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Statement from Majority Leader Fahey on Undemocratic Expulsion of State Representatives Justin Jones and Justin J. Pearson of Tennessee

SALEM, Ore. - Following [yesterday's news](#) that Republican lawmakers in Tennessee expelled State Representatives Justin Jones and Justin J. Pearson after they joined over 7,000 peaceful protestors in speaking out against gun violence, [House Majority Leader Julie Fahey](#) (D-West Eugene & Veneta) releases a statement:

"Like many Americans, I watched with alarm as the Tennessee House voted to expel two of its members yesterday. As a legislative leader who's been closely involved in two expulsion processes in Oregon, I firmly believe that the actions in Tennessee were a blatant abuse of the legislative process and a disturbing erosion of our democratic norms.

"Expelling an elected member of a legislative body must be rare, deliberative, and done with sufficient due process. Expulsion should be a measure of last resort, pursued only when a legislator's behavior is so egregious that there is no other option. In recent years, other state legislatures have expelled members for criminal convictions, sexual harassment, tax evasion, and, in Oregon, for abetting an attack on our State Capitol. Above all, expulsion proceedings should be absolutely free of partisan political motives.

"By removing an elected leader from their seat, the legislative body is not just expelling a single person, but is overturning the choice that voters made to elect that legislator. The right of voters to choose their own representatives is fundamental to our democracy. Yes, there are times when this step must be taken, but it must be balanced with the sacred right that voters have to decide who represents them in our democracy.

"Two years ago, the Oregon House voted 59-1 to expel one of its members. The legislator in question not only violated the Legislature's rules, but in so doing, he endangered the safety of staff, other legislators, and the Oregon State Police. His actions led directly to violence, which caused injuries among the state troopers who responded. It was one of the darkest, most frightening days in the Oregon State Legislature, and the member who caused it never

expressed remorse for his actions. Even still, we undertook a careful, intentional, months-long process before recommending expulsion. It was a decision that none of us took lightly, and the fact that the vote was effectively unanimous (only the expelled member voted no) showed that we were committed to a non-partisan, non-political process.

"The actions by the Tennessee Legislature, by contrast, appear to be blatantly partisan, reactionary, and designed solely to punish the legislators for their political actions. The expelled legislators, Representatives Jones and Pearson, participated in a protest urging the legislature to pass gun violence prevention measures following yet another horrific mass shooting. As someone who has studied the offenses leading to expulsion of legislators in Congress and in other state legislatures, I can say with complete certainty that breaking a legislative rule of decorum on its own should not rise to the level of expulsion.

"Importantly, the expelled Tennessee Representatives are both Black, and are both Democrats in a Republican-controlled legislature – a legislature that has taken a sharp right turn toward attacking vulnerable residents, including LGBTQ+ and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities in recent years. Republican-controlled legislatures have pursued an alarming agenda of stripping away democratic protections (like making it more difficult for BIPOC and low-income voters to vote), using government to ban books they don't like, and taking away the basic healthcare rights of women and LGBTQ+ folks. These actions undermine our pluralistic, democratic, and vibrantly multi-racial society.

"As the Majority Leader of the Oregon House of Representatives, I have no ability to influence what the Tennessee Legislature does. But I'll do everything in my power to stand up for the rights of Representatives Jones and Pearson and their constituents and to stand against these blatantly undemocratic acts.

"And as long as I have any say in the matter, I'll sure as hell work to prevent these kinds of authoritarian actions from taking hold in Oregon."

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