

GOP walkout forces new routines

By LAUREN DAKE
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — On the first day of the 2020 legislative session, Sen. President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, stood at the dais overseeing the Oregon Senate with the help of a physical therapist and a nearby walker.

Courtney was recovering from a staph infection, but was determined to be present in January for the opening day of the legislative session.

On the morning of Feb. 28, Courtney, the state’s longest-ever serving president, presided over a half-empty chamber, one which Senate Republicans have boycotted now for more than a week.

In classic Courtney fashion, he gave a speech where his emotions fluctuated from anger to disappointment to sadness.

He spoke to the importance of showing up to work. “I’m here,” Courtney told the chamber. “Limping. Walker. But here.”

From the start of the current legislative session, Democrats knew Republicans in the Senate were likely to stage another walkout to try to kill sweeping climate change legislation. Last week, they left town. And in a surprise move, House Republicans joined



Oregon Capital Bureau Photo/Sam Stites
Seats in the Oregon House of Representatives remain vacant during a Republican boycott of the legislative session.

them a day later in fleeing the Oregon Capitol.

“I’m getting angrier and angrier and angry, because I don’t understand human beings who leave after the first half,” Courtney said, his voice increasingly rising in pitch. “I don’t understand it. To me, you wear the uniform — you wear the uniform. You may not agree with it. ... You come to work. Who doesn’t go to work? I don’t understand it.”

The two sides now appear to be at a complete impasse: Republicans want the cap-and-trade bill referred to the voters; Democrats want it passed in the Legislature.

At this point of a legislative session, lawmakers would normally be finalizing state budgets and a

flurry of activity would precede the final stretch leading to adjournment.

Instead, mornings in the Capitol have a new ritual.

The presiding officers — both Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek — speak to the bills that will perish if Republicans don’t return to Salem.

“I’m just going to get really angry here,” Courtney said, reading the title of a bill addressing out-of-state placements for youth in foster care, “Oregon children and youth. ... I’m gonna tell ya, I never was a foster child. I can’t even imagine what it’s like and when you’re out-of-state all alone. ... I’m going to tell you this session should never end without us seriously making

a run at that.”

And instead of passing legislation, lawmakers are strategizing how to convince Republicans to return.

House Democrats plan to issue subpoenas to require absent Republicans’ attendance in the Capitol. The subpoenas would theoretically require lawmakers to appear before a House Rules Committee on March 5, but it’s unclear whether they will compel Republicans to return. They have hired a process server company to help deliver the subpoenas.

Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, said the Republicans’ latest decision to walk out “cannot be the new normal.”

Senate Republicans fled the Capitol twice in the previous legislative session, derailing the cap-and-trade bill that has once again prompted their exodus.

House Republican Leader Christine Drazan blasted the Democrats’ latest move, calling it a strong-arm tactic. But it’s not a new strategy.

In 2001, the Democrats were in the minority and fled the Capitol over a redistricting dispute. Republicans tried to bring them back by hiring private process servers to deliver a summons compelling them to the Capitol.

Good Samaritan fired from U.S. Bank gets job with credit union

By SAMANTHA SWINDLER
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — The Portland woman who was fired from her job with U.S. Bank after a Christmas Eve act of kindness has been hired by a credit union that created a job especially for her.

Emily James will be joining Community First Credit Union in Santa Rosa, California, as a training supervisor.

“It was exactly what I wanted,” James said. “I want to be training, mentoring and helping others. I’ll be training new hires as well as doing follow-up training.”

The head of human resources for Community First Credit Union was among the dozens of hiring managers who reached out to *The Oregonian* after James’ story ran, wanting to reach her.

James, who worked as a senior banker at a U.S. Bank call center in Portland, was fired on Dec. 31, 2019, for what she was told was an “unauthorized interaction with

a customer.” Unable to get a hold that U.S. Bank had placed on a customer’s paycheck released on Christmas Eve, James received permission from her supervisor to drive to the gas station where the customer was stranded and give him \$20 in cash.

James and her supervisor, Abigail Gilbert, were fired over the incident.

The story triggered outrage from across the country for weeks.

But it wasn’t until *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote about the firings that U.S. Bank CEO Andy Cecere called both James and Gilbert, offering them their jobs back. Gilbert accepted, but James did not.

Community First Credit Union flew James to Sonoma County, California, to interview, and James said the not-for-profit financial cooperative felt like a good fit.

James will be moving to Santa Rosa, in California’s wine country, for her new position, along with her dogs, HarleyQuinn and Domino.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

