

No Winners With A Walkout

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All of Oregon was given a bad deal this week, thanks to the actions of our Republican Legislators. While I personally am represented by both a Republican Senator and Representative, I am not alone in getting the short end of the stick due to the walk out. When our elected representatives are derelict in their duties, we all suffer. And those who are currently suffering such as our houseless, our ill, and our foster children will suffer the most. We can sit back and say “oh well”, and accept it as “politics as usual”. Or, we can rise up and say “No More”.

Susannah Morgan, CEO of the Oregon Food Bank put out a firm but eloquent statement.

“There is no other venue to bring these issues or solutions to the table — and walking away from that table over isolated policy differences is an abdication of responsibility to our communities. ...No discussion or decision-making takes place when lawmakers don’t show up to make laws.”

What is the visible cost of the walk out? Our Oregon Legislators make a minimum of \$21,612.00 per year, plus a per diem of \$152.00 per day that the Legislature is in session. This year, the session is only 35 days long. Each Legislator is effectively earning \$769.00 per day this year. Even local representatives that drive home every night and don’t need to pay for temporary housing are given that per diem. So Senator Boles and Representative Post are pocketing money without having to pay for the items for which the funds are allocated. There is no provision in our Constitution or bylaws for stopping payment due to a failure to perform the duties of the elected position. They are getting paid \$769 a day to leave the state. Hardly seems fair.

The party of fake news has been on message that the Democratic Majority are pushing through bills that cost the average taxpayer money and that it’s some sort of End Times Tyranny here in Salem. Aaron Fiedler, the Oregon House Democrats Communications Director says “Just to give you an idea of the session so far in the House: 34 bills passed, only two had party line votes, 14 had Republican chief sponsors, Republicans have had full access to the legislative process.”

Representative Paul Evans during the 2019 session said “Despite what you might hear in the media the Oregon Legislature is truly a bipartisan place. So far this year, 171 bills have passed the Oregon House. Of those 98 percent were either unanimous or had at least five Republican votes. Just three votes have passed along party lines. I look forward to working with my colleagues from across the political spectrum in moving our state forward.”

Republicans are also proclaiming that walking out is within their constitutional rights, despite the oath of office they took to serve us in the Legislature. Lane Shetterly, a former Republican member of the Oregon House of Representatives, had this to say,

“The quorum requirement is found in Article IV, section 12: “Two thirds of each house shall constitute a quorum to do business, but a smaller number may meet; adjourn from day to day, and compel the attendance of absent members.” This says two things about a quorum. First, two-thirds of each house constitutes a quorum to do business. Second, if there isn't a quorum, those members present can “compel the attendance of absent members.” Webster's dictionary says “compel” means “to impel or force to appear.” “Compel” does not mean to sit and wait, plead or negotiate. Nothing in this constitutional provision suggests the founders “put [the] quorum in there” to give any faction of the Legislature the right to deny a quorum for any purpose.”

FM3 polled 750 likely voters and reported that 63% of voters are less likely to vote for a Legislator that walks out. Shifting demographics in Marion county and Bend mean that both Senator Denyc Boles and Senator Tim Knopp are running the risk of having the walk out cost them their jobs. In Senate District 10, registered Democrats now outnumber Republicans. (Democrats: 29,636 to Republicans: 28,531). That’s good news for Democrat Candidates in Marion County who have a long track record of showing up and doing the work.

The House Rules Committee voted 4 to 0 on Friday to subpoena the 21 House Representatives that have failed to show up. The subpoenas would require attendance in front of the Rules Committee on March 5th. Speaker Kotek is also investigating other ways to hold them accountable for their actions, including blocking pay to their staff.

Who are the real victims of the walk out?

House Bill 4001 would declare a housing emergency, and includes tens of millions of dollars to help cities fund shelters and navigation centers, including \$4 million to Salem. The state's Department of Housing and Community Services released a report last year that made it clear Oregon is failing to be able to offer people experiencing homelessness a safe, warm place to sleep. "Homelessness, especially unsheltered homelessness, is of catastrophic proportions in Oregon... Oregon is one of four states in which more than half (61 percent) of all people experiencing homelessness were found in unsheltered locations." It is estimated that our state needs to add 5,800 beds just to meet the most minimal of needs to the houseless.

HB 4109 would remove a dangerous pesticide from use.

SB 1532 would assist low income homeowners with home repairs, enabling them to stay in their homes.

HB 4146 provides health care for our College and University faculty.

HB 4120 would provide funding and homes for Oregon's Foster Care children.

HB 4005, a gun safety bill, would require guns to be stored with a gun lock or in a locked container if children are present.

HB 4073 would limit the cost of insulin to those that need it.

All of these bills and more are at risk if Republicans don't return to their jobs. None of these issues should wait another year.

Despite being weary from the relentless wrong doing of the minority party, we must take action. Here are a few ways you can make your voice heard:

On Saturday at 11 AM, Democrats will meet at the Progressive Resource Center in West Salem at 1320 Edgewater St NW for canvassing. There will be snacks and training before the canvas. Here is the facebook page for the event:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/3242025105810091>

No More Costly Walkouts has a petition you can sign here:

<https://www.nomorecostlywalkouts.com/>

You can also sign this local petition <http://chnng.it/whGDQTCH> which will be sent to Senator Boles telling her that we expect her to do her job.

And finally, you can join us in assisting our local candidates in fundraising, canvassing, and phone banking. I fully believe that we can flip Marion County Blue, but unfortunately, it won't happen if we stay home. We'll sleep in November, right? There are no winners with a walkout, but there WILL BE winners on Tuesday, November 3, 2020.