

About-face: ‘I don’t see the math where this gets overturned’

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College votes sent by the states.

The Electoral College results are sent to Congress, where they are read aloud. Normally, Congress rapidly certifies the vote in a largely ceremonial process.

However, if a member of the House and a member of the Senate object to any slate of electors, both chambers must hold separate two-hour debates before voting whether to accept or reject the Electoral College numbers.

House members — including Democrats — have made single objections in the past, but no senator has joined the effort.

However, more than 100 of the House’s 221 Republicans have said they will oppose the vote.

“Multiple states have engaged in litigation and thousands of witnesses have submitted sworn affidavits of reported fraud in the 2020 Presidential election,” a letter signed by Bentz and other freshmen says.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, had lobbied his caucus not to join the objection. But Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Missouri, announced he would object and an additional dozen senators, led by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, say they will also object.

While the moves to block



Oregon Capital Insider/Contributed Photo
U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, right, is sworn into office on Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021, as the representative for Oregon’s Congressional District 2. The oath was administered by House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., with Bentz’s wife, Lindsay Norman, middle, holding a Bible.

certification are expected to delay the result by a few hours on Wednesday, Jan. 6, the House Democratic majority of 222 members will be joined by several Republicans who oppose the effort as undemocratic.

Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, the Republican presidential nominee in 2012 who lost to President Barack Obama, slammed those challenging the Electoral College votes as “dangerously threatening our

democratic republic.”

“I could never have imagined seeing these things in the greatest democracy in the world,” he said. “Has ambition so eclipsed principle?”

Former House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wisconsin, told his former colleagues in the House that challenging the Electoral College results was “striking at the foundation of the republic.”

Ryan said he could not think of “a more anti-democratic and anti-conservative

act than a federal intervention to overturn the results of state-certified elections and disenfranchise millions of Americans.”

Trump tweeted that those members of Congress who were not supporting him were cowards.

“The ‘Surrender Caucus’ within the Republican Party will go down in infamy as weak and ineffective ‘guardians’ of our Nation, who were willing to accept the certification of fraudu-

lent presidential numbers!” Trump tweeted on Monday, Jan. 4.

The heat of the argument intensified on Jan. 3 when a recording of an hourlong telephone call by Trump in the White House to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, was made public.

In the call, the president told Raffensperger, the state elections official who had already certified the results, to go back into the votes again to overturn Biden’s 11,779-vote win.

“So look. All I want to do is this. I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have,” Trump said. “Because we won the state.”

Raffensperger said repeated recounts had not changed the outcome and that he would not change the result.

“Well, Mr. President, the challenge that you have is, the data you have is wrong,” Raffensperger said.

Bentz is the only Republican among Oregon’s five House members and two senators. One of his colleagues, Rep. Earl Blumenauer, said Trump’s call to the Georgia officials should be prosecuted.

“In 17 days, Trump has NO claim to immunity and should be investigated,” Blumenauer said. “If a crime was committed, he should be arrested and prosecuted.”

Walden, the outgoing representative of Oregon’s 2nd Congressional District, could not be reached to comment on Bentz’s position or whether if Walden was still in Congress he would support the results over objections of Republican activists.

Soon after the election, Republican political leaders were refusing to buck Trump’s claims of having the election stolen from him. McConnell declined to support Trump’s conspiracy theories on voting but publicly refused to call Biden “president-elect.”

On Dec. 1, *The Washington Post* newspaper asked all 249 Republicans in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House, “Who won the election?”

Walden was among the 70% of those polled who did not respond directly to the newspaper’s query. But the *Post* reviewed recent public statements and put Walden on the list of 27 accepting Biden as the next president based on a Dec. 1 interview for a National Journal podcast.

“I think in the end we’ll have a transition here, and you’ll have a new president come Jan. 20,” Walden said. “I don’t see the math where this gets overturned and so far I’ve not seen the evidence of the amount of fraud it would take, or mistakes — and those occur in every election — to overturn the results in any state.”

Focus: ‘It’s really hard to find the motivation to do school work’

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average and ability to take advanced classes.

“It’s really a disservice to those who are trying to set themselves up for success,” he said. “If you’re taking AP Biology, how are you supposed to learn that through a computer screen?”

Ashley Perkins was standing on the corner with her daughters, Emma Perkins, a sophomore, and Kayla Perkins, a sixth-grader. She said she wanted to let the school district know her family supported getting kids back into the classroom as soon as they can.

Emma said she looked forward to being able to form more of a relationship with her teachers, and be more engaged in class.

“It’s really hard to find the motivation to do school work,” she said of distance learning.

Mooney echoed other administrators by pointing out that although the governor has removed the sta-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
A group of roughly two dozen protesters advocating for the reopening of schools gather outside the Hermiston School District office in Hermiston on Monday, Jan. 4, 2021.

tistical barrier to reopening, many of the state’s social distancing rules remain the same. That means districts’ revised reopening plans will still have to account for reduced school bus capacity, teachers that can only inter-

act with a maximum of three cohorts per day and class sizes that allow for 6 feet of social distancing between students.

After Brown made her announcement, Pendleton Superintendent Chris

Fritsch sent out a letter on Dec. 30, 2020, that sketched out what the district could do with wider latitude while tempering expectations.

Fritsch wrote that the district is considering bringing back elementary school stu-

dents for half-days before Feb. 15, a move that would expand in-person education while working around Pendleton’s class size limitations. Fritsch was less optimistic about bringing back secondary students, but he added the district would continue to advocate for a change in the rules.

Fritsch said the district plans to unveil a more formal plan after its Tuesday, Jan. 5, school board meeting.

In a Jan. 4 interview, Athena-Weston Superintendent Laure Quaresma said her district’s small class sizes means the district is in good position to bring back its students at the K-5 level.

Quaresma said staff and school board members will continue to discuss their options through the end of the week. At the secondary level, the district is looking at splitting its student body and hosting them for in-person class on alternating days.

But Quaresma added the district didn’t want to finalize its plan until it got more

guidance from the Oregon Department of Education later this month, given how often state rules have changed in the 2020-21 school year.

“Every time you get something solved, you get something new,” she said.

As schools weigh their options, cases are surging throughout the county. On Jan. 4, Umatilla County Public Health reported more than 200 cases from over the weekend.

And although the metrics were just made advisory, they’re still being calculated and tracked. In his letter, Fritsch noted that Umatilla County’s late December 2020 case rates were “648% over the advisory level for reopening elementary schools and 1,296% over the advised level for secondary schools.”

Once schools reopen, the next challenge schools will need to solve is how to stay open. If schools start to experience outbreaks, education may revert to an online-only format.

Building: Purchase was approved in June 2020

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Once the new city hall is complete, the county will move the services currently located in the Cook Building into a 5,000-square-foot space in city hall that the city is adding to plan for future growth. According to a deal previously signed by both parties, the county will have use of that space for a minimum of 15 years in exchange for its \$3 million investment in the new city hall. The \$400,000 from the Cook Building will be credited toward that \$3 million.

Murdock emphasized that the \$3 million comes from payments in lieu of taxes that the county is receiving from large developments in Hermiston’s enterprise zone. It fits with the county’s plan of reinvesting enterprise zone funds into the cities where they came from.

“The county general fund is not making a contribution,” he said. “These are development funds generated in Hermiston.”

During the Dec. 16, 2020, meeting where the commissioners voted for the sale of the Cook Building, Commissioner Bill Elferting stated that he felt the county



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners has approved the sale of the Cook building located at 435 E. Newport Ave.

was getting a good deal based on cost, and the public would benefit being able to visit county offices that were newer, larger and in a more accessible location.

“I’ve had opportunities to discuss this with counsel and also with finance, and it appears to be quite a good proposition with us to enter into with the city of Hermiston,” he said.

The Hermiston City Council voted in June 2020 to approve purchase of the Lanham Building, but City Manager Byron Smith said the sale had not yet closed because the parties involved

had been waiting for the Cook Building sale to be approved.

Smith said bids for construction of the new city hall will close near the end of January. The architects for the project estimate it will take about 18 months to build, Smith said, but in his experience contractors tend to have a longer estimate than architects so it may be more like a two-year project.

Since a fire in the HVAC system and the resulting smoke did more than \$100,000 in damage to the old city hall in December 2019, city staff have been

farmed out to several other buildings. Contractors have been working on renovating the underutilized basement of the Hermiston Public Library across the street, and Smith said the basement should be ready for city staff to move into near the end of January or beginning of February.

“We’ve had a few hiccups with getting materials since COVID has shut down plants,” he said.

He said employees moving into the temporary city hall in the library basement include “customer service” staff, such as the city recorder, human resources and the finance department. Once they leave their current location at the old Carnegie Library next door, the city’s planning department will move into that space.

Once the new three-story city hall is built, it will include staff that had previously been located at the old city hall and in the Carnegie Library, as well as freeing up space for Hermiston Police Department by moving the municipal court from the police station to the new city hall. The basement of the library will then be used to expand the library’s collection and services.

Brown:

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tion by the second week of January. School officials at the Eugene 4J district announced even before Gov. Brown’s announcement that they would move toward a hybrid of in-person and distance learning in early February.

But other districts, including Oregon’s largest, are being more cautious.

Portland Public Schools Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero said in October 2020 that schools would hold off on bringing students back in-person until the start of February at the earliest. That time frame will almost certainly be pushed back.

“We need educators and school staff to have access to vaccinations before we reopen,” PPS spokesperson Karen Werstein said in a Dec. 30, 2020, email. “Right now, we are keeping a close watch on the rollout of vaccinations and look forward to PPS school staff being able to access vaccines at the beginning of phase 1B, per Gov. Brown’s confirmation last week.”

The unions that represent Oregon teachers have

expressed skepticism at Brown’s push for reopenings. Some teachers worry that school buildings and classroom practices can’t be made sufficiently safe during a global pandemic. The Oregon Education Association was critical of Brown’s Feb. 15 target and policy changes, saying they would lead to “uncertainty” and a “patchwork” of different approaches across the state.

The Oregon School Boards Association was more supportive. The Oregon Legislature just approved one of that group’s key criteria for reopening — granting schools liability protection from COVID-19-related lawsuits.

“This next step will require close coordination with local health authorities,” OSBA executive director Jim Green said in a press release after Brown’s Dec. 23 announcement. “Above all, we want to minimize risks as we return to in-person instruction.”

But if minimizing risk involves vaccinating school staff, reopening schools won’t happen quickly, and won’t happen in time to meet the governor’s Feb. 15 reopening goal.