



## OFFICE OF THE HOUSE SPEAKER

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### NEWS RELEASE

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### **House Speaker Tina Kotek's full remarks on the conclusion of the 2020 legislative session**

SALEM, Ore. – On Thursday afternoon, House Speaker Tina Kotek announced that the 2020 legislative session is functionally over after repeated Republican walkouts made it impossible to pass most of the bills and budgets in a democratic fashion before the session's March 8 constitutional deadline.

Below are her prepared remarks in full. Click [here](#) for a link to the video.

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Colleagues, when I was first nominated to be Speaker of the House, I knew this would be a tough job.

On my first opening day as Speaker in 2013, I addressed the joint session held in this chamber, and I said it was a critical time for our state's democratic institutions because the people's faith in elected leaders was strained, and faith in government even more so.

On that January morning seven years ago, I could never have imagined how much more our democratic institutions would be tested. As Americans, as Oregonians, big questions are looming: Can our democracy keep the people's faith? Can elected leaders respect their oaths of office and the rule of law that allows us to get things done?

I'm so deeply disappointed today. It is clear that 21 Republican members will not come back with enough time to finish our work this session.

After refusing to show up for work over the last two weeks, House Republicans violated their legislative subpoenas and did not appear before the House Rules Committee this afternoon to explain their unexcused absences.

House Republicans are in clear violation of their one constitutional duty: to vote, on bills, on this floor. They are denying Oregonians their right to a functioning legislature by walking off the job and preventing votes on all the legislation ready for consideration on our floors.

The claim is that this is about Senate Bill 1530, the climate action bill. The Republicans wanted changes. The Senate made many of those changes in the months leading up to this session. Not all of them, true, but many major, substantive changes were made. People listened and compromised because we know that compromise is in the best interest of serving the people who elected us.

And still, House Republicans walked off the job. They left the state a full two weeks before our constitutional deadline to adjourn, after only three bills had passed both chambers this session, with hundreds of others that have won support through our public process being left in limbo.

As your Speaker, I have taken a very pragmatic approach to problem solving. For the most part, I think we have been able to work together to face each challenge directly and pass legislation – most of which is bipartisan - to make our state stronger. I have sometimes held my own family of Democrats more accountable for their behavior than my Republican colleagues because I recognize the challenges of being in the minority caucus.

But let's be clear. This is not about any one bill or about being treated unfairly. This is about the corrosion of our democratic process.

I'll admit, I saw that corrosion more clearly at the national level before I recognized it here at home.

This is a challenge I did not expect to face in my time as Speaker. I did not expect to face a constitutional crisis in which so many of our colleagues simply decide to stop showing up for work until they get their way.

Now, after missing 8 days of work and creating an insurmountable backlog of good bills and good budgets, the Republican leaders say they want to come back with 12 hours left so they can pick and choose what bills live and die. This would mean that after days of shirking their duties, they simply get to return and decide they can unilaterally kill all bills of their choosing.

This is the equivalent of one basketball team walking off the court for most of the second half, then asking to return in the final minute on the condition they can dictate the final score.

When you play basketball – or any team sport -- you know teams come into a game with different strengths. One team might have the tallest players, while the other might have the fastest players. Regardless of the differences, you play hard and you play by the rules. When it's over, you shake hands.

The stakes here in the Legislature are very high. What we do here touches people's lives now and into the future. And that's why the rules HERE matter. This is not a game.

But what the Republicans have done is cheat. They have not played by the rules. They took their ball and went home. They have broken their oath of office by not showing up to vote.

Our work here this session has to be over. We have been held hostage by a small group of elected representatives. We have been open to compromise and negotiation from the beginning, but unfortunately their actions turned this into a hostage situation, not a negotiation. When the only thing you want to make a deal on is the one thing the majority won't give you, you are not negotiating. You're blackmailing. Early in the session it was "refer the climate bill and we'll stop reading bills." Then it was "refer the climate bill and we'll show up for an evening floor session." Then it was "refer the climate bill and we'll come back to work so we can decide which bills to pass."

That's not a democratic process. That's shameful. That's petty. That's partisan politics at its worst.

The backlog of bills has become so large that we simply cannot complete our business in a democratic fashion. We don't have time for floor debates. We can't provide for the transparent process that is necessary for final votes. I've reached out to Republican Leader Drazen every day since she and her colleagues walked out of the Capitol, and she simply will not agree to finish ALL the work that has been blocked by their repeated walkouts.

In fact, I called Leader Drazen again today after she sent a press release offering to come back on Sunday – with only 12 hours remaining before our constitutional deadline, I asked, "Will you come back and agree to take floor votes on every bill that has earned enough support through the public process?" She said no.

Let me be clear: I am not willing to roll over let only certain bills become law based on a kill list developed in a back room in an undisclosed, out of state location by absent Republicans and corporate lobbyists.

Therefore, this session is functionally over. We will not reconvene on the House floor. Instead, we must pursue a different path to address the most urgent health and safety needs facing our state.

On Monday, the Senate President and I will convene a meeting of the Legislative Emergency Board. We intend to approve an emergency funding package for coronavirus response and flood disaster relief for the Umatilla Basin in Northeast Oregon. Thankfully, the Emergency Board will be able to allocate funds with or without Republicans. Just as we have done for the last 8 days,

we will continue to do our jobs and do our best for the people of this state. We are not willing to walk away from Oregonians.

Colleagues, we must take climate action this year. I'm so incredibly sad that, once again, adults have failed our children and their children and their children. Shame on us.

The Senate President and I are working with the Governor to make sure we don't let this Republican obstructionism halt our progress on addressing climate change this year. The Governor is finalizing executive actions that will reduce Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions.

Lastly, we ask that the Governor call us back into special session within the next 30 days to address urgent legislation completed over the last few weeks.

I'll close my comments the same way I did on opening day in 2013, by quoting Dorothy Day, the Catholic social justice activist. She said her experiences taught her to "disregard people's talk, and judge only their actions."

Today, colleagues, I can say I am proud of the hard work each of you put in this session. We must continue to govern. We must continue to uphold our broader moral responsibility to the people of this great state as a whole – to their health, their safety, their economic security. We did so through our actions. We did so by showing up.

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