

# Congress finalizes Biden victory

Oregon's Rep. Bentz splits votes

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau



Cliff Bentz

In a day scarred by a historic violent attack on the U.S. Capitol as Congress met, shaken lawmakers insisted on resuming a session that went late into the night to approve the Electoral College vote for President-Elect Joe Biden early Thursday morning.

Lawmakers had come to Congress Wednesday expecting a contentious day of debate as a splinter group of Republicans said they would slow and perhaps even halt the traditional reading of the votes for president cast Dec. 14 by the Electoral College.

President Donald Trump had been ceaselessly pushing claims that the election was stolen from him despite losing to Democrat Joe Biden by more than seven million votes and a 306-232 tally in the Electoral College.

Trump addressed tens of thousands of supporters just prior to the vote, and the crowd pushed up Pennsylvania Avenue. Some in the crowd pushed up Capitol Hill, fighting police along the way, then smashing through the doors of the Capitol's central chambers. National Guard and an FBI tactical squad arrived to bolster defenses and push the invaders out using a plume of tear gas in Statuary Hall, home to images of great Americans of the past.

Leaders discussed calling off the session, but opted to continue to get their job done and as a symbol of the continuity of American government.

Some but not all of those challenging the Electoral College votes announced they were dropping the effort after the rash of violence.

Objections to the vote totals in Arizona and Penn-

sylvania, a smattering of the states originally targeted, went to debates and votes in the chambers.

Among Oregon's nearly all-Democratic delegation, the Electoral College votes were supported by both Sen. Ron Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley. Four of the five Oregon Democratic House members — Suzanne Bonamici, D-Beaverton, Earl Blumenauer, D-Portland, Peter DeFazio, D-Springfield, and Kurt Schrader, D-Salem — supported the slates brought to the Capitol in thick mahogany boxes.

Oregon's wild-card on the day was Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, the only Republican in the state's delegation to Congress, and a freshman who had only been sworn into office the previous Sunday.

Bentz had been among a group of incoming GOP lawmakers who issued a statement last month calling for "a congressional investigation and review into what has happened in states where election irregularities have been observed."

Over the next six weeks, Bentz said he talked to constituents in Congressional District 2, which takes up most of Eastern and Central Oregon.

"I had heard many speak of distrust in the elections that were facilitated by several states," Bentz wrote. "That is why I wrote to Speaker Nancy Pelosi last month, urging for a prompt and thorough congressional investigation into voting irregularities during the 2020 presidential election. So far, my request has fallen on deaf ears."

In the end, Bentz split his votes, opposing the GOP objection to the 11 Electoral College votes for Biden sent

by Arizona. But several hours later, Bentz was on the side of those Republicans objecting to the 20 Electoral College votes from Pennsylvania.

In a press release issued just before 4 a.m. in Washington, Bentz said the issues in each case were different, but his constituents believed the election was tainted by unspecified fraud.

"My goal was to protect the integrity of our elections and to prompt all states to uphold election laws as determined by their state legislatures — all in accordance with our Constitution," Bentz said.

Rep. Conor Lamb, D-Pennsylvania, dismissed the stalling with objections and repeated recitations of legal arguments rejected over 50 times by various courts as dangerous "lies" that were getting people killed.

"These objections don't deserve an ounce of respect, not an ounce," Lamb said. "A woman died out there tonight, and you're making these objections. Let's be clear about what happened in this chamber today — invaders came in for the first time since the War of 1812. They desecrated these halls, in this chamber, and practically every inch of ground where we work."

Earlier in the debates, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell chastised any of those considering an objection as setting in motion a dangerous path for democracy.

"We'll either hasten down a poisonous path where only the winners of an election actually accept the results, or show we can still muster the patriotic courage that our forebears showed, not only in victory, but in defeat," he said. "If this election were overturned by mere allegations from the losing side, our democracy would enter a death spiral."

Democrats easily repulsed the objections when they finally came up for a vote.

McConnell and several other senior Republicans, especially in the Senate, joined in upholding the Electoral College tallies.

It was during the Arizona debate earlier on Wednesday that tens of thousands of pro-Trump demonstrators, fresh from a rallying speech by the president, streamed up Pennsylvania Avenue where more militant activists in the group stormed the capitol, attacking police and crashing their way into the heart of the building.

Lawmakers in the chambers barricaded the doors, while those in their offices were told to shelter in place. Police, aided by National Guard and an FBI Tactical Weapons unit, were able to extract the demonstrators from the Senate and House galleries.

Demonstrators had broke up and carted off furniture from leadership offices, set small fires and left behind at least two explosive devices. A billowing cloud of tear gas was needed to push the stragglers out of the Statuary Hall, ringed by images of famous Americans such as Samuel Adams, Ronald Reagan, Billy Graham, Thomas Edison and Kamehameha I.

With less than two weeks until the inauguration, CNN at 4:30 a.m. reported that top government officials are discussing the invocation of the 25th Amendment, which would allow the neutralization or removal of President Trump from authority.

After about 20 hours of debate in Congress, interspersed with the attack on the Capitol, the final ceremonial acts of the day were closed, leading to the finalization of the votes to elect President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-president-elect Kamala Harris. They will be sworn into office on Jan. 20 on the same steps of the Capitol occupied by rioters. Officials promise a much heavier security presence.



The Oregon Capitol building in Salem was the site of protests last week.

# Right-wing protesters rally outside Oregon Capitol in Salem

Legislature begins 160-day session Jan. 19

By George Plaven and Peter Wong  
EO Media Group and Oregon Capital Bureau

Right-wing demonstrators and supporters of President Donald Trump rallied outside the Oregon State Capitol on Jan. 6 as part of a nationwide protest of the 2020 Election results.

Protesters also took the opportunity to decry Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 emergency orders.

While the crowd of hundreds had largely dispersed after 2:30 p.m., video taken by the Salem Reporter earlier in the day showed violent clashes with counter-protesters that led Salem Police to declare an unlawful assembly.

The police department later Tweeted that no force was needed to separate the groups. One person was arrested for harassment and disorderly conduct.

Many protesters held America, Gadsden and Trump flags, and some openly carried firearms. They chanted, "Freedom!" and hurled insults at Brown, calling her a tyrant.

One man standing at the Capitol Mall with a speaker said it was "1776 all over again."

"This is America," the man called out to cheers of support from fellow protesters. "Communism will never, never be America."

No official activity was scheduled inside the Oregon Capitol on Wednesday. Oregon electors had already cast the state's seven electoral votes for Biden and Harris on Dec. 8 during an in-person ceremony that was streamed live.

The Oregon Capitol has been closed to the public since March 18, after

the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Police sealed off the building Wednesday after Capitol authorities, anticipating problems, decided Tuesday night to close the building to the few workers who remain.

Metal shutters covered the glass doors at the east and west entrances. They already were in place on the iconic revolving doors at the north entrance. About two dozen troopers were stationed at the south entrance, which faces Willamette University.

Wednesday's protest was not the first instance of potential trouble at the Capitol, which was built in 1938.

Anti-lockdown, pro-Trump supporters briefly occupied a vestibule on the northwest side of the building on Dec. 21, when state lawmakers met for a one-day special session. They were ejected, and police rebuffed their second attempt to force their way through the west entrance, although they broke windows on the doors. Five men were arrested, and Oregon State Police are seeking the identity of another man caught on camera.

Concrete barriers were placed in front of the Capitol on New Year's Eve. Salem Police arrested three people during New Year's Day protests, which extended to downtown and the governor's official residence at Mahonia Hall.

The Oregon Legislature is scheduled to start its 2021 session on Monday, Jan. 11, with the swearing-in of all 60 representatives and 16 of the 30 senators, and the election of the House speaker and Senate president. The organizational session is expected to last a day.

Lawmakers get down to business on Jan. 19, when the clock starts on the 160-day session.

# Wyden says new political era in D.C. will speed COVID-19 aid

By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

With Democrats in control of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House, and Democrat Joe Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration approaching, Americans can expect a large, long-term package of aid to help get through the COVID-19 pandemic that will likely last well into the year, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, said in a Friday interview.

Wyden said he was supporting efforts to get President Donald Trump to resign or be removed from office after the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, sparked by Trump's speech to protesters. On Friday he called for the resignations of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Missouri, for their roles in the Electoral College challenge that set off riots culminating in a siege of the

Capitol. "Any senator exhorting such an assault violates their sworn oath and is unworthy of holding federal office," Wyden said. "There must be consequences for senators who would foment a violent mob for personal gain."

But focus also has to be sharp on what to do after Trump is gone.

"We're going to get \$2,000 checks out to Americans as soon as we can," Wyden said. "We're going to get those \$600 federal unemployment benefits back. We've got folks who are hurting desperately — they're not able to pay their rent, buy their groceries, get medicine for their kids."

Wyden said the political change in Washington, D.C., will reveal the reality that Wyden said Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McCo-

nnell, R-Kentucky, have tried to hide: The COVID-19 crisis is deep, hard and won't be under control for months, even a year.

"These safety net issues are so essential, they should not depend on whim of one political person," Wyden said of McConnell. "There was a strategy before not to admit how bad things are."

Congress is also ready to help Biden lift the fog of conflicting policies and statements about the pandemic that has killed more than 367,000 Americans this year. Democrats believe they will get significant Republican support for a major push to get vaccines created, transported and into the arms of Americans as swiftly as possible.

"Deployment without delays," Wyden said.

Because President Trump at first dismissed, then down-

played, the exploding spread of the virus, Wyden said, Trump could never get beyond what the crisis meant to him personally. The national response became politicized. When Trump himself was infected, he was given emergency treatment using rare medicines that allow for a swift recovery. Instead of being chastened by his brush with COVID, Trump told Americans not to let it control their lives, and he personally rarely wore a mask.

Even when the Trump-initiated Operation Warp Speed helped scientists create two vaccines in less than a year, with more to come, Trump was still holding parties and large rallies with supporters who did not wear masks, spreading the infection.

"He didn't want to do the hard work needed," Wyden said of a national fight against COVID-19.

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