

Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Girod, Members of the Committee,

I strongly support SJR4 for many of the same reasons that other oral and written testimony already addresses. So, I would like to respond to some of the main arguments I have heard and read in opposition to this bill.

A common argument opposing these bills is that walkouts are “the only way rural Oregonians can have their voices heard.” As a rural Oregonian for more than 48 years, I’m deeply offended by this argument. This implies that all rural Oregonians are in favor of such political extortion, which is certainly NOT the case. I do NOT believe that my representative, Daniel Bonham, nor my senator, Lynn Findley (and Cliff Bentz before him) were representing me when they walked out. In fact, when they walked out, they silenced MY voice, and the voices of thousands of their constituents. And all Oregonians were cheated out of hundreds of bills we desperately needed to do critical things like restore forest health, fund homeless shelters, expand community mental health treatment, and much, much more.

The second argument is that a 2/3 majority is a “standard” for organizational quorums. This is simply not true. Oregon is one of only four states that requires a 2/3 majority. Forty-five states require a simple majority and Massachusetts requires even less than a simple majority.

https://ballotpedia.org/Noteworthy_state_legislative_walkouts

In reality, almost NO organizations set quorums as high as 2/3 of their members because if a quorum can’t be met on a very regular basis, nothing gets accomplished. And organizations, including our state legislature, exist in the first place to get things accomplished!

Third, it’s “lazy to pass bills without bipartisan effort.” This statement implies that Democrats have refused to include Republicans in negotiations over bills. Certainly this has been an excuse given by the Republicans who have walked out, but it is not true. As a prime example, the revised 2020 version of the cap-and-trade bill included so many compromises that support for the bill from many environmental groups declined. And yet, Republicans still walked out over this watered-down version that include many of their own amendments. What’s really “lazy” is to rely on walkouts rather than doing the hard work of negotiating and accepting compromise on bills that address matters of great importance to a majority of Oregonians, like responsibly reducing our impact on climate change. Why bother negotiating if you can just flee to Idaho instead?

And fourth, “It’s in the Constitution for a reason.” No it’s not. It’s in the Oregon Constitution because we copied another state’s constitution when we were first getting started. Oregon’s constitution has been amended many times since its inception in 1857, as we have discovered its imperfections the hard way.

In closing, I would like to add that it is very insulting that Senator Girod and Senator Thatcher both were absent without pre-exuse from today’s hearing. By not showing up, they told me that my voice doesn’t matter, that they don’t care what those of us who showed up to testify had to say about how their actions impact us. Such utter disregard for Oregonians causes me ask with even greater urgency that you please pass SJR4, and send it to the voters for the final word. We’ve had enough of lawmakers who refuse to do the job we pay them to do.

Thank you,

Debi Ferrer
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