

# Oregon GOP: Facing the elephant in the room

Atiyeh: 'I never left my party. My party left me.'

By Peter Wong  
Oregon Capital Bureau

When Vic Atiyeh was in the last year of his life, he was happy to accept an accolade from a former aide calling him "Oregon's last great governor."

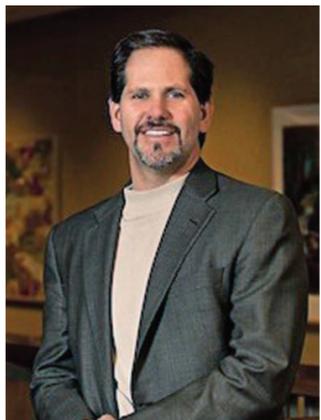
But as his personal archive was opened in 2013 at Pacific University — where he had been a trustee — Atiyeh also said he did not want his legacy to be the last Republican governor of Oregon.

Yet voters have elected only Democrats to the governor's office since Atiyeh, formerly a state legislator from Beaverton and a businessman in Portland.

It's the longest streak for either major party in Oregon history.

Republicans dominated statewide offices when Atiyeh was governor 40 years ago. They were led by Oregon's U.S. senators of that era — Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, each with five victories — but also the secretary of state, state treasurer and attorney general, even though Democrats controlled the Legislature.

Republicans have become a threatened species at the statewide level. Just two Republicans have been elected



Contributed photo

**Knute Buehler**

to statewide office in the past two decades.

Their ranks are shrinking further.

**Knute Buehler once carried the GOP banner in Oregon. Now he's left the party.**

In November, Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden won the race for the White House, unseating one-term incumbent Republican Donald Trump. The win was certified and recertified after several statewide recounts, and was acknowledged by states' elections officials, governors, secretaries of state, the U.S. Justice

Department, an estimated 60 judges in about 100 lawsuits — often dismissed because of a lack of evidence — and the Republican-controlled U.S. Senate.

But then came Jan. 6, when supporters of President Trump listened to several stirring speeches, then marched on the U.S. Capitol and invaded it by force, in an effort to overturn the will of the voters. Five people died. Many of the attackers used social media to brag about the incursion — in real time — while security cameras and the Washington press corps caught countless photos and videos of the effort to overthrow the election.

Despite all that, the executive committee of the Oregon Republican Party took a stance saying Trump actually won, and adopted a resolution branding the violent breach of the Capitol as a "false-flag operation" by parties other than the ones who bragged live on Facebook and Twitter as it was happening.

That's when Knute Buehler, the 2018 Republican nominee for Oregon governor, left the party altogether.

Buehler, a physician and former state representative from Bend, says there is a route for Republicans to win again — but not by embracing "wacky conspiracy theories."

"Our political system works best when there is a balance of power, and

not when one party dominates, especially for such a long duration," Buehler said. "Things get unbalanced and you do not get good policy. Instead you get a lot of people who are disenfranchised, who feel shut out of the process and disregarded."

"But," Buehler added, "it is a pretty hard route for a Republican right now, especially with the events in January."

**Decline and fall**

Bob Packwood's rise to the U.S. Senate in 1968 coincided with continued Republican dominance in Oregon over a couple of decades, despite a Democratic voter registration edge dating back to 1956. "But we have no bench" of potential candidates for statewide office, Packwood said, either in the Legislature or elsewhere.

Thousands more have left the party without fanfare.

According to the Oregon secretary of state, whose office compiles figures at the end of each month, registered Republicans statewide dropped by almost 8,500 from November to January. Republicans now constitute just 25.5% of all registered voters, compared with 36% 20 years ago.

Oregon's share of registered Democrats also declined during those decades, even as their totals surged past the 1 million mark, from 39.4%

in 2001 to 35.5% in 2021. The share of voters not affiliated with any party grew from 21.7% to 31.8%.

In those two decades, voters have elected Republicans statewide only twice.

One was Gordon Smith, who won a second term in the U.S. Senate in 2002 but lost six years later. He became president of the National Association of Broadcasters. He maintains a home in Pendleton, but has said he will not seek public office again.

The other was Dennis Richardson, a former state representative who lost to Democratic Gov. John Kitzhaber in 2014, but was elected secretary of state two years later. Richardson died of cancer in 2019.

One of Richardson's early endorsers for governor in 2013 was Atiyeh, who knew about second chances. He was elected governor on his second try in 1978 (he lost four years earlier) and was re-elected in 1982.

He endorsed most of the subsequent GOP nominees, with the likely exception in 1998 of Bill Sizemore, who won just 30% in a landslide loss to Kitzhaber.

But Atiyeh never endorsed his party's rightward drift and focus on social issues.

"I never left my party," he said in 2012. "My party left me."

## Grace period given to counties that fall to COVID-19 'extreme' risk level

Grant County remains in lower risk category



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
Kate Brown, Governor



By Gary A. Warner  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Counties that might fall back into the state's most restrictive extreme risk level for COVID-19 spread will be given a two-week grace period on heightened restrictions, Gov. Kate Brown announced Thursday.

Brown said the state's low overall infection rates and its steep trend downward since the winter holidays allowed for "a bit more time" for some state trouble spots.

The state currently ranks 49th of the 50 states in new infections per 100,000 people — only Hawaii scores better.

With a positive test rate of 3.9%, Oregon is firmly on track for numbers to continue downward statewide, and 1 million vaccine shots have been administered to residents.

The governor said she made the decision to waive the restrictions "recognizing the challenges businesses encounter when facing a switch back and forth between extreme risk and other risk levels."

The drop to the high risk level meant that restaurants could offer limited indoor dining, a key change during the cold, wet winter months that have stretched into March.

Higher numbers would have required a return to the tighter restrictions on businesses, dining, and activities. Brown's message did not include any changes to rules covering counties already in the extreme risk level.

Brown had announced Feb. 23 that 10 counties had dropped out of the extreme

Activities	Lower Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk	Extreme Risk
<b>Social and At-Home Gathering Size — Indoor</b>	Max 10, recommended limit 4 households	Max 8, recommended limit 2 households	Max 6, recommended limit 2 households	Max 6, recommended limit 2 households
<b>Social and At-Home Gathering Size — Outdoor</b>	Max 12	Max 10	Max 8	Max 6, recommended limit 2 households
<b>Eating and Drinking Establishments</b>	Indoor Dining available at 50% capacity, 12:00a Close, Outdoor Dining 300 cap, max 8 per table.	Indoor Dining available at 50% capacity or a max 100 (whichever is smaller), max 6 per table. 11:00p Close, Outdoor Dining 150 cap, max 8 per table	Indoor dining available, not to exceed 25% capacity, max 50 capacity, 11:00p Close Outdoor Dining Available, max capacity 75, max 6 per table, limit 2 households	Takeout highly recommended. Outdoor dining, max 50 capacity, 11:00p Close, max 6 per table, limit 2 households
<b>Indoor Recreation and Fitness Establishments (includes gyms, fitness organizations, indoor recreational sports, indoor pools, indoor K-12 sports, indoor collegiate sports, indoor personal training, indoor dance)</b>	Max 50% capacity	Max 50% capacity or 100 total (whichever is smaller)	Max 25% capacity or 50 total (whichever is smaller)	Prohibited
<b>Indoor Entertainment Establishments (includes aquariums, indoor theaters, indoor arenas, indoor concert halls, indoor gardens, indoor museums, indoor entertainment activities of any kind, indoor event spaces)</b>	Max 50% capacity	Max 50% capacity or 100 total (whichever is smaller)	Max 25% capacity or 50 total (whichever is smaller)	Prohibited
<b>Retail Stores (includes Farmers' Markets, Grocery Stores, Convenience Stores and Pharmacies)</b>	Max 75% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up	Max 75% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up	Max 50% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up	Max 50% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up
<b>Indoor and Outdoor Shopping Centers/Malls</b>	Max 75% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up	Max 75% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up	Max 50% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up	Max 50% of capacity, encourage curbside pick-up
<b>Faith Institutions, Funeral Homes, Mortuaries, Cemeteries</b>	Indoor max 75% capacity 300 outdoor	Indoor max 50% capacity or 150 total (whichever is smaller), 250 outdoor	Indoor max 25% capacity or 150 total (whichever is smaller), 200 outdoor	Indoor max 25% capacity or 100 total (whichever is smaller), 150 outdoor
<b>Offices</b>	Limited office work available	Recommend remote work if able	Recommend remote work if able	Require remote work if able, close offices to the public
<b>Outdoor Recreation and Fitness Establishments (includes outdoor gyms, outdoor fitness organizations, outdoor recreational sports, outdoor pools, outdoor parks and hiking trails, outdoor campsites, outdoor K-12 sports, outdoor collegiate sports, outdoor personal training, outdoor dance)</b>	Max 300	Max 150	Max 75	Max 50
<b>Outdoor Entertainment Establishments (includes Zoos, outdoor gardens, outdoor aquariums, outdoor theaters, outdoor stadiums, outdoor event spaces, outdoor arenas, outdoor concert halls, outdoor entertainment activities of any kind)</b>	Max 300	Max 150	Max 75	Max 50
<b>Personal Services</b>	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
<b>Long-Term Care</b>	Visitation allowed	Visitation allowed	Visitation allowed	Outside visitation only

risk level, the top of the four-tier rating system that also includes high risk, moderate and lower. The higher the risk level, the more restrictions are in place on businesses, dining and activities.

It was a dose of good news after a period in which most of the state had been in extreme risk at one point or another.

"For the second time in a row, we are seeing great progress in stopping the spread of COVID-19 across Oregon and saving lives," Brown said Feb. 23.

Of the counties on the extreme risk rating prior to

Feb. 23, Brown announced seven had dropped one step to higher risk: Crook, Jackson, Lane, Marion, Polk, Umatilla and Yamhill counties. Malheur and Union dropped to medium, while Wasco fell all the way to lower.

Five counties: Benton, Coos, Douglas, Jefferson and Josephine are currently on the extreme list.

Risk level adjustments

are made every two weeks. But measurements are taken every Friday and analyzed each Monday. The numbers are published weekly, with the period between reassignments called "the warning week."

With the next assignment of risk levels set to be announced March 9 and go into effect March 12, state officials evidently saw some counties trending back up to

extreme risk.

Brown's office did not say what counties were of concern. The "warning week" numbers indicate trends, but the final status would also be determined adding in the as-yet unknown statistics of this week through Friday.

The drop in infections was part of the recent good news that has seen overall new infections down their winter

holiday period highs. A third vaccine, made by Johnson & Johnson has arrived in the state and the first 100 doses sent to each county, with a total of 34,000 expected to immediately follow.

But there was cautionary news as well. Two potentially more virulent and easier-to-spread versions of the virus showed up in Oregon.

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