

## OREGON LEGISLATURE

# House OKs gun storage combined with partial ban on public places

■ Bill heads back to Oregon Senate, which previously approved a broader ban

By Peter Wong  
Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon House, on a largely party-line vote, approved a bill that combines storage requirements for firearms with a narrower ban on guns in some public places.

The 34-24 vote on Thursday, April 29, sends the revamped Senate Bill 554 back to the Senate, which can vote to accept the changes — and send it to Gov. Kate Brown — or reject it and force a joint panel to negotiate the differences.

Support came exclusively from Democrats. Three of the 37 Democrats voted no: Paul Evans of Monmouth, David Gomberg of Otis and Mark Meek of Oregon City.

Opposition came largely from Republicans, mostly from rural areas. Exceptions were from Clackamas County, where both Democratic Rep. Meek and Republican Leader Christine Drazan of Canby spoke against it. No Republicans voted for it.

Two Republicans were excused.

The vote took place after close to three hours of debate.

The bill does not have an emergency clause, which means that if it becomes law, opponents have 90 days from the close of the 2021 session to obtain 74,680 voter signatures to force a statewide election. The number is set by the Oregon Constitution, which specifies 4% of the votes cast for governor in the most recent election in 2018.

Part of the revamped bill proposes requirements for firearms locks and storage already written into a separate House bill, which the House sent back to committee.

Under the revamped bill, guns must have trigger or cable locks, be stored in a locked



Rollingwood (Texas) Police Department/TNS

The Oregon House of Representatives on Thursday approved a bill that would require gun owners to store guns with a trigger or cable lock, in a locked container or a gun room.

container or in a gun room. An offense is a Class C violation, which carries a maximum fine of \$500, unless someone under age 18 obtains access, in which case it is a Class A violation with a maximum fine of \$2,000. No jail time is imposed for violations.

The bill also requires prompt reporting of stolen firearms. Its first sections are named in honor of Cindy Yuille and Steve Forsyth, who died on Dec. 11, 2012, in the Clackamas Town Center shootings. The assault-style weapon used to kill them was found to have been stolen.

The other part of the revamped bill narrows the scope of a firearms ban included in the original SB 554, which passed the Senate on March 25.

The changes would still bar the estimated 300,000 holders of Oregon concealed-handgun

licenses from bringing firearms into some public places. State courts, which often are in buildings maintained by counties, already are off-limits to firearms.

But the scope of the ban would be narrower under the House version.

Licenses would be barred from bringing firearms into the Capitol, though not from other state buildings as originally proposed in the Senate.

They would be barred from bringing firearms into the passenger terminal at the Portland airport, defined as one with annual passenger traffic of more than one million. (Eugene and Medford airports had counts around one million passengers annually prior to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.) Passenger boarding areas and firearms shipments in luggage are controlled by federal law. Firearms bans would be

optional at Oregon Health & Science University, seven state universities, 17 community college districts and 197 school districts if their governing boards impose them on buildings and grounds under their control. Notices of bans must be clearly displayed on buildings and grounds and posted online. (Bans would not apply to public sidewalks and streets.)

The revamped version of the bill drops the option for cities, counties and special districts to bar firearms from their buildings and grounds.

Offenses would be considered Class A misdemeanors with maximum punishments of one year in jail and a fine of \$6,250.

The bill also would raise initial filing fees for concealed-handgun licenses from \$50 to \$100, and for renewals, from \$50 to \$75.

# Brown defends decision to ban indoor dining

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown said Friday that she has no intention of rolling back orders issued this week to fight the nation's worst rate of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations now hitting Oregon.

"Cases are widespread, driven by new, more contagious variants," Brown said during a virtual press conference Friday morning, April 30.

The Centers for Disease Control reported Friday that Oregon has the highest rate of new infections and hospitalizations of any state in the nation. Cases of COVID-19 have risen 38% in the past two weeks, while hospitalizations are up 43%. Nationwide, both are in decline.

Fifteen counties, including Baker, already exceeded the extreme risk numbers at the very top of the state's four-tier COVID-19 risk chart. But Brown had ordered that the counties would not need to resort to the most severe restrictions as long as the state's hospital system was not overly taxed. She set 300 COVID-19 hospitalizations as the "tripwire" for restoring the ban on indoor dining and strict limits on activities and gatherings.

When cases topped 300 on Monday, April 26, Brown lifted the moratorium on extreme risk limits, putting 15 counties into extreme risk restrictions Friday, April 30. On Friday, the state reported 339 COVID-19 patients in hospitals around the state.

With early and sometimes heavy restrictions, Oregon has one of the lowest case rates and deaths since the pandemic began spreading in the first months of 2020. Brown said decisions often had to be made pitting "lives and livelihoods."

"As your governor, I chose to save lives," she said.

Brown said more than half of state residents have been at least partially vaccinated. The first to receive the vaccine were elderly in nursing homes, who made up more than half the deaths from COVID-19 in the state. While the daily death toll has fallen since its peak last winter, Brown said the current infection rate was rising too quickly and new variants that are more contagious and in some cases, lethal, meant the recent spike had to be taken as seriously as earlier outbreaks.

Brown's latest actions included extending her authority over public health by extending the emergency declaration she issued in March 2020 until at least June 28.

The orders to instigate the extreme risk and extend the emergency set off protests from some political and business leaders.

A Republican-led effort was started in the Legislature to initiate bills to curb Brown's powers or bar another extension.

"Literally everything in Oregonians' lives are being dictated by one person," Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, said on the floor of the Senate on Thursday, April 29.



Brown

# John Day voters to decide on 5-year levy for police dept.

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Voters will decide the fate of the John Day Police Department.

The John Day City Council and Budget Committee met on April 20 to discuss the proposed budget for fiscal year 2021-2022 and agreed that the residents of John Day should have the opportunity to vote on a five-year levy to fund the police department.

If the levy does not pass, the city plans to transition the department to the Grant County Sheriff's Office in September.

Budget Committee member Mark Miller said the people at the town hall meeting on April 8 voiced their support of the police department and should have their say by voting.

"I think the people of the town gotta have their say," Miller said. "My comment is: Put it to the people."

The plan is to file for an emergency election Aug. 3 to request approval of John Day voters for a levy of 35 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Although the original estimate was only 10-15 cents per \$1,000, the police department's modernization expenses discussed at the budget meeting led to the increase, according to the agenda.

"There's a lot that has to happen in the lead up to the election and afterward," said John Day City Manager Nick Green.

Green said they are coordinating with their legal counsel on the ballot measure

language for the local option levy.

The council will need to approve that language prior to submitting it to the county clerk for processing. The approval will need to happen at the May 11 city council meeting, according to Green. The city will then submit the ballot measure to the Grant County Clerk by May 14.

Green said the schedule is tentative until the city files the ballot measure.

Councilor Paul Smith said he was informed that the special election would cost the city between \$3,000 and \$5,000, and the measure would need a double majority for the levy to pass.

A double majority means that more than 50% of regis-

tered voters need to vote with more than 50% in favor of the measure to pass.

"If we waited until November, the election would not cost us anything, but we would not be able to collect any assessment until 2022," Smith said, 10 months later than if they held the vote in August.

The Budget Committee included the revenue from the

local option levy in the budget it approved. Green said, if the levy does not pass, the transition option would be triggered.

John Day City Councilor Heather Rookstool said she favors giving residents a chance to vote. However, she said people need to also understand what would happen if the levy does not pass and if the county does not want to work out a

consolidation agreement.

"I like the idea of the option, but if they say no and the county says no, I want residents to understand what kind of service they're going to get," Rookstool said. "It will be emergent services only.. The public needs to listen and make their voices heard because this is their one chance to do that."

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