



## Editorial: A chance to salvage the session

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Last Thursday's Senate floor session was canceled due to a lack of quorum as Republican senators continued a multi-day boycott. But a thawing of relations offers a glimmer of hope for leaders to get the session back on track, the editorial board writes. (AP Photo/Amanda Loman)AP

### The Oregonian Editorial Board

The legislative session seemed headed straight for disaster last week with Senate Republicans staging daily walkouts and Democrats' rhetoric growing increasingly desperate.

But a slight thawing of relations between Senate President Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, and Senate Republican Leader Tim Knopp, R-Bend, offers a glimmer of hope to get the session back on track. After a meeting of caucus leaders, Wagner announced Thursday that he would [hold off convening](#) the next Senate floor session until Monday. That gives the two sides some breathing room to continue discussions without triggering, at least until Monday, a possible 10th unexcused absence by a few Republican legislators.

Under [Measure 113 passed last year](#) by voters, lawmakers with 10 or more unexcused absences are barred from running in the next election.

Democrats and Republicans should use this time well to map out a course of action that puts Oregonians' interests above power plays from both caucuses. To that end, both Democratic and Republican legislators must be prepared to make concessions that may annoy their most partisan supporters but generate better results for the state. And leaders should recognize that whether and how they craft a solution will affect not only this session but their reputations and effectiveness going forward.

Here are a few key areas on which the two sides must be willing to budge:

#### **Democrats should allow greater public and legislative input on [House Bill](#)**

**[2002](#)**. The bill, one of the main focuses of Republican opposition, includes some noncontroversial provisions such as protections for medical professionals who provide abortion to visitors from out-of-state. But one of the most divisive aspects of the bill is that it would allow all minors to receive an abortion without parental notification, a change from current practice in which a teen must be at least 15 to do so.

Certainly, there may well be cases in which confidentiality is necessary to protect the child. Oregon could set up a judicial bypass system, as many other states have, to address those cases. Existing laws should also trigger immediate state intervention and criminal action if a parent is the person who has impregnated the child.

But as a general rule, the state should not be giving children an avenue for pulling away from parents – their key support system – in such a serious situation, especially since the

state won't be sticking around to help that child afterwards. While Democrats cast this bill as if it keeps government out of patients' medical decisions, in reality, it helps keep parents out of their kids' lives.

The divisiveness of this change also does not match the size of the problem. Only 18 of the 476 pregnancies by minors were among girls in the 10-14 age range, according to Oregon Health Authority statistics for the period from April 2022 through March 2023. Instead of sending the bill straight to the Senate floor for a vote, as Wagner aims to do, send the bill to a Senate legislative committee instead to take out that provision and explore an alternative, such as a judicial bypass. In addition, Wagner should allow greater public and legislator input on other aspects of the bill. On such highly-controversial proposals, Democrats should err on the side of inclusion.

**Republicans need to abandon walkouts as a viable tool.** They may be effective in drawing attention, but it's the kind of attention that diminishes their appeal to the voting public even more. While some legislators may be prepared to surpass the 10-unexcused absence threshold and challenge Measure 113's constitutionality, curtailing the session will hamper or block passage of critical legislation for housing, economic development and other needs felt by Republicans, Democrats and Oregonians across the state. Republicans have legitimate gripes that Democrats ignore their requests and priorities – even down to Democratic leadership deciding which Republican legislators serve on which committees. But Oregonians indicated their frustration with walkouts in their resounding approval for Measure 113. Republicans should focus on broader public communication of their concerns and fielding strong candidates who can win in swing districts to best advance their agenda.

**Voters should take accountability for what they voted for.** It should surprise exactly no one that Measure 113 did not stop walkouts. It was not built to. As we noted in our opposition to the measure, the solution to ensuring that a minimum number of legislators are present to achieve quorum is to lower Oregon's abnormally high quorum threshold. Instead, the public employee unions who fronted the measure opted for a more peculiar and politicized route. Voters should accept their role in creating the current impasse.

**Revive the 'Oregon Way.'** Majorities rule, and voters show their priorities by the choices they make at the ballot box. But Oregonians need only look at other states, such as Idaho and Texas, to see how a majority that governs for its most partisan supporters harms residents as a whole. The best ideas and most sustainable legislation come through testing, challenging and amending for flaws that supporters are unlikely to spot. And the failure to consider the priorities and make room for the values of the minority fuels resentment and mistrust, making governing only more difficult in the future. There's plenty of time left for the session to go awry. But there's also plenty of time for legislative leaders in both chambers to pull back from extreme positions. Democrats and Republicans both should legislate for a united Oregon.

*-The Oregonian/OregonLive Editorial Board*