

# Walkout may succeed in changing quorum rules

Do you think Gov. Kate Brown should do more to get schools to reopen? Do you think more should be done to vaccinate seniors sooner?

Do you think the state should look to speed up reopening of businesses?

Those are reasons why Oregon Senate Republicans walked out on Thursday. They say their efforts to get Brown's attention to these issues have gone unacknowledged. So they walked out to get her attention.

Yes, they got her attention. But Republicans didn't compel her to make any changes. And we can't imagine she will fundamentally change her approach.

Perhaps Senate Republicans did succeed in a few ways. Just getting people's attention these days takes more than making a speech. The walkout got the Oregon public's attention for at least a news cycle. And in that moment Republicans highlighted what the difference might be if they were governing.

They also reminded their fellow legislators that they still have the power to shut down the making of new laws.

Oregon is one of only a handful of states that requires by its constitution that two-thirds of

lawmakers must be on the Senate floor and the House floor for work to be done. The narrow Democratic margin in the Senate means the Democratic majority is not walkout-proof. A walkout is some of the only raw power Republicans in Oregon really have.

For how long? Will voters tire of this tactic? It seems inevitable that through a bill or an initiative a measure will be put on the ballot for a constitutional amendment to change Oregon's quorum rules to a simple majority.

That might not be something to celebrate. Yes, it would work in the favor of Democrats now. It is, though, one of the few tools to prevent a tyranny of a simple majority. Oregon voters are roughly evenly split between Democrats, unaffiliated voters and Republicans — in that order. There is probably far more that unites Oregonians than divides them. On some issues at least, majority opinion is slim or hard to find.

Democrats hold power now. They may not always. Democrats have used the power of the walkout before, in 1971, 1995 and 2001.

In these unsettled times, Oregonians need legislators and a governor who find ways to work together, not write new exclusionary rules.

## Federal stimulus checks should not increase state taxes

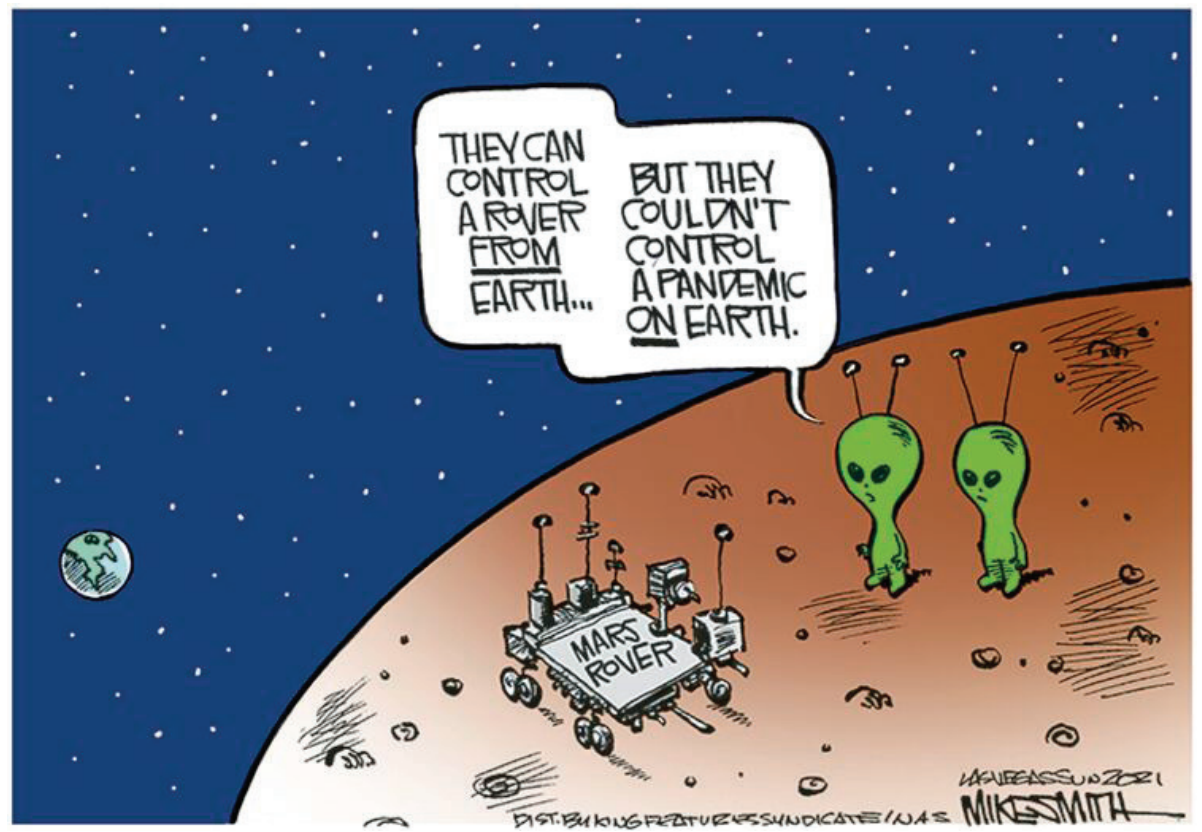
The federal stimulus checks helped a lot of Oregonians out when they needed it. And it is also going to help out Oregon government — about \$100 million in federal stimulus payments is going to wind up in the state treasury.

The federal government is not taxing the stimulus payments. In Oregon, they are not taxed as income, either. But the payments can impact the federal tax calculations used on your Oregon income tax. And so the stimulus payment may mean you owe state tax on more of your income and wind up paying more taxes or get a reduced refund.

Does that sound right to you? The stimulus checks sure seemed to be aimed at helping individuals, not helping state government.

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Democrat, wants state lawmakers to pass a bill to eliminate the state tax liability owed by Oregonians on federal stimulus payments. State Sen. Dick Anderson, R-Lincoln City, is already working on such a bill. The idea has at least half a nod from Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat. A spokesperson said Kotek "supports the House Revenue Chair evaluating this issue."

Tell your legislator what you think.



### GUEST COMMENT

## COVID-19, one year later

It's been one year since the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Oregon. Twelve grim months later, nothing is the same. The pandemic has claimed more than half a million lives in the United States. More than 2,200 Oregonians have died with the coronavirus. All of us have felt their loss. All of us have seen our lives altered: a beloved grandparent's lonely wave through the glass of a nursing home window. The empty storefront of a bedrock local business. Birthdays, graduations and anniversaries awkwardly celebrated on a screen instead of in-person. Frustration as parents struggle to help kids in school while trying to meet work demands.

But there's another number Oregonians should bear in mind, especially as we confront the coming months of the pandemic: 4,000. That's approximately the number of lives you've saved by wearing a mask, limiting in-person gatherings and maintaining social distance.

Oregon was one of the first states in the nation to report a case of COVID-19, but a year later our state has the fourth lowest coronavirus case rate in the nation, the fourth lowest death rate and the fourth lowest COVID-19 death rate among seniors. If Oregon's death rate matched the nation's, three times as many Oregonians would have lost their lives.

You made the difference. Month after month, deep into the pandemic, about 8 in 10 Oregonians continue to observe lifesaving pandemic precautions. While we know who's died from COVID-19, we'll never know for sure whom you've saved. Maybe it's an esteemed elder who's alive to lead a virtual devotional group for his faith community. A middle-age mother who's here to help her daughter apply



Pat Allen

for college. A thirtysomething who agrees to be best man at his friend's wedding, once the pandemic is over. Maybe it's someone reading this message. Maybe it's you.

State and local public health actions saved lives too. Gov. Kate Brown issued early stay-at-home orders. Our state was the first in the nation to protect the most vulnerable nursing home residents by limiting visitation. Oregon put limits on bars, restaurants, gyms and other types of businesses that could fuel the virus' spread. Those limits figured as vital factors in Oregon's life-saving calculus — but they came with undeniable costs to workers and business owner. Still, and unlike other states, Oregon kept manufacturing and construction going, blunting the worst-case economic fallout on working families.

Here's another number: 973,022. That's the number of COVID-19 vaccine first and second doses Oregon nurses and other vaccinators have administered so far. It's true Oregon's vaccine rollout has been no less bumpy than it has been elsewhere. Yet Oregon has fully vaccinated about 1 in 12 adults, putting us ahead of most other states (Oregon ranks 16th in the percent of people fully vaccinated).

But the pandemic isn't over. More contagious and more dangerous variants of the virus are taking hold. We are in a race to vaccinate as many people as possible, as soon as we can.

It's been a hard year. On top of the pandemic, we've endured historic wildfires that also claimed lives, displaced thousands and obliterated the homes and businesses that comprised

entire communities. We've awakened to an overdue reckoning with racial health inequities. Winter storms compounded our discomfort and disruption.

We're tired. But we can't give up. With gratitude, and respect for all the lifesaving sacrifices you've made so far, I ask Oregonians to:

- Keep wearing masks, limiting your social get-togethers and maintaining your physical distance. Until we know more, we need to keep our guard up.

- Choose to get vaccinated when you are eligible, as soon as an appointment is available to you.

On Friday, Gov. Brown told Oregonians we are speeding up our timelines to vaccinate Oregonians. Over the next month we expect to vaccinate more than 3 in 4 seniors. People with underlying health conditions will be eligible on March 29. Frontline workers will be eligible no later than May 1. And we'll open vaccinations to the first healthy members of the general public no later than June 1.

I know many people have questions about COVID-19 vaccines. I know the experience of racism and memories of historical trauma and medical experimentation are alive in many communities. Other people are wary of government.

Yet, once again, we depend on each other to save lives. The COVID-19 vaccine is the safest and most effective way to protect yourself and your loved ones and return to more of our normal life. We need enough Oregonians to get immunized, so all of us are protected.

Thank you for the lives you've saved so far and the lives we can all save in the months to come.

*Allen is the director of the Oregon Health Authority.*

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Masks and COVID-19

**To the Editor:**

Please wear proper masks in the appropriate manner to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is such an easy thing to do. I thank all the Grant County individuals and businesses who are following CDC and state of Oregon guidelines. You are keeping cases, hospitalizations and deaths down in our county. Oregon has one of lowest per capita cases and death rates for the COVID pandemic in the nation. Your actions and behaviors are keeping us safe, healthy and alive.

I am dismayed, saddened and angered that some John Day and Canyon City residents, businesses and public institutions are choosing not to adhere to such simple, public health requirements. This resistance means I am traveling to other counties and areas where state and CDC guidelines protocol are followed in order to do business. Grant County is losing a much-needed customer base when choices made here do not protect us.

We each have the ability to save lives and get back to normal quicker. Absorb all that has been learned about COVID-19 during this past year, and follow the science.

Please consider your actions and your power to make a positive, life-saving decision every day.

**Nancy Collins**  
Canyon City

reminded me of "the pot calling the kettle black." It is just childish finger pointing to direct attention away from one's misbehavior to make someone else look worse.

**Ron Ballard**  
John Day

#### 'Give residents an expected date of completion'

**To the Editor:**

On Aug. 22, 2018, the Prairie City Council held a town hall meeting to inform citizens about the water supply emergency, caused by drought, and plans to improve the city water system. The mayor and city staff had been working to find a solution.

The mayor, with representatives from Business Oregon, explained that the city could receive a grant and loan to complete a water project using wells, drilled by the city in 2005, on private property outside of the city limits. Doing so would require an increase of \$8 per month in water utility bills. In a show-of-hands vote the many residents in attendance indicated that the council should go ahead with the project. Since January 2019, utility customers have been paying that additional \$8 each month.

Plans, paperwork and permits satisfying state and federal regulations have been completed. But it appears that this project has reached a standstill. When will actual work start? It has been about two and a half years, and residents still have not seen one gallon of that water.

For months, questions to city hall about progress have received

vague answers. With the possibility of another drought year, I believe it's time for the mayor and council to give residents an expected date of completion.

**Carole Garrison**  
Prairie City

#### Provide updates on Prairie City water

**To the Editor:**

I want to know what is going to happen to the city of Prairie City. The city leaders act like they don't have to move on getting the city a steady water supply. We have been paying \$8 more a month for the past 2-plus years for them to get more water. That adds up to \$70,000 to \$80,000 and nothing to show for it.

They are suppose to have been working on this since August 2018, according to the last public meeting. We need answers, not just "we are working on it," or "the attorney has it." We don't need platitudes we need action.

We are running out of time. The money that we have for this project is on a time frame. If we don't get the water soon, we won't have the money to pay for it. The city leaders know this but still they are not doing anything. What will happen to us if we don't get water.

This summer looks really dry and no water in site. As citizens of Prairie City we need to press our leaders to act now before we don't have any water and nowhere to get any either. Our neighbors will not be so generous the next time.

**Georgia Patterson**  
Prairie City

*Editor's note: Prairie City Mayor Jim Hamscher said there are no deadlines for the funds he is aware of.*

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#### 'The pot calling the kettle black'

**To the Editor:**

The tirade about Republicans in last week's letter to the editor