

Senate Republicans stage one-day walkout

Governor's extension of COVID-19 state of emergency prompts move

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — A one-day Republican walkout in the Oregon Senate on Thursday, Feb. 25, was sparked by Gov. Kate Brown's announcement that she will extend the COVID-19 state of emergency until May 2.



Hansell

"We had to get their attention," said Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, one of the lawmakers who was not present for the scheduled session on Feb. 25.

The Republicans sent a letter to Brown protesting her decision and other COVID-19 restrictions, and calling on her to support reopening the Oregon Capitol, which has been closed since March 2020.

"We need an open process for our constituents to engage in testimony on bills," said Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Ath-



Bradley W. Parks/Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon Senate Republicans boycotted the Oregon Legislature's floor session on Thursday, Feb. 25, shortly after Gov. Kate Brown announced she was extending her COVID-19 related emergency order.

ena. "We want transparency so people can have a voice in what is going on."

Hansell said he was taking part in virtual committee hearings on Feb. 25 and will continue until the next scheduled Senate floor session on March 3.

"I plan to be there," Hansell said.

Hansell estimated that 75% of the calls his office receives are about the pandemic, from who gets priority in the vaccine roll

out to why businesses cannot open and operate. He said he joined with his colleagues to send a message to the governor to reconsider COVID-19 policies and how well they are working. The emergency declaration extended on Feb. 25 gives the governor the legal power to issue executive orders on health and safety, including restrictions on businesses, schools, meetings and activities. It also now covers vaccine distribution.

Oregon currently has the

second lowest rate of infection in the nation, which Brown and Oregon Health Authority leaders have credited to strong measures to cut off the spread on the virus. While trends in the past month have shown a steep drop in COVID-19 cases, the OHA says the virus is still a major threat and spikes have been caused by earlier moves to loosen the rules to allow more social and business interaction.

"When I issued my first

state of emergency declaration last March, there were 14 known cases of COVID-19 in Oregon," Brown said. "Today, we have now seen more than 150,000 cases across the state, and, sadly, 2,194 deaths."

The walkout caught senators who arrived at the Capitol by surprise, with 18 Democrats gathering on the Senate floor, an activity that some lawmakers have worried could expose them to infection. All lawmakers were wearing face coverings on Feb. 25.

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, the Legislature's longest-serving member, came to the podium after the roll call showed no Republicans had come to the floor.

"I did not know they would do this," Courtney told the senators. "Yes, there are hard feelings here and there, but nothing of this magnitude."

Courtney called the Republican action "game-playing" and said he wouldn't take part, opting instead to adjourn until March 3.

"They need to be here and do what they need to do to show their opposition on the floor and allow us to move forward," Courtney said.

The Republicans' move meant five bills that could

have been moved into position for votes next week are now delayed. The 18 Democrats could not move ahead without some GOP help.

"We need two more to satisfy our constitution to have a quorum to do the people's business — all the people's business, not just our own," Courtney said.

He asked the Republicans to return to the floor for the session next week. He then gavelled the chamber into adjournment.

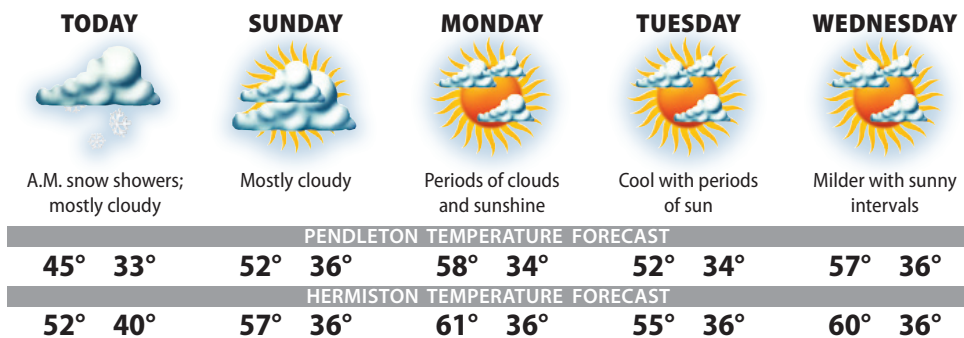
"Very regrettable," a glum Courtney said.

Republicans walked out in 2019 and 2020 over carbon cap legislation that Democrats said they had enough votes to pass in both chambers. House Republicans joined in the 2020 walkout.

Knopp and then-Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend, did not join the 2020 walkout. Both lawmakers were locked in tight reelection campaigns in increasingly Democratic districts. Knopp narrowly won his district, while Helt was defeated by now-Rep. Jason Kropf, D-Bend.

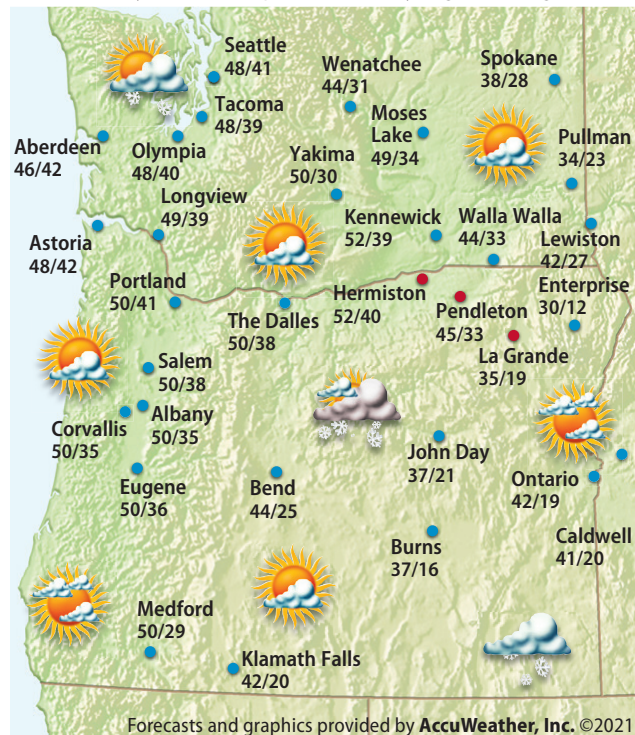
Republicans attended three special sessions last year to deal with emergency legislation addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, its associated economic upheaval, wildfire recovery and police reforms.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



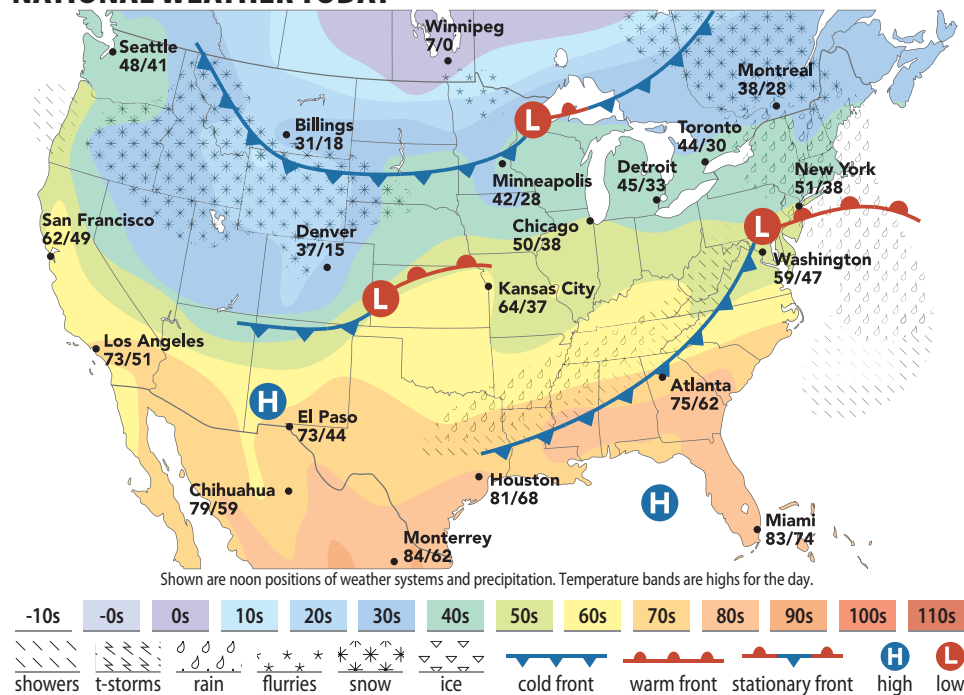
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	44°	38°
Normals	50°	31°
Records	71° (1926)	0° (1993)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.01"	
Month to date	2.09"	
Normal month to date	1.05"	
Year to date	3.00"	
Last year to date	4.06"	
Normal year to date	2.43"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	53°	41°
Normals	52°	30°
Records	71° (1932)	5° (2011)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	0.49"	
Normal month to date	0.89"	
Year to date	1.08"	
Last year to date	0.36"	
Normal year to date	2.17"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	WSW 6-12	Sun. WSW 7-14
Pendleton	W 7-14	SW 8-16
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	6:37 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	5:39 p.m.	
Moonrise today	6:19 p.m.	
Moonset today	7:17 a.m.	
Full Last New First		
Feb 27 Mar 5 Mar 13 Mar 21		

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 90° in McAllen, Texas Low -18° in Clayton Lake, Maine

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Bill would allow more schools and public buildings to ban guns

By DIRK VANDERHART
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — A bill that would allow local governments, school districts and universities to prohibit handguns in public buildings is on its way to the Oregon Senate floor, following a tense committee hearing Thursday, Feb. 25.

Senate Bill 554 is the first gun control bill of the 2021 legislative session to move toward a floor vote. And in normal fashion, the measure drew intense opposition from gun owners.

Currently, anyone with a concealed handgun license in Oregon can legally bring their weapon into buildings, such as city halls, public university buildings, or public schools. SB 554 would not change that, but it would allow governments, school districts, ports and other entities to create their own rules banning firearms in their buildings.

Those bans would need to

be made clear with signage and online notices. Anyone violating the rules could be subject to a class C felony.

SB 554 would also increase fees for applying for a concealed handgun license from \$50 to \$100, and the fee for renewing a license from \$50 to \$75.

In committee hearings and hundreds of pieces of written testimony, opponents of the bill argued that it amounted to an unnecessary infringement on gun rights. Many pointed out that concealed handgun licenses need to pass background checks and must meet a range of requirements, including not having misdemeanor convictions within four years and no outstanding warrants.

Those requirements, opponents say, mean that CHL holders tend to be law-abiding citizens. Many people referred to claims that concealed handgun licensees are less likely to be convicted of a crime than police officers, though the data surrounding that

comparison is fuzzy.

Others have argued that people with concealed-carry licenses are a last defense against criminals and mass shooters. The FBI tracks active shooter incidents in the U.S., along with how those events end, and typically finds a relatively small percentage are stopped by armed citizens and unarmed citizens alike. The numbers behind the FBI reports are sometimes disputed by gun rights advocates.

"There's confusion about CHL holders and violent crime," Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, R-Lyons, testified in a hearing Monday, Feb. 22. "There's a huge difference between the two."

Though SB 554 did not contemplate the Oregon Capitol, Girod said he and his wife routinely carry guns in the building, and would not stop. "I'll be darned if I'm going to be a sitting duck for a person who wants to come in and start shooting," he said. "It's just not right."

IN BRIEF

State tax collections buck pandemic unemployment trends

SALEM — More than 150,000 Oregonians remain out of work as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, but income tax collections that support state services and public schools are likely to exceed pre-pandemic forecasts.

State economists told lawmakers on Wednesday, Feb. 24, that is good news for the current two-year state budget — but not so good for the next couple of budget cycles, including the spending plan lawmakers are putting together now.

State Economist Mark McMullen likened it to what happened in 1990, when Oregon underwent a relatively mild economic downturn, but growth in tax collections slowed for a few years afterward.

"We have a couple of years with flat growth ... without any gains in revenue, which is good for a recession, but bad for keeping up with the

spending side," McMullen said at a quarterly presentation to House and Senate revenue committees.

He and senior economist Josh Lehner had projected a \$2 billion drop in tax collections right after the start of the pandemic in spring 2020. But in their latest forecast, they said lawmakers will have about \$800 million more in collections available for the current budget period and the next, which starts July 1. Even with lawmakers tapping it on Dec. 21, 2020, the ending balance and two state reserves will have about \$3.1 billion at the start of the new budget period.

Largely as a result of billions in federal aid to individuals and businesses, McMullen said, Oregon's overall income levels were up 5%, not down, despite the sharpest one-month nose-dive in Oregon's unemployment rate from a record-low 3.3% in March 2020 to 14.2% in April 2020. The December 2020 rate was 6.4%.

— Oregon Capital Bureau

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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