

Push to recall GOP lawmaker fails

By DIRK VANDERHART
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, was the second Senate Republican targeted for recall because he showed up to oppose a gun-control bill. Detractors wanted Findley to walk away from the Capitol.

Earlier this year, gun rights supporters launched a recall attempt against state Sen. Lynn Findley because he showed up to work, voting against a controversial gun control bill.

It appears Findley, R-Vale, will be able to keep showing up.

With a deadline to collect 8,289 valid signatures approaching Monday, Sept. 13, the chief petitioner behind the recall told OPB the effort had failed.

"I think we're going to fall just a smidge short," said Patrick Kopke-Hales, the Mount Vernon veteran who initiated the petition.

Kopke-Hales declined repeatedly to offer an estimate of how many signatures he and other recall supporters collected, but said the vastness of Findley's Senate district combined with a resurging COVID-19



Kristyna Wentz-Graff/Oregon Public Broadcasting
Sen. Lynn Findley, left, R-Vale, conferences with Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, on the Senate floor at the Oregon State Capitol on Tuesday, May 18, 2021.

pandemic had doomed the petition.

"Everybody went back to having to wear masks," he said. "It just made life harder all the way around."

Findley expressed doubts the recall effort nearly succeeded, saying he knew no one within his district who had even seen a recall petition.

"I find that hard to imagine," he said. "I'd not heard of any efforts to even gather signatures."

The movement to bounce Findley arose after the Eastern Oregon lawmaker attended a March floor session, in which Demo-

crats passed the session's signature gun-control bill out of the Senate. That bill, Senate Bill 554, created new requirements for gun owners to secure their weapons when not in use, and banned firearms from the state Capitol and Portland International Airport. It also allowed schools to create their own firearm bans.

Gun rights supporters, including the hardline Oregon Firearms Federation, had pressed Republicans to walk out over the bill, which would have denied Democrats a quorum needed to conduct business. That's a tactic Republicans

used repeatedly in 2019 and 2020 to block climate change legislation.

But while some GOP senators did refuse to attend the SB 554 vote, Findley and five other Republican senators showed up to argue strenuously against the proposal, allowing Democrats to pass it. The bill is scheduled to take effect Sept. 24, though a referendum campaign is underway that could allow voters to have the final say next year.

"Whether he chooses to believe that he was fighting for us, the best way would have been denying the Senate Democrats quorum on this bill," Kopke-Hales, the chief petitioner, wrote in a statement in July. "He knew he was fighting a losing battle."

Also involved in the recall push was HollyJo Beers of Milton-Freewater, who is affiliated with the Umatilla County chapter of the Three Percenters, a militia-style group that promotes gun rights. A political action committee affiliated with the recall petition had not reported raising any money as of Sept. 13.

Findley is the second Senate Republican to face a recall threat in connection with the gun control bill.

Oregon lawmakers to debate political maps

Gov. Kate Brown officially calls for special session

By DIRK VANDERHART
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — With a deadline to approve new political maps fast approaching, Oregon lawmakers will convene in Salem on Monday, Sept. 20, to try to find agreement on new legislative and congressional districts.

Gov. Kate Brown on Sept. 10 made official what lawmakers have been planning on for months, calling a special session and requesting that lawmakers work "expeditiously" to pass a redistricting plan.

What's not yet clear: Whether the public will be invited to attend.

With COVID-19 surging in the state, House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney elected last month to eliminate planned in-person hearings where members of the public could comment on proposed political maps. Instead, those hearings have been held virtually — like nearly every legislative hearing since the pandemic took root in 2020.

But the state Capitol is open to visitors. After being closed since March 2020, the statehouse reopened July 12, when Brown had already eased statewide restrictions. Courtney and Kotek had made no announcement as of Sept. 10 that they'd seek to reshutter the building and implement the distancing measures they've employed at other

recent sessions.

The timing of the special session comes during an interesting time at the Capitol in Salem. Lawmakers have been forced to move out of their offices because of ongoing construction, limiting the places they'll be able to spend time in the building while not on the floor.

And the session is set to occur days before a new law banning firearm possession in the Capitol is set to take effect. That raises the specter that members of the public could openly carry weapons in the building during the politically charged debate over how to draw new districts — a possibility that some lawmakers would object to, in light of an incursion by far-right protesters in December.

Lawmakers have until Sept. 27 to pass a new plan for redrawing the state's 90 legislative districts and six congressional districts, but there is little sign the two parties can find agreement. Proposed maps released by Democrats and Republicans last week have drawn criticism by both sides that the other is attempting to gerrymander to lock in political advantages for the next decade.

Despite that, Brown sounded a note of optimism.

"This special session is an opportunity for legislators to set aside their differences and ensure Oregon voters have their voices heard at the ballot box," the governor said in a statement. "Based on my conversations with legislative leaders, and the ongoing public testimony we are hearing from Oregonians across the state this week, I believe the Legislature is ready to begin the next step of the redistricting process."

If lawmakers do not pass a plan by the deadline, Democratic Secretary of State Shemia Fagan will take control of drawing legislative maps. A panel of judges will be tasked with approving a congressional map.



Courtney



Kotek

School boards warned: Follow the law, like it or not

By BETSY HAMMOND
The Oregonian

SALEM — Leaders of the Oregon School Boards Association recently admonished school board members across the state to uphold their oaths of office and follow all laws, even those they disagree with.

They conveyed that message in an open letter — signed by the association's executive director, president and the head of its board members of color caucus — that took clear aim at the notable number of school board members who have directed school employees to defy mask mandates intended to keep children safe from COVID-19. It also called out, without naming them, the four members of the Newberg School Board who directed their superintendent to ban displays of Pride and Black Lives Matter symbols in Newberg schools.

"We are ... lamentably seeing a remarkable number of board members doing their very best to ignore the law or openly defy it," Director Jim Green, President Maureen Wolf and members of color caucus head Sami Al-Abdrabbuh wrote. "Such behavior is simply unacceptable. We are duly elected leaders of our communities," the three, all of whom have also served on local school boards, continued. "We set examples for young people ... We call on Oregon's more

than 1,400 school board members to carefully weigh the consequences of your actions, to heed your oaths and to lead by example."

The letter comes on the heels of dramatic school board actions to defy what some members feel is unacceptable overreach by Gov. Kate Brown, the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Health Authority. Oregon has a long tradition of local control of public schools, which are governed by elected local school boards, but also subjects schools to state laws, executive orders and administrative rules.

Brown and the two state agencies have required universal mask wearing in schools, made being vaccinated a condition of employment for school employees and required school boards to pass "every student belongs" policies that call for full inclusion of students regardless of race, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

In addition to anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-Black votes by the Newberg board this summer, the Albany school board fired Superintendent Melissa Goff after she championed racial equity, and the school board



Green



Wolf



Al-Abdrabbuh

in Adrian fired its superintendent after he indicated he would enforce masking rules. In Redmond, a packed crowd cheered as the five-person school board considered a resolution to defy mask rules.

Since firing its superintendent, the Adrian school board approved a letter to all district families that said in part, "Although in our view Oregon's pandemic steps have been consis-

tently wrong, we believe that complying with the mask order is in the best interest of our students," the Oregon School Boards Association reported.

The letter the statewide association's leaders sent to all Oregon school board members is notable in part because the association and its leaders have always shown or voiced awareness that they represent an extremely diverse membership. Oregon's roughly 200 school districts range in size from two students to 47,000, encompass rural, suburban and big or medium-size city communities, and range in political leaning from very conservative to very liberal.

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