

Dear Chair Senator Wagner, Vice Chair Senator Girod and members of the committee,

My name is Debbie Wong, a citizen in West Linn. I fully support SB 261, 262, and SJR4 addressing the walkouts, hoping this issue will not go unaddressed through another walkout. It would be helpful to have the language in SB 261, 262 tightened to facilitate enforcement. Actions that subvert the democratic process should be a bipartisan concern. That a minority can completely thwart the will of the majority of voters in OR by walking out is outrageous. In addition, denying quorum is a dangerous precedent set to be used every time the minority does not get their way. The legislative branch will become irrelevant with problems faced by Oregonians going unaddressed.

Walking out on the job is a gross dereliction of duty. People should not get paid for not fulfilling their responsibilities and there should be associated consequences given the significant consequences faced by real people when the important work is blocked by a lack of quorum. Over a hundred bills died as a result of the walkouts in 2019 and 2020 including bills addressing disaster preparedness, wildfires, housing crisis, climate change, gun safety, mental health/foster care, equitable taxation, government transparency and many more. Many of these bills would have benefited constituents of those legislators who walked out also. Without accountability, the minority will be further emboldened as evidenced by the increasing frequency of such actions and for increasingly less substantive reasons.

The minority claim their concerns are not acknowledged and a walkout is their only option. This is difficult to give credence to given the 2020 version of the Clean Energy Jobs Bill had many changes made to it over the 2019 version to accommodate Republicans, which so weakened the bill that many democrats had difficulty supporting it, and yet Republicans still walked out over it.

SJR4 which changes the quorum requirement to a simple majority would be the most effective solution. OR is one of only 5 states that require more than a simple majority for a quorum. While a higher quorum facilitates the acknowledgment of the concerns of the minority through compromise, it loses legitimacy when exploited by the minority to have complete control. Oregonians are facing so many challenges that we can not afford to be held hostage by this political maneuvering now nor in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Debbie Wong