

# Oregon Senate Republican leader faces recall effort for not leading a walkout

By DIRK VANDERHART  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod and five of his Republican colleagues committed an act that some in their party felt was a betrayal: They showed up for work.



Girod

As the chamber took up a proposal on March 25 to ban firearms in state buildings and pave the way for other bans, six of the Senate's 11 Republicans showed up to the floor, ensuring the chamber had the minimum 20 members present required to take up business.

That bill passed over lengthy and fiery Republican objections, and Girod, R-Lyons, now faces more than cries of outrage from those who believe he should have once again led a Senate walkout. He might have to defend himself against a recall.

A Molalla resident named LaVaedra Newton filed a prospective petition on Monday, April 5, to bounce Girod from the Senate seat he's held since 2008. Newton and others say Girod abdicated his duty by not blocking the gun bill.

"In the face of an onslaught of dangerous and crippling legislation, Oregon's Republican Senate Leader has refused to stand up to protect his constituents," Newton wrote in a form submitted to the Oregon Secretary of



Andrew Selsky/Associated Press, File

**Oregon Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, R-Lyons, is facing a recall effort after committing an act that some in his party feel was a betrayal — showing up for work.**

State's Office. "Faced with legislation that threatens the safety and financial stability of Oregonians, Senator Fred Girod had refused to use the single tool available to defend the people who elected him. He needs to be replaced with a real leader."

To successfully force a recall election, Newton will need to collect at least 8,922 valid signatures from voters in Girod's district by July 6.

History suggests that will be a tall order, particularly during a pandemic and working within a district that was heavily hit by 2020's unprecedented wildfires. In recent years, recall petitions against two state legislators — former Democratic state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell of Astoria and Republican state Sen. Chuck Thomsen of Hood River — have come up short. So have five petitions to recall Gov. Kate Brown.

Girod on Tuesday, April 6, said he was not worried about bucking the trend.

"I just stood for election — in a three-way race I got 67%," he said. "If they want to spend a bunch of money trying to take me out, they're welcome to do it. I don't think they'll be successful."

Rather than focus on the recall, Girod said he would work on getting relief to his fire-ravaged district, passing a new two-year budget and steering billions of dollars in new federal aid.

"The last thing I'm going to do is pay a bunch of attention to this initiative," he said.

Newton, the chief petitioner behind the recall, did not respond to inquiries about plans for circulating recall petitions. His filing says backers will not pay signature gatherers.

Newton's petition also names Rob Taylor, a Bandon-based conservative talk radio host, as an "authorized agent" for the effort. Taylor, who lists the Oregon Firearms Federation among his sponsors, recently blasted Girod and

other Republicans for showing up to the Oregon Capitol on March 25.

"Some of the Republicans seem not to want to do their job," Taylor said on a March 29 show in which he mischaracterized some aspects of the gun bill. "It should never have gone to discussion because all of the Republican senators should have walked out."

Taylor did not respond to a query about the recall effort.

The petition reflects a new reality for Republican lawmakers who have walked away from the Capitol repeatedly in the past two years to block legislation that was unpopular in their districts: The bar for using that tactic has been lowered in the public's mind. Democrats hold 18 seats in the Senate, with a required quorum of 20 members.

"People now expect it for all bills that, from a Republican perspective, are seen as a bad bill," Girod said, adding that his caucus had discussed staging a walkout on Senate Bill 554. "The problem that we had is trying to walk for 3½ months just was not doable."

Despite that conclusion, nearly half the Senate's 11 Republicans did not attend the session where SB 554 was debated. Sens. Dallas Heard, Dennis Linthicum, Kim Thatcher and Art Robinson all were marked as absent. A fifth Republican, Thomsen, was listed as "excused." Also granted an excused absence was Sen. Brian Boquist, who recently changed his registration from Republican to Independent and no longer caucuses with the GOP.

# Senate expands list of who should report child abuse, human trafficking

By GARY A. WARNER  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Senate on Monday, April 5, expanded the list of those who should report possible child abuse to include hoteliers, and those who should report suspected human trafficking to include employees of restaurants and bars.



Findley

"Sexual exploitation crimes often go unreported and victims don't have the resources they need to find help," said Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale. "The more reporting the community does, the better."

Both bills on the matter were introduced by members of the Republican Senate caucus and passed with bipartisan support. They now go to the House for consideration.

Senate Bill 515 requires employees of bars and restaurants to report reasonable belief of suspected human trafficking or unlawful employment of minors.

The bill passed 27-1, with all Democrats supporting the legislation and Rep. Dallas Heard, R-Roseburg, voting no.

"By all of us taking a little responsibility for the most vulnerable in our communities, we can make a difference," said Senate Minority Leader Fred

Girod, R-Stayton. Senate Bill 535 makes hotelkeepers and innkeepers mandatory reporters of child abuse. It also requires computer technicians and processors to immediately report suspected child pornography found on devices or systems they work on.

"Trafficking and sex crimes are happening in our own backyard, and we need more tools to fight them," said Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend. "These employees can play an important role in reporting."

The bill passed 26-2, with all Democrats voting yes, while Heard and Sen. Brian Boquist, a longtime GOP lawmaker from Dallas who has declared himself an independent, both voted no.

During the initial call of the vote, Senate Majority Leader Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, asked Senate President Peter Courtney for a "Call of the Senate." This impels senators to come to the floor to vote. In the initial roll call, neither Heard or Boquist responded to the roll call. In the last roll call, they both voted no.

Heard, who is also the chair of the Oregon Republican Party, has voted "no" on every bill in committee and on the floor as a protest against what he says is the Democrats' manipulation of the session agenda. That's caused Heard to be absent for a bill that made displaying a noose a hate crime, as well as his votes on the crime reporting bills.

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