

Legislature

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It's just a lot of paper

A lot of trees died to churn out the 1,500 bills and resolutions submitted by House and Senate members for the 2021 session.

In normal years, about 20% of bills make it to the full House and Senate for consideration.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, and Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, are eager to cap the time lawmakers are in Salem and the hours staff in the Capitol have to work on preparing bills and support materials. That's a formula for an extra high attrition rate on legislation not fast-tracked from the beginning.

Drawing lines for 2022

Along with the official crises in front of the Legislature, the House and Senate committee on redistricting will be closely watched. Every 10 years, the new U.S. Census numbers are used to re-draw 60 state House districts, 30 state Senate districts and five Congressional districts.

If the Legislature cannot agree on the new district lines, the mapping of state legislative districts goes to Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, while congressional lines go to a federal panel. There are often court challenges. But the new boundaries will be in place for the 2022 elections.

COVID-19 vs. open Capitol

State political reporters recently held an online meeting with legislative leaders and Gov. Kate Brown to get a preview of politics and policy agendas for 2021.

The Capitol has been closed to the public since Brown declared a state of emergency in March as COVID-19 began its spread through Oregon.

The Legislature has held three short special sessions to deal with emergency measures tied to the pandemic, wildfires and police reform.

Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, R-Stayton, said the regular session of the Legislature should not continue with the public only able to take part via online testimony.

"You do what you can to make it so that the public has a right to come in and testify," Girod said.

"There are billions of dollars that are going to be spent."

Girod, 70, said he knew that with its many older members and those with health issues, the Legislature included people who were in high-risk categories for serious illness and even death.

But he argued a year of Oregonians being limited to virtual involvement was not acceptable in a transparent democracy. Opening the Capitol in some form was "worth the risk."

Courtney sharply disagreed.

"I am not willing to play God with this stuff," said Courtney, 77.

Oregon's five short days of special sessions since March had avoided any infections. But the regular session would require many more gatherings in Salem. Reopening the Capitol would increase the viral exposure on each person inside.

"You may be willing to take the risk, but I am not," Courtney said.

Capitol security

Violent assaults on the Oregon Capitol on Dec. 21 and the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 are driving an aggressive review of security in Salem.

Oregon is one of 20 states that does not require visitors to pass through metal detectors to enter the state Capitol. It's one of 45 states that allow some form of open carry of firearms, including AR-15 semi-automatic rifles and other "long guns." It's even one of about 20 states that allow the guns to be carried into the Capitol.

Senate Minority Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, said most protesters would say they carry the guns as an expression of their Second Amendment.

An incredulous House Majority Leader Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, vigorously disagreed.

The recent attacks show that the presence of armed protesters has a different motivation: "It's to intimidate," she said.

All aspects of security are under review, but any changes would be announced in public in advance and any change to gun laws would likely require legislation.

Courtney lives in Salem and has worked in the Capitol since he was first elected to the Legislature in 1981.

Surveying the reality today — the Capitol shuttered for 10 months, the attack on the Legislature, concrete blocks placed in front of the entrance, lower outside windows shielded against future riots by plywood, yards of fencing and National Guard troops on the grounds — makes Courtney immensely sad.

"This is really a traumatic thing to have Oregon, which is the most open Capitol in the nation, about to become a fortress," Courtney said.

"I never thought I'd see that. It breaks my heart."

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Devereaux

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Devereaux had his own fascinating history as a war-time pilot. On July 14, 1945, he was flying a Corsair F-4U in an air battle near Japan and he shot down a Japanese bomber. When he returned to his aircraft carrier, he crashed while landing.

After the war, Devereaux began working for Brooks-Scanlon as an accountant and was promoted to controller. He also entered public service as a city councilor. The council appointed him mayor for one year in 1968, when the city's population was 13,000 people.

Bend resident Harriet Langmas, whose late husband, Sam, served as Bend mayor from 1982 to 1985, remembered Devereaux's passion for local history.

Langmas described him as a champion for keeping history alive in the city. He was twice president of the Deschutes Pioneers Association and served on the board of directors of the Deschutes Historical Society.

"He always just had a spirit of livelihood for whatever he was doing," Langmas said. "He was a great participant, and he will be sorely missed by all."

Ruth Burleigh, 94, who was Bend's first female mayor in

1981, remembers working with Devereaux on the historical society board.

Burleigh remembers Devereaux's intelligence and humble nature in everything he did.

"I really thought a lot of him and enjoyed every bit of time I spent with him,"

Burleigh said. "He's been a solid part of our country around here."

Chris Piper, who served on the Bend City Council from 2019 to 2020, said he met Devereaux at a veterans event

shortly after being appointed to the council. Devereaux became a mentor to Piper and offered advice for serving on the council.

"He provided his words of wisdom and guidance on the council," Piper said. "His insight was very helpful."

Piper would see Devereaux at other veteran events and the two would joke with each other. Piper remembers Devereaux's sense of humor and compassion for people.

Piper imagines the soldiers who served with Devereaux in World War II would have admired his attitude and leadership.

"He is just a very honorable, generous individual that never focused on himself," Piper said. "He focused on others."

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Devereaux

Gymnastics

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Lockdowns have taken a toll on business owners across the state and beyond with rising debts forcing some to close their operations permanently. Gymnasiums and other indoor recreation facilities are bearing the brunt of the closures, especially in Deschutes County, where such businesses are not permitted to open due to the "extreme risk" COVID-19 category rules.

Roger Lee, executive director of Economic Development for Central Oregon, said the inability of gymnasiums and fun centers to generate revenue could be the tipping point for many.

"We have forecasted that business failures would multiply in this quarter as a result of the past 10 months of forced closures or curtailment of operations," said Lee. "Despite several rounds of federal stimulus through PPP and other government loan and grant programs, there is not enough money in either the national treasury or state coffers to backfill COVID losses, particularly for those businesses most impacted by executive orders."

Damon Runberg, regional economist for the Oregon Employment Department, said it's too soon to know the full extent of Central Oregon's business closures because the lockdowns are ongoing.

"All we can say is that we are not out the woods and the economic catastrophe from this public health crisis continues to do permanent damage to



Dean Guernsey/For The Bulletin

Sharman Watt, owner of Central Oregon Gymnastics Academy, has been forced to close down her thriving business of 20 years due to COVID-19 restrictions.

many of the region's businesses, particularly those who rely on public gatherings where physical distancing is difficult," Runberg said.

Watt's main problem is covering her rent, which continues to pile up even though her business is closed. She estimates she will need \$100,000 to pay for rent and other costs for the gymnastics center until September, the next possible month she thinks a profit is possible.

Without government help, she has turned to crowdsourcing and fundraisers. A GoFundMe campaign has so far raised around \$21,000.

"We are trying to keep the doors open for her through the summer to try and get us back to that fall enrollment period, to help keep the bills paid," said Aric Shafer, whose 9-year-old daughter Skylar attends programs at the academy.

Shafer said families like his are eager to get their kids back into the facility not only to compete but help lift their morale. Shafer said the gym serves as a "second home" for his daughter and its closure has caused her emotional distress.

She is "depressed and popping around the house because she can't do her usual exercise and can't get her energy out and see her friends," said Shafer. "It's really hard to watch her affected in such a way."

Watt said the emotional stress of broken routines runs across all age groups. She says her programs are especially important for young girls who suffer from anxiety or other stress disorders.

"Kids out there need programs like this," said Watt, who opened the academy in 1998. "Some are extremely shy or they are extremely anxious. There are middle of the road

kids who do it because it's fun, but there are a lot of kids who need these programs to work out their issues. They are missing a huge portion of their childhood."

Watt's business will remain closed as long as Deschutes County remains in the "extreme risk" category, which occurs when a county has more than 200 new infections per 100,000 people for more than 14 days. Deschutes County recorded 793 new cases from Jan. 3 to Jan 16, which is 410 cases per 100,000 people.

The next level down from extreme risk is high risk. Gyms in high-risk counties can open up with 25% of normal capacity or a maximum of 50 people, whichever is smaller.

"Gyms and recreational indoor facilities in town are all very strapped," said Katy Brooks, chief executive of the Bend Chamber of Commerce. "We have to reopen soon or these folks will be going out of business."

Watt anticipates the losses to increase well into the second half of the year but remains hopeful that the academy can survive and start getting back to even by the end of the year. She gets her motivation from the hundreds of kids chomping at the bit to get back to their gymnastics routines.

"I can't let it go for these kids. They would be devastated if they didn't have this," said Watt. "The community needs this so if we can survive we are going to survive."

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Outbreak

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All Redmond-based caregivers can be tested for COVID-19; caregivers are asked to stay home and get tested if they have symptoms, no matter how mild. Other protections include increasing air filtration, requiring caregivers who care for patients to use N95 respirators and eye protection throughout their shifts while the outbreak is ongoing, boosting hand sanitizer and cleaning throughout the facility and asking caregivers to eat in the cafeteria or outside patio rather than in a break room, according to the hospital.

Late last year, 160 nurses at each of the four St. Charles hospitals — Redmond, Bend, Madras and Prineville —

Teachers up next for COVID-19 vaccine

Deschutes County has the green light from the Oregon Health Authority to issue vaccines to kindergarten through 12th grade teachers.

Those in the so-called 1B category can expect to be contacted by their employers about how to sign up for a vaccine, according to Deschutes County Health Services.

About 2,500 teachers can begin getting their vaccinations against COVID-19 starting this weekend, the county said in an emailed statement.

The county and St. Charles

Health System are coordinating with the school districts and private schools regarding scheduling appointments online. If there is enough vaccine available, the county will reach out to child care facilities as well, according to the prepared statement.

County residents who want to be notified when they are eligible for the vaccine can go to vaccine.deschutes.org to sign up.

Those 80 years old and up not in an assisted living facility will be eligible for a vaccine Feb. 8, according to the county.

To date, 12,290 residents have been vaccinated in Deschutes County.

— Bulletin staff report

signed a petition urging hospital administrators to boost staffing and provide more

personal protective equipment. The petition came after administrators blamed

Survey

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The survey data, which is routinely gathered by the city every few years and was reviewed by the Bend City Council in a meeting on Wednesday, will help the new council determine the city's goals for the next two years.

Close to 70% of residents deemed the creation of affordable housing a high or urgent priority, according to the survey, which is similar to the results two years ago. That percentage jumps up among renters specifically. Almost 80% say affordable housing is considered an urgent need, compared with 61% of homeowners who consider it an urgent need, said Tony Iaccarino, a project manager with DHM Research, at the council meeting Wednesday.

Housing and addressing homelessness also appeared to be more of a pressing issue

among people who said they have lived in Bend for a longer period of time, he said.

"Those who've been here longer, more than five years, are clearly, definitely noticing big changes in these particular areas," Iaccarino said.

The preference of what kind of housing should be built, however, has changed significantly compared to two years ago, Iaccarino said. In 2018, residents reported no preference between having single-family homes built over town homes or duplexes.

In 2020, roughly 50% of respondents said more single-family homes should be built, compared with 25% who preferred town homes.

"What is driving that shift? We think it's renters," Iaccarino said.

According to the survey, 63% of renters who responded wanted more single-family homes built. Michelle Neiss, president of DHM Research,

said the pandemic could be influencing people's opinions. With more people staying home, people may be wanting to have more space or a backyard to enjoy.

"There's been some national conversation about people moving to suburbs in the pandemic," she told the council.

Some priorities around transportation have also changed. In 2014, only 52% of those surveyed approved of the conditions of the roads in Bend, compared with 67% in 2020.

"(Fixing roads) is no longer seen as urgent of a priority as it used to be," Neiss said.

The research group also asked a new question about how residents prioritize addressing the racial equity gaps with housing, policing and other city services. About 75% of respondents said it was important, with more than half of those people calling it "very important."

One gap that was clear was reflected in the question about local policing. According to the survey, 69% of white residents rated local police positively, while only 56% of people of color rated the police with high marks.

Roughly a third of respondents said their top priority for policing was for Bend Police to work with social service groups to address mental health and homeless related calls.

At the end of the presentation, some councilors called for the city to push harder to get more representation from the Latino community in the survey. The phone survey was not offered in Spanish.

An online survey, which was offered in Spanish but not statistically valid because people could self select to take it, only had four respondents.

The full surveys can be found at the city's website.

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