

Legislature

Continued from A1

The Senate moved at a more sedate pace, with just 16 bills handled in a morning session. But it has 22 more scheduled for Thursday.

Courtney used a quote from Florence Nightingale, the nurse and social reformer born in 1820, to send the message he wanted lawmakers to cooperate on getting through the session without any more delaying tactics.

"I attribute my success to this: I never gave or took an excuse," Courtney said.

In an unusually late move, two bills were introduced. Senate Bill 871 would essentially bar horse racing in Oregon. Senate Bill 870, authored by Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, would revise disclosures on campaign finance contributions.

Courtney's office did not explain how the bills might be considered this late in the session.

The legislation became a blur on Tuesday and Wednesday, as bills churned out by the dozens. A tiny sample of topics included extending approval of take-out cocktail sales, residential rent assistance, extending a moratorium on foreclosures, barring insurance companies from requiring the use of mail-order pharmacies, and scores of other issues.

News of the gun rights referendum spread late Tuesday. It was submitted by three Republican House members: Reps. Mike Nearman of Independence, E. Werner Reschke of Klamath Falls and David Brock Smith of Port Orford.

Numbered Initiative 301, the referendum would require supporters to gather 74,680 signatures by 90 days after the adjournment of the Legislature in order to qualify for the November 2022 ballot. If the Legislature goes to June 27, the signatures would have to be in before Sept. 25.

The new gun law goes into effect 91 days after adjournment. If the signatures are collected by the 90-day deadline, the law would go on hold until the vote in November 2022.

Nearman faces criminal charges in Marion County for allegedly allowing protesters into the Capitol during a special session in December. It took state police in riot gear to expel the group.

Despite the looming deadline to head for the exits, the House and Senate stuck to some of their daily traditions that chew up time.

There were the symbolic actions that serve as political litmus tests or to tout a favorite topic.

The House passed Senate Joint Memorial 4, calling on Congress to act on reparations for descendants of slaves. It passed on a party-line vote of 35-23, with Democrats in favor and Republicans against.

Both chambers each day set aside time for "courtesies," or positive remarks. They are followed by "remonstrances," a term dating to the 13th century that the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "a forcefully reproachful protest."

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, rose during courtesies to praise Oregon potatoes, reminding his colleagues that "much of the state's crop is grown in my very own district."

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Governor signs extended moratorium on foreclosures

Oregon homeowners who have fallen behind on their mortgages due to the coronavirus pandemic will be protected from facing foreclosure until at least the end of the month.

Gov. Kate Brown signed House Bill 2009 into law Tuesday, reinstating the state's moratorium on foreclosures until the end of her coronavirus state of emergency declaration, now set to expire June 30. The new law is retroactive to Dec. 31.

The moratorium would be automatically extended in 90-day intervals to the end of September, or even the end of the year, if Brown extends the emergency period. According to the legislation, Brown must decide whether to extend the emergency period by June 14 for the moratorium on foreclosures to also be extended.

Oregon homeowners also have the right under the legislation to put their mortgage in forbearance while the moratorium is in effect.

Senate approves bill giving businesses more time to repay back rent

Oregon business owners who fell behind on their rent last year as the coronavirus pandemic took hold may soon be given more time to make up their missed payments.

The Oregon Senate voted 25-4 Wednesday to approve a bill that would give businesses that missed rent payments from April to September 2020 until Sept. 30, 2021, to repay that owed rent. Gov. Kate Brown needs



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to sign the bill for it to go into effect, but the legislation received bipartisan support in both chambers.

Lawmakers allowed the state's moratorium on commercial evictions to expire last September but gave business owners until the end of March to repay any owed rent they had accumulated to that point. With that rent now coming due, businesses have been urging the legislature to give them more time to make up their debt.

If Brown signs the legislation, House Bill 2966A would be retroactive to March 31, and any eviction process for nonpayment of rent that was initiated before the bill went into effect but has not yet been resolved would be stayed until Oct. 1 or dismissed.

However, the legislation won't help business owners who are continuing to struggle during the pandemic and have missed rent payments since the moratorium on commercial evictions expired in September.

Proponents of the bill have said that extending the repayment period will give lawmakers time to get rent

assistance into the hands of landlords whose business tenants have struggled to keep up with their rent, potentially avoiding an onslaught of commercial evictions.

Lawmakers allocated \$100 million in January to launch a commercial rent relief program to help businesses across the state.

Business Oregon, the state agency tasked with administering the fund, approved nearly \$59 million to help pay the missed rent of 2,881 businesses statewide during the first two rounds of the program. The agency is using the remaining funds to provide grants to struggling small businesses to cover both operational expenses and missed rent.

Senate, House pass to-go cocktails bill

Oregon lawmakers have passed a bill allowing the sale of cocktails to-go to continue after the COVID-19 pandemic. Senate Bill 317, which allows licensed establishments to sell "mixed drinks and single servings of wine in sealed containers for off-premises consumption," previously passed the Oregon Senate in March. It cleared the House on Tuesday by a vote of 51-7. The bill now moves to Gov. Kate Brown.

As new coronavirus restrictions brought drinking and dining to a standstill across America in March 2020, many states rushed to overturn laws banning takeout cocktail sales, many of which had been on the books since Prohibition.

Sponsored by Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, and Rep. Rob Nosse, D-Portland, the new bill means Oregon will join around 15 states and the District of Columbia in making cocktails to-go permanent.

— Bulletin wire reports

Hansell said \$200 million dollars worth of potatoes, accounting for 25% of all french fries exported overseas, came from Oregon. He also showed off a canvas bag that was sent to each senator that included a potato and spud-inspired recipes.

Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, rose during remonstrances to criticize Gov. Kate Brown's executive order requiring residents to show certification of vaccination to enter businesses without a mask. He said the White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and 48 out of 50 states were against "vaccine passports," a popular term in conservative circles.

"Even the left-wing ACLU is against it," Knopp said, to a few titters of laughter from Democrats. "Businesses don't want to play vaccine cop. We shouldn't make them."

With most of the 34 committees shut down last week, bills piled up in the few panels that are exempt from deadlines.

About 200 bills were parked in the House and Senate rules committees. Some will get pulled out and sent through for a floor vote. But the committees are also known for being a legislative graveyard, a place where bills go to die with the end of the session.

One committee that can still meet is the House Committee on Conduct, the arbiter and

enforcer of the chamber's rules.

In a Tuesday evening meeting, the panel upheld a complaint by Rep. Vikki Breese Iverson, R-Prineville, that a suggestive text from Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, amounted to sexual harassment and creating a hostile work environment. The panel was split on whether Witt's text amounted to a suggestion that he would trade a vote for sexual favors from Breese Iverson, which Witt denies. The panel left any punishment or action for Witt to a future meeting.

An issue lurking in the background may set up a partisan battle in the final days of the session.

The Capitol, which is controlled by the Legislature, has been closed to the public since March 2020 because of the pandemic. Hearings and committee meetings have been held remotely, with lawmakers coming to the chamber floors — masks required — for final votes.

Republicans have argued that the Capitol should be open so members of the public can take part in the lawmaking of their state. With at least four reported cases of COVID-19 among lawmakers and staff, Democrats have said the move would undermine public health.

Legislative leaders have said they would reopen the building once Marion County reached the lower risk level status determined by the Oregon Health Authority and Brown.

Marion County is currently at high risk level, the most restrictive currently in use in Oregon.

The ZIP code that includes the Capitol has had at times the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the state. Marion County is far from reaching the benchmark Brown has set for a waiver on restrictions.

To be moved to lower level, a county must have given at least one dose of vaccine to 65% of the adult population. As of Wednesday, Marion County had administered shots to 56.9% of residents.

But Brown has also promised that all 36 counties would move to lower level once 70% of those eligible statewide have had one shot. As of Wednesday, that number was 62.5%.

At that pace, the state mark will likely be surpassed within the next two weeks. That is right around the earliest the Legislature would adjourn, "sine die," a Latin term that in politics means to adjourn without a specific date to meet in the future.

But Kotek has said the House will likely be in session until just before the deadline, with lawmakers saying June 25 is the likeliest end point.

No plans have been announced on what the Legislature would do if Marion County went to lower level status before adjournment.

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- » General interest photos, such as: commerce, industry, transportation, rural life, public service, etc.
- » Photos taken between 1950 and 2000.
- » Photos taken in Central Oregon.
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- » Photos will become part of the Deschutes Historical Museum's archived collection.

SCANNING SESSIONS

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Friday, June 11 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, June 12 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.
Saturday, June 12 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.
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