

All’s quiet on Salem front as GOP walkout enters second week

By Claire Withycombe
Oregon Capital Bureau

School kids still visited, their eyes drifting up toward the larger-than-life murals of settlers and farmers.

A smattering of lobbyists could be seen chatting in the hallways, weaving in and out of legislative offices, on the phone and quietly working away on laptops.

Were it any other legislative session, where there is less than a week left before lawmakers must adjourn, the building would be frantic with lobbyists trading gossip and waiting outside the chamber doors for quick audiences with state senators and representatives in between votes.

By Monday afternoon, though, the Capitol rotunda had all the echoey silence of a cathedral — without the atmosphere of reverence.

Most Republican legislators vacated the Legislature days ago to avoid voting on a bill that aims to slash the state’s greenhouse gas emissions.

In their wake, they have left behind a humdrum Capitol, whose occupants are bleakly inching toward the March 8 constitutional deadline.

“Those who have religion are praying,” quipped Aaron Fiedler, spokesman for the House Democrats. “Those who don’t might find it.”

Democrats have been adamant that they made changes to the now years-old climate concept to accommodate business interests and rural consumers. They point to how they have delayed the implementation of fuel regulations and scaled back the number of industrial polluters directly affected by the program.



Oregon Capital Bureau/Claire Withycombe
School kids gather in the rotunda of the Capitol the morning of Monday, March 2.

Republicans maintain they want the legislation to go directly to voters. House Republicans decry, from afar, recent efforts by majority Democrats to compel them to testify about their absence later this week.

In a feeble attempt to bring the focus back to policymaking, four House Democrats on a health committee met late Monday afternoon to get experts on the record to testify to the damaging health effects of climate change.

It was lightly attended, and one of just two public hearings lawmakers held Monday. The dozen or so people there were a far cry from weeks earlier, when hearings of interest could draw a packed house and lines out the door.

When a reporter stopped by the office of Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, Courtney was the one asking the questions.

Why, gesturing to himself, wasn’t anybody writing a story about “this old broken down gee-

zer” showing up for work?

Courtney, 76, grabbed a handful of pretzels and eased himself down into a chair. Oregon’s longest-serving Senate president is nursing a hip injury. He requires a walker to get around. Finishing his pretzels, he dismissed the crumbs with aplomb.

“Well, gotta call Herman again,” Courtney said.

He play-acted a brief conversation between himself and Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr.: “You gonna be here tomorrow?” “No.”

Courtney and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, had just issued a joint statement to dispel any notions Republicans could get away with coming back on the last day of the session, when time is short and Republicans could have more sway over what survives, with a list of requests in hand.

“We will not be part of closed-door negotiations or last-min-

ute deals,” Kotek and Courtney said. “We will not pick and choose which bills will live and which bills will die.”

“The only job required of a legislator as specified by the Oregon Constitution, and thus captured by our oath of office, is to vote on legislation,” they continued. “Once again, we urge the absent Republicans to return to the Capitol and make their voices heard by voting, rather than continuing this government shutdown.”

Monday afternoon, House Republican Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, responded from an undisclosed location with another call to refer the bill to voters.

“Oregonians should be disappointed that Democrats have apparently thrown in the towel and refuse to participate in good faith conversations moving forward,” Drazan said. “We are not asking for secret negotiations or last-minute deals.”

Apart from the war of words, it was still “Marty Monday,” a weekly event where state Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene, and his staff serve grilled cheese sandwiches.

It’s a moment for legislative staff to set aside politics and mingle on Monday mornings. A plate of the sandwiches — featuring a special blend of cheeses intended to be economical but not stingy — sat, growing cold, outside his office around midday.

“I mean, for all that we can, and do, fight about important issues of policy, we try to maintain good relationships in the building,” Wilde said. “And of course, for the staff who work here every day, it’s important to keep a positive environment.”

“I think everyone’s concerned,” Wilde said. “I think on both sides

there’s a lot of concern about what this means for our process. We do not want Salem to become a miniature version of Washington, D.C. It seems like a step down that path. We don’t want the dysfunction there to become the dysfunction here.”

While most Republican lawmakers are out of the building, their aides are at work, sorting through hundreds of constituent emails. The more social media-savvy Republicans have posted photos of themselves watching committee hearings, appearing to be diligently taking notes.

The state conference call on the rising threat of the coronavirus could be heard echoing around the third floor of the House on Monday.

On the House floor, Rep. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, wearing a bow tie and with a Dr. Seuss hat resting on her desk, rose to recite a poem she’d written on her commute down to Salem in honor of “Read Across America” day.

“Oregon, my Oregon, you deserve so much better than this,” Sollman began. “This hit to democracy feels not a win, but a huge miss. We promised Oregonians with our word and our oath, to be present, work together, for urban, rural both.”

A few minutes later, the mood turned serious from the dais, when Kotek read aloud an email she’d written to House Republicans on Saturday, Feb. 29.

“We all understand the seriousness of the situation you have created by intentionally being absent from floor sessions for the last week,” Kotek said. “Without quorum, we cannot do the work that voters have elected us to do. Once again, I ask that you return to work.”

How the coronavirus outbreak could affect Oregon’s economy

An outbreak resulting in quarantines would hurt Oregon’s economy, but virus could also hurt Oregon’s largest export market, China

By Jake Thomas
Oregon Capital Bureau

The emergence of the coronavirus could put a damper on the unprecedented expansion of the Oregon economy.

A full-blown recession could be on the horizon if the virus disrupts supply chains, keeps workers from their jobs and causes businesses to pull back investment, economists say.

In a recent forecast, state economist Josh Lehner wrote that Oregon’s economy is in good shape with historically low unemployment, low interest rates, accompanied by high business and consumer confidence. But he said the coronavirus could be the strong economy’s undoing.

He referenced research by the Brookings Institution on the economic impact of the 2002 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (better known as “SARS”) that began in Asia and spread to 26 countries. According to the Washing-

ton, D.C., think tank, the outbreak of SARS took 1 percentage point off China’s gross domestic product, while having even less of an impact in the U.S.

China, which is where the coronavirus outbreak began, has since become the world’s second-largest economy, and the products of its factories are integrated into supply chains across the globe.

Lehner wrote that China is Oregon’s largest foreign market for exports, accounting for up to 20% to 30% of totals. China has shuttered factories and restricted travel to contain the virus. A prolonged shutdown in China would likely hurt Oregon’s export market, wrote Lehner.

“Fears over the human and economic impact could potentially reach critical mass where consumers pull back and delay spending money and employers put off investment and hiring decisions,” he wrote.

In a follow-up email, Lehner said that a downturn could mean adjustments to

the state economic forecast, which could have budget implications. He said that local quarantines and public restrictions would have the biggest economic disruptions.

In the meantime, Oregon is likely to be affected by what it’s not sending overseas.

Oregon exported \$4.7 billion worth of goods to China in 2018, according to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. The state’s largest manufacturing export is computer and electronic products, which accounted for \$7.5 billion or exports. Machinery was next at \$4 billion.

Robert Whelan, senior economist at consulting firm ECONorthwest, said that Oregon’s largest export is semiconductors, used to manufacture circuit boards, that are exported to China, as well as South Korea

and Malaysia. Intel Corporation, a manufacturer of semiconductors and one of Oregon’s largest companies, could be particularly affected.

Whelan said that manufactured products use parts from all over the world. He said that if a company in Asia, for instance, couldn’t get a component needed for a product because of the coronavirus outbreak, it would delay buying semiconductors or other goods from companies in Oregon.

Agriculture is another large export commodity for Oregon. The state shipped \$1.9 billion worth of agricultural goods in 2017, according to federal figures. Whelan said wheat makes up a large portion of those exports, and he’s not as concerned about a hit to Oregon farmers.

“That’s probably less affected because everyone

has to eat, sick or not,” he said.

However, he said tourism is more likely to be affected and will hurt Portland, a destination for affluent Chinese. Lehner wrote in his forecast that Chinese tourists spent \$261 million in Oregon in 2018.

How badly the coronavirus will affect the economy is uncertain. The stock market saw its worst week since the 2008 financial crisis. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development predicted that the outbreak could reduce global growth by 1.5%.

Nike, the Beaverton-based sneaker giant, has already had to close stores in China in response to the outbreak, which could cut into its profits.

But Scott DuHadway, the Cameron professor of supply chain management at Portland State University,

said Oregon is not likely to see similar disruptions soon.

He said it’ll take time for disruptions in supply chains to spread. Companies that rely on manufacturing, which requires workers to show up at factories and work in close proximity, are more likely to be affected — particularly those dependent on low-cost manufacturing from China. He said these disruptions will cascade to the broader economy.

Gail Krumenauer, spokeswoman for the Oregon Employment Department, said employment data for January slated to be released this week won’t reflect any impact from the outbreak, but the department is paying close attention.

Whelan said that the exact economic effects of the outbreak won’t be clear until after it’s happened.

“Data and numbers are always old,” he said.



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SAT & SUN (1:00) (4:00) 7:00	MON-THURS 7:00
THE CALL OF THE WILD (PG) Starring Harrison Ford. A sled dog struggles for survival in the wilds of the Yukon.	FRIDAY (4:10) 7:10
SAT & SUN (1:10) (4:10) 7:10	MON-THURS 7:10
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (PG) After discovering a small, blue, fast hedgehog, a small-town police officer must help it defeat an evil genius who wants to do experiments on it.	FRIDAY (4:20) 7:20
SAT & SUN (1:20) (4:20) 7:20	MON-THURS 7:20
\$9 Adult, \$7 Senior (60+), Youth	\$175349-1



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Young Writer’s Club: Tuesdays, starting March 10 from 6:00 to 7:00 PM. Grades 6-12 welcome, but space is limited. Reserve your young writer’s spot today, FREE!

Painted Sky Book Club Meeting: Tuesday, March 17 from 5:30 to 6:30 PM. Painted Sky Center for the Arts is starting a book club! Please join us for this FREE event.

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