s highway division, to be the agency’s new leader.

The commissioners voted on the appointment Tuesday evening, chosen after a national search to replace longtime director Matt Garrett that took six months.

Before leading ODOT’s highway division, Strickler was the Southwest Regional administrator at the Washington Department of Transportation. In an earlier role at ODOT, he led the Columbia River Crossing project for the department. That effort to

replace the Interstate 5 bridge across the Columbia River failed, largely because Washington lawmakers backed out of \$450 million they committed for the project.

Strickler’s appointment five years later comes as Oregon lawmakers have renewed the charge to work with Washington to replace the bridge. Strickler must be confirmed by the Oregon Senate, and his pay and benefits will be negotiated in the coming weeks.

“I’m eager to lead the agency in this dramatic time of growth in our state and to work to modernize our trans-



Strickler

portation network, diversify the department’s workforce, and bring innovative solutions to achieve Oregon’s transportation, environmental and economic goals,” Strickler said in a statement shortly after the vote.

Garrett stepped down in June after nearly 14 years at the helm.

Strickler will manage an agency with an annual budget of about \$2 billion. He will continue carrying out projects funded by a major bill lawmakers passed in 2017 that raised \$5 billion for a decade’s worth of transportation projects.

In a statement, Gov. Kate Brown called Strickler “the right person to help ODOT continue its transformation.”

“He has driven the agency’s vision for how to address the complex mobility needs of our region and brings strong interstate partnerships to bear,” Brown said.

BRIEFLY

Murder charges dismissed against man who shot son

DAMASCUS — Charges have been dismissed against a man who fatally shot his adult son Sept. 1.

The Clackamas County Sheriff’s Office says 69-year-old William Fuller of Damascus shot 35-year-old Jason Fuller during a confrontation.

Deputies said they responded to a 911 call at the home shortly after 10 p.m. Jason Fuller was pronounced dead at the scene, and deputies seized several guns.

Court documents say a grand jury returned a “not true bill,” clearing Fuller of the murder and unlawful use of a weapon charges.

Clackamas County Chief Deputy District Attorney Chris Owen told *The Oregonian*/OregonLive the grand jury didn’t feel there was sufficient evidence to indict Fuller but that law enforcement will continue to evaluate. Fuller was released from jail.

Owen said he could not go into detail about what led to the shooting.

Oregon woman will not face charges for killing boyfriend

MEDFORD — An Oregon woman will not face charges after prosecutors determined she killed her ax-wielding boyfriend in self-defense.

The *Mail Tribune* reported Tuesday that the Jackson County District Attorney’s Office will not prosecute 33-year-old Vanessa Rose Marroquin.

Authorities say Marroquin killed Robert Leroy Mitchell Jr. when she shot him once in the chest June 6.

Marroquin contacted police to report she shot Mitchell at their property near Central Point, 164 miles south of Eugene.

Authorities say Mitchell returned three hours after an argument and found Marroquin in a warehouse with three other people.

Marroquin told police Mitchell dragged her outside and struck her repeatedly with the blunt end of the ax.

Police say Marroquin used a revolver to shoot Mitchell, who was found dead at the scene.

— Associated Press

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