

# Third special session begins with protests, ends with COVID aid

Demonstrators force their way into the Capitol

By Gary A. Warner  
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The Legislature held its third special session of 2020 on Monday, amid a pandemic and violent protests at the Capitol organized by a right-wing group.

A protest organized by the Patriot Prayer group attracted over 100 people, who at one point forced their way into a side door of the Capitol. Some smashed glass doors and attacked journalists.

Oregon State Police, Marion County sheriff's deputies and Salem Police, many dressed in full riot gear, responded to the attempt by some demonstrators to force their way into the Capitol.

The demonstration was declared an unlawful assembly, and law enforcement moved the demonstrators off the Capitol grounds, closing Court Street using a Salem Police armored car.

At about 5 p.m., the lights went out in the Capitol and had to be restarted while lawmakers sat in the relative dark.

Despite the action outside, the demonstrations did not disrupt the session, which Gov. Kate Brown had called to push through \$800 million in aid linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the wildfires that burned over 1 million acres in late summer.

Brown called the session as several federal programs were set to expire at the end of the year. Oregon had received \$1.4 billion of the \$2.2 trillion nationwide CARES Act approved in the spring and signed by



File photo

**Oregon lawmakers met in a special session Monday to tackle issues related to COVID-19 and wildfires.**

President Donald Trump.

Congress continued to work on a compromise \$900 million aid package, but with the deadline looming, Brown decided to bring lawmakers back to Salem.

The Legislature voted to:

- Allocate \$600 million to the state emergency fund for upcoming needs for COVID-19 and wildfire recovery.

- Extend an eviction moratorium until July 1, 2021. The current moratorium ends Dec. 31. As part of the package, \$150 million was allocated for reimbursing landlords for up to 80% of the back rent they are owed and \$50 million in renter assistance.

- Limit liability claims against schools due to actions during the state of emergency declared by Brown in March and extended several times. A similar bill to limit medical provider liability stalled in committee.

- Allow to-go sales of alcoholic beverages when the order includes a meal.

The session was held in Salem despite the COVID-19 pandemic that has infected 103,755 Oregonians, killing 1,347. Nationwide, COVID-19

has infected over 18 million Americans and killed 319,190, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

The two prior special sessions during the pandemic were held when infection rates were significantly lower. The current infection rate in Oregon is 30.7 per 100,000 people.

The Capitol is in Marion County, where the rate is 47.4 per 100,000 — the eighth highest among Oregon's 36 counties, according to an analysis of state and local health data by the New York Times.

Oregon has avoided an outbreak among legislators so far. Nationwide, more than 113 state lawmakers have tested positive for COVID-19, and five have died, according to a running total published daily by the Ballotpedia website.

The session got off to a rocky start in the Senate when Sen. Dallas Heard, R-Roseburg, dramatically ripped off his face mask while addressing the Senate, daring President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, or law enforcement to take action against him.

Saying he was protecting the rights of "the children of God," Heard railed against the pandemic restrictions in the Capitol and across the state.

"If you had not done such great evil to my people and had simply asked me to wear my mask, I would have," Heard said. "But you commanded it, and therefore I declare my right to protest against your false authority and remove my mask."

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, cut Heard off.

"Your time is up," Courtney said, rapping his gavel. When Heard protested, Courtney ordered Heard's microphone shut off. Heard then walked off the Senate floor.

The order to wear masks in the Senate was put in place by Courtney following incidents during the second special session in which he strongly requested the masks, but saw Republican Sens. Dennis Linthicum of Klamath Falls and Brian Boquist of Dallas come into the chamber without any face covering. House Speaker Tina Kotek had required masks in the earlier session.

Heard went outside the Capitol to address protestors, where he was alternately applauded for his stand by some and heckled by others who said he was a "collaborator" because of his position as a lawmaker.

The crowd chanted "Arrest Kate Brown" and "let us in." They carried American flags, including one upside down — a symbol of distress. Some carried the Gadsden flag depicting a coiled rattlesnake ready to strike, with the words "Don't Tread on Me." The flag from the American Revolution has become a favorite of conservative activists in recent years.

Other demonstrators carried

"Trump 2020" flags, and some wore the red "Make America Great Again" hats popularized by President Donald Trump.

Most demonstrators did not wear masks to prevent spread of the COVID-19 virus. A few wore gas masks, and others were dressed in military-style tactical outfits. A few carried semi-automatic assault-style rifles.

At least two live streams of the protest were running on YouTube. Other videos showed demonstrators smashing the glass doors of a side entrance to the Capitol and attacking journalists covering the demonstrations.

A fire alarm went off inside the Capitol rotunda, but it was a false alarm, officials said. At least two protestors were arrested. Oregon State Police put out pictures of some of the violent demonstrators, asking the public to contact authorities with their identities.

In the House, the unhappiness over the session being held while the Capitol has been closed to the public due to the COVID-19 crisis was criticized in a more sedate manner.

"We need to find a way to innovate and get the public involved in the process again," said Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend. "There is a lack of imagination on how to get the conversation going again with the public."

At the end of the day, Sen. Shemia Fagan, D-Portland, who will be leaving the Senate to become Secretary of State next year, said the problems of holding the session were worthwhile.

"We voted to prevent tens of thousands of Oregonians from losing their homes in the middle of winter and a surge in the pandemic," she said.

## Grant County moves to 'lower risk' level, but most Oregon counties under tightest COVID-19 restrictions

Ratings will last through Dec. 31

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Most of Oregon will greet the holiday season and New Year's Eve as "extreme risk" locations requiring tight COVID-19 limits on gatherings, dining and activities.

Last week, Gov. Kate Brown announced new risk levels for counties after the initial two-week period of the four-tiered ratings: extreme, high, moderate and low. The new ratings are effective Friday and will last through Dec. 31.

In a sign that the COVID-19 pandemic is still growing in Oregon, more counties were

added to the extreme risk level: Benton, Clatsop, Coos, Curry, Lincoln and Tillamook counties. As of Friday, 29 of 36 Oregon counties will be in the most restrictive level.

The announcement puts the entire Oregon Coast from Astoria to the California state line in the extreme risk category.

"We continue to see community spread across Oregon to the point that the majority of the state needs to continue with strict health and safety measures," Brown said in a statement.

A few counties saw their risk levels lowered.

The biggest movement of any county was Grant County, which dropped from the highest rating to the lowest.

Harney County moved

from moderate risk to low risk.

Lake County moved from extreme risk to moderate risk. Counties under the extreme risk limits must limit gatherings to six people from no more than two households.

Employers are required to tell all workers who can do their jobs remotely to stay away from their offices.

All indoor dining is closed and outdoor dining is limited to 50% capacity with take-away meals strongly encouraged. Use of entertainment, exercise, gyms and pools, sports games and activities located indoors is prohibited. Outdoor activities are limited to 50 people.

Visitations to residents of long-term care and other congregate care facilities must be held outdoors.

Retail stores can remain open, but at 50% capacity. Personal services busi-

ness, such as hair salons, can remain open.

Faith institutions should limit indoor gatherings to a maximum 25% capacity or 100 total (whichever is smaller), and a limit of 150 outdoors.

Risk levels will be revised next with an announcement on Dec. 29 and will cover the period from Jan. 1 to Jan. 14.

State health officials said that despite the arrival last week of the first doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, it will be several months until most of the state will be eligible to receive the two-shot inoculation. Until then, pandemic safeguards will still need to be followed: wear a mask, keep physical distance from others, avoid gatherings, wash hands often and stay home when sick.

Risk level data can be found at [coronavirus.oregon.gov](http://coronavirus.oregon.gov).

RISK LEVELS EFFECTIVE DEC. 18	
<b>Lower risk</b>	Deschutes
Gilliam	Douglas
Grant (moved from extreme)	Hood River
Harney (moved from moderate)	Jackson
Sherman	Jefferson
Wallowa	Josephine
Wheeler	Klamath
<b>Moderate risk</b>	Lane
Lake (moved from extreme)	Lincoln (moved from high)
<b>Extreme risk</b>	Linn
Baker	Malheur
Benton (moved from high)	Marion
Clackamas	Morrow
Clatsop (moved from high)	Multnomah
Columbia	Polk
Coos (moved from high)	Tillamook (moved from moderate)
Crook	Umatilla
Curry (moved from high)	Union
	Wasco
	Washington
	Yamhill