

To: Senate Committee on Rules
From: Diana Wales on behalf of Indivisible Roseburg
Re: Hearing regarding SB261, SB262, SJR3, and SJR4 on March 18, 2021

Indivisible Roseburg, a member of the Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network (COIN), is a grassroots organization based in Roseburg that seeks to promote progressive legislation and issues.

We are writing this memo in support of SJR4, which would change the quorum rules for the Legislature. At this point we are taking no position pro or con on SB261, SB262, and SJR3.

We believe firmly that, in a democracy, majority rules. While we strongly support and encourage legislation that has strong bipartisan support, we view as fundamentally undemocratic a system in which a minority of legislators can forcibly impose their will on the majority.

Six times since 2019, the Republican minority has chosen to walk out of the legislature in order to deny the legislature the 2/3 majority it needs (per the Oregon Constitution) to conduct business. These actions were taken five times during the 2019 and 2020 legislative sessions to prevent passage of bills they opposed, and once this year to protest the Governor's covid restrictions and vaccination priorities. This is more times than the walkout has been used in the previous 162 years since Oregon gained statehood and thus, we believe, represents a use of this measure not intended by the framers of our state Constitution.

We believe that walking out on the job represents a gross dereliction of duty and an insult to Oregon voters. Hundreds of bills died as a result of Republicans' walkouts in 2019 and 2020, including bills to restore forest health, to fund homeless shelters, to increase transparency in government, to expand community mental health treatment, to trim tax breaks for wealthy investors.

In summary, the recent use of walkouts as employed by the GOP represents a strategic and unprecedented use of this tactic that is inherently anti-democratic and that compromises the ability of the legislature to carry out its responsibilities. This cannot continue if we are to have effective and democratic governance in this state.

Of the four bills before the Rules Committee regarding this matter, we believe the most crucial is SJR4, which would change the quorum requirement in the Oregon Constitution from 2/3 members of each chamber to a simple majority. We believe that this measure, if passed by the voters, would eliminate the need for the other three measures.

While opponents of SJR4 would argue that it allows a simple majority to impose its will on the voters, we would note that Oregon is one of only five states in the nation that require more than a simple majority for a quorum. In the end it comes down to whether one believes that, in a democracy, majority should be allowed to rule or a minority is allowed to rule.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments.