

Bill

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broad discretion over who could obtain licenses. Oregon now has about 300,000 people with such licenses.

"The events of 2020 are a flashing red light that we need to do something," she said.

Burdick was referring to a crowd opposed to the closing of the Oregon capitol who breached a door to the building on Dec. 21 during a special session of the Legislature. Police were able to block the group in a vestibule and eventually ejected them.

Proponents also brought up the swarm of gun-toting activists who went to the Michigan capitol in Lansing. Several men were arrested for allegedly plotting to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat.

The series of incidents culminated in a mob of supporters of then-President Donald Trump who invaded the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 during the verification of Electoral College votes. Members of both the U.S. House and U.S. Senate were forced to evacuate their chambers for several hours until police and National Guard were able to secure the building.

Burdick said the bill gives local governments flexibility, rather than impose a state policy.

"I think you are safer without a gun; the National Rifle Association thinks you are safer with a gun," she said. "Neither of us gets to decide. The local community gets to decide. That's as it should be."

Sen. James Manning Jr., D-Eugene, a 24-year Army veteran, said the bill is consistent with a 2008 U.S. Supreme Court decision that recognizes an individual right to bear firearms under the Second Amendment. The decision, written by Justice Antonin Scalia, also allows regulation of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings.

"This bill does not take anyone's freedoms from them," Manning said.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, and Judiciary Committee chairman, said even Tombstone, Arizona, barred guns from town limits back in 1880 as violence grew.

A recent survey conducted by DHM Research of Portland indicated 59% support for such a measure, 31% opposition, with most support in the



PMG file photo

A bill that would bar firearms from state buildings has passed the Oregon House.

"HERE'S THE DEAL. THIS IS STILL MARCH. THE SESSION GOES THROUGH JUNE 27. THAT BILL IS GOING TO STOP EVERYTHING BETWEEN NOW AND WHENEVER WE COME BACK BECAUSE WE CAN'T WALK AWAY FOR FOUR MONTHS."

—State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale

sample from the Portland area and Democrats; however, it mustered 49% support outside the Willamette Valley.

What opponents said

Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, argued the bill would deprive thousands of concealed-handgun license holders from being able to defend themselves.

Knopp said he could think of only one instance — a 2019 shooting at a Eugene middle school that resulted in police killing a male parent involved in a custody dispute — when there was a conflict.

"What we have here is a bill in search of a problem," he said.

Knopp said, if the bill's proponents in the Senate were confident that it had public support, they should vote to put it up for a referendum on a statewide ballot.

A motion calling for a referendum failed on a party-line vote.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, a former Umatilla County commissioner, said counties do not want the burden of having to decide whether firearms should be allowed in public buildings.

When Oregon voters are removing criminal penalties, including those for possession of small amounts of drugs other than marijuana, "we are crim-

inalizing this," Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, said.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, was the lone Democrat to join six Republicans to oppose the bill.

Four other Republicans — Dallas Heard of Roseburg, Dennis Linthicum of Klamath Falls, Art Robinson of Cave Junction and Kim Thatcher of Keizer, among the most conservative senators — chose not to attend the session and were considered absent.

Three other senators were officially excused, including Sen. Brian Boquist of Dallas, now an independent, whose stepson took his own life by a firearm in 2016.

What local legislators said

Findley said the Republicans made substantive arguments on the bill last week. Findley, who faced criticism from constituents in his district for not walking out of the session, said he and others in the GOP put in over four hours on the Senate floor expressing arguments against the bill.

"Had our colleagues who chose to walk been there to help us, it would have driven at home a little harder," he said. "That's their right. I felt I needed to represent the people in my district on the rest of the issues coming before this (Legislature), and their voices need to be heard on how wrong this bill is."

He said walking out would stop everything he and other lawmakers are working on in the Legislature. It would be "nonsensical" at this point, he said.

"Here's the deal. This is still March. The session goes through June 27," he said. "That bill is going to stop everything between now and whenever we come back because we can't walk away for four months."

Findley pointed out that, had he walked out, a bill specific to Grant County, Senate Bill 21, would have died. The bill would direct the state Fish and Wildlife Commission to develop and adopt an invasive grass pilot program in the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area.

"If I would have walked, the bill was dead," he said. He said SB 21 has good momentum to make it out of committee. Findley said several people believe the bill makes good sense.

Blue Mountain Eagle reporter Steven Mitchell contributed to this story.

Housing

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The problems

Evans said, while Phillips is the kind of landlord that would "bend over backward" for his tenants, getting him to fix things has been difficult. She said belongings from the previous tenant were still at the apartment when she moved in, and the apartment appeared as if it had not been painted in several years.

She said she complained about "black mold" behind her shower wall for over a year and that she constantly had to use bleach to keep it at bay.

Evans told the Eagle that

Phillips tore down the back porch of another unit over a year ago and still had not replaced it.

Larkin's son Charles Williams said one of the apartments has no key for the front door and that they have to leave the sliding glass door to the porch unlocked.

Nonetheless, like Evans, Williams said Phillips is a "decent man."

Phillips said the reasons for not keeping up on the repairs were due to COVID-19. Phillips, who lives in La Grande, said his wife works with people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and he did not want to take the chance of exposing residents to the virus.

What's next?

County Commissioner and Prairie City Mayor Jim Hamsher said the people at Kircher Korners have been in the area for years, and he does not want to see them have to relocate.

Evans said she hopes Phillips can appeal and get an extension to get the property recertified with HUD.

In a Friday email, Lombardi said, while he cannot speak to Kircher Korners' contract specifically, a property owner's chances of successfully appealing this type of action are slim.

"Absent a legitimate commitment to improving the physical condition of the property," he said, "I think it follows that such an appeal would be pretty weak."



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Kircher Korners, a subsidized housing complex in Prairie City, is losing its HUD contract April 1, and tenants are uncertain where to go.

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ANNUAL EASTER EGG HUNT
 SATURDAY, APRIL 3
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 CLYDE HOLLIDAY STATE PARK
 LOTS OF PRIZES

This is the Fire Departments way of getting back to normal. Face masks will be required by anyone 5 years and up. If you or anyone in your party is ill please stay home. We know it will be difficult to keep the 6 ft distance during the actual Easter Egg Hunt but, please try to adhere to this guidance at all other times.

Contact City Hall at
541-932-4688
 with any questions.

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