

Letter: Women at Capitol stand up against harassment

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

One hundred and thirty women have signed a letter standing up against and casting light on harassment and sexism at the Oregon Capitol. Spearheaded by Rep. Jodi Hack, R-Salem, and Portland Democrats House Speaker Tina Kotek and Jennifer Williamson, the letter is modeled after one circulated in Sacramento following accusations of widespread sexual harassment in the California state-house.



File photo

Oregon State Capitol.

"Oregon has more women in political leadership than any other state, and that has made a positive difference," the letter by Oregon lawmakers states. "But it's still not enough. As women working in the halls of our democratic institutions, we want to empower women to speak up without fear when they have been harassed, bullied, or dehumanized."

The letter coincides with an Oregon landing page on the "We Said Enough" website. California lawmakers created the website last week to encourage women to tell their stories of harassment and unwanted advances. About 150 women signed the California letter.

Circulation of the Oregon letter follows accusations by Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, and another unnamed female senator earlier this month that Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, repeatedly inappropriately touched them. Kruse has denied the allegations to at least two Oregon newspapers.

Gelser's revelation has sparked other women who work at the Oregon Capitol to come forward with other instances of subtle sexism and harassment, as reported Oct. 25 by Oregon Public Broadcasting.

The letter urges lawmakers and others at the Capitol "to create a culture where it is expected that people (both men and women) will speak up when it is happening in front of them, and ensure that it is safe to report it when it happens in private."

The Legislature will hire an outside consultant to ex-



Sara Gelser

amine its personnel policies, the House Majority office confirmed Friday.

Women who signed the letter include existing and former Democrat and Republican lawmakers, legislative staffers and lobbyists.

"Changing the culture of any institution starts at the top and that's ultimately what this letter is about," Williamson said. "We are committed, as a bipartisan group, to improving the culture of the Capitol and ensuring that it is a positive work environment for everyone. That starts by ensuring individuals feel empowered to come forward with issues. This isn't about politics — it's about making this institution better."

Rep. Julie Parrish, who signed the letter, said she hopes the letter sparks dialogue about incidents that have stayed largely private until now.

"Oregon has a larger segment of elected women than other states — and in recent years, we have seen an uptick in female lobbyists, but politics is still a male-driven industry," said Parrish, a Republican from West Linn.

A reminder to respect boundaries is "a good check for everybody," she said. "Every woman's threshold for what she thinks is appropriate or inappropriate is going to be different, but hey, if she says no, back off, listen to her. She means it."

Senate President Peter



Jeff Kruse

Courtney, D-Salem, imposed "unprecedented" sanctions against Kruse Oct. 20, in response to the allegations that Kruse continued to touch the two senators after he was asked not to. As punishment for that and for Kruse's habit of smoking inside the Capitol building, Courtney ordered the removal of Kruse's office door and stripped him of his committee assignments, which weakens his power to influence legislation. The door was removed early Friday.

Gelser first hinted at the allegations in a tweet in which she asked a Republican Senate aide if he would ensure members of his caucus don't inappropriately touch or grope female lawmakers or staff in the Capitol. Gelser made an informal complaint that Kruse had touched her inappropriately in March 2016.

At that time, Courtney followed protocol and reported the allegation to Legislative Counsel Dexter Johnson and Employee Services Manager Lore Christopher.

Johnson and Christopher told Kruse to stop touching women at work, Courtney's letter stated. Gelser told The Oregonian that Kruse's behavior didn't stop.

Courtney also has reported the latest accusations by Gelser and the other female senator to Legislative Counsel and Employee Services, and those offices are conducting a fact-finding inquiry.

Bend businessman Sam Carpenter to run for governor

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau



Contributed photo

Sam Carpenter, a businessman from Bend, announced Wednesday he will challenge Rep. Knute Buehler for the 2018 Republican nomination for governor.

"I confidently predict an enormous political and economic turn-around for Oregon as we leave behind the current failed progressive far-left leadership of Gov. Kate Brown, and move forward to an executive branch that is laser-focused on serving the people of Oregon through a smaller, much more efficient government machine," Carpenter said in a statement.

Carpenter, 67, is billing himself the conservative choice against the more moderate Buehler, also from Bend. The primary is in May.

His campaign motto is styled after that of President Donald Trump's: "Make Oregon Great Again."

"Yes, I share President Donald Trump's vision of a society truly in tune and serving the needs of regular Americans, not the needs of the intertwined cabal of big government, big business, and big finance," Carpenter said. "I'll fight to put the power back where it belongs,

Bend businessman Sam Carpenter announced Wednesday that he will seek the GOP nomination for governor. Carpenter is billing himself as the more conservative choice, contrasting himself with moderate Rep. Knute Buehler.

in the hands of Oregon's citizens."

Buehler, an orthopedic surgeon, is known for spearheading significant pieces of bipartisan legislation, including increasing access to contraceptives. The two major reproductive rights organizations — Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America — nevertheless, have backed Brown. He declared his run for governor in early August.

Rebecca Tweed, Buehler's campaign manager, said she had no comment on Carpenter's announcement Wednesday.

Carpenter told the Pam-

plin/EO Capital Bureau in August that he was considering a campaign for governor but was waiting to see if any candidates with Trump-minded agendas made a bid. If no one else he could support stepped up, Carpenter said he would seek the position.

The winner of the GOP primary will face off with Gov. Brown, who is seeking her second and final term as the state's chief executive.

Brown's campaign adviser Thomas Wheatley said Carpenter's "entrance into the race will add a lot more sizzle to the Republican primary."

Court rules health care ballot title is unclear

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

The Oregon Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the ballot title on the referendum on the state's health care funding scheme must be clearer.

Three Republican lawmakers — state Reps. Julie Parrish of Tualatin/West Linn, Cedric Hayden of Roseburg and Sal Esquivel of Medford — want to repeal parts of a state law that requires health care providers and insurers to pay assessments to the state for its Medicaid program.

The three had argued that the ballot title approved by a legislative committee in September didn't fully or clearly explain the effects of the potential repeal.

A ballot title is the official written material that voters see. In Oregon, a ballot title includes a caption, summary and statements that explain

the results of a "yes" and a "no" vote.

The court found that the caption needed to explain the assessments with more detail or describe them as "taxes," and explain that insurers were allowed to increase certain premiums under the law.

The "yes" and "no" vote result statements, the court determined, should also be changed to better explain the direct effects of the measure.

The court also said that the statement and the summary should not address an open legal question — whether or not temporary assessments on hospitals would be delayed or removed altogether as part of the referendum.

The ballot title "no" statement currently says that a part of the law that the petitioners want to repeal would merely be delayed, due to how the referendum petition was written.

That's a matter of legal interpretation, the court said,

and added it should be resolved at a later time, in the event that voters vote "no" and the partial repeal is successful.

The court did reject some of the petitioners' arguments.

For example, the court found it was appropriate to include, as ballot title writers did, that the revenues went toward health care for low-income individuals and families, and "stabilizing reinsurance premiums" through a reinsurance program.

Parrish had previously raised questions about the process used to write the materials that the Supreme Court said on Wednesday should be changed.

Separate legislation had created a committee of four Democrats and two Republicans to write the ballot title for the healthcare referendum, although typically the Attorney General does that.

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A special thank you to each of our sponsors for this year's event!

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