



OFFICE OF THE HOUSE SPEAKER

900 Court St., N.E., Room H-269

Salem OR 97301

<http://www.oregonlegislature.gov/rayfield>

NEWS RELEASE

February 1, 2022

Danny Moran, Communications Director
danny.moran@oregonlegislature.gov

Oregon House of Representatives elects Dan Rayfield as Speaker

Rayfield highlights session priorities including education, small business support, housing and more

SALEM – Today, on the opening day of the 2022 legislative session, the Oregon House of Representatives elected Rep. Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis) to serve as Speaker of the House.

In his first remarks as Speaker of the House, Rayfield shared how a chaotic childhood made him the person he is today, and highlighted priorities for the 2022 session.

“Like the rest of the country, Oregonians have faced immense challenges these last two years,” Rayfield said. “We can give them hope that stability, safety, and a better tomorrow are possible.

“We know our kids learn best when they’re in a safe school environment five days a week, which is why we will work to support our teachers and schools to make that happen. We’ll bring support to working families and the small businesses that make up the backbone of our economy. We’re going to work to bring down the cost of living by making investments in key areas like housing and health care, and we’ll work to address the homelessness crisis in every community in the state. And we’re going to prioritize keeping our communities safe, while we invest in mental and behavioral health services to help some of our most vulnerable neighbors.”

Rayfield was formally nominated on the floor by Rep. Wlmsvey Campos (D-Aloha).

“I know that many of our colleagues can attest that he has spent time listening and learning about the priorities of the different communities we represent and has demonstrated that he is someone

who values all voices in this chamber, and that he demonstrates authenticity and integrity in this work,” Campos said.

The full transcript of Rayfield’s remarks are posted below and video can be found [here](#).

###

It is a tremendous honor to be voted as your next Speaker of the House and I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to lead this chamber.

First, I want to thank the people that put up with me and allow me to do this work – my family, and most importantly my wife, Amanda, and son, Adam. Without the two of you and your patience I could not do any of this work. And while I don't say it enough, I want you to know how grateful I am for that. I love the two of you more than you'll ever know.

When the going gets tough – and many of us have had more than our share of that lately – I rely on two main things: my family, and my terrible sense of humor, for which I apologize in advance.

We're at a critical point in our recovery from the pandemic. During the next five weeks, we will have the opportunity to support the people and the communities that were impacted the most by the last couple years. We may have different perspectives on how best to do that.

As it turns out, I've had some experience with navigating different perspectives.

I grew up in a divided household. My parents divorced when I was a 1-year-old and couldn't have been more different. My father was a colonel in the Air Force Reserves, senior vice president of a commercial insurance company and lived in Oregon. It's probably no surprise he was active in Republican politics. In fact, the first political event I ever attended was in support of Vice President Dan Quayle. I attended in my Boy Scout uniform.

At the other end of the spectrum, my mother lived in Southern California and was very progressive. She volunteered at the Catholic worker to feed the homeless and protested at the Nevada nuclear test sites. She was also a proud feminist.

I spent my childhood flying back and forth between these two homes. It gave me an early lesson in how two people can have similar goals but approach them from vastly different places. My mom protested nuclear weapons to keep the world safe; my dad supported them because he thought they were needed to keep the world safe.

I believe that we are all here because we want to do good for Oregon. And it is important to me that we all give the measure of grace that comes with recognizing that in each other.

As Speaker, I want to understand what motivates each of us so that I can help us work together to serve the entire state of Oregon, when we agree and especially when we don't. That takes time, patience and honest communication in an environment that doesn't always encourage those things. I will try my best to exhibit those qualities in this role. And I am confident you will let me know when I fall short.

In that spirit, I want to share some of why this work matters to me.

I spoke a moment ago about how my family provides stability for me are the focus of my life. That was not my reality as a child.

Early on in my life, my mother struggled with alcoholism, anger, and drug addiction. Some of my earliest memories involve seeing these struggles up close. I was that kid. But I also saw firsthand her efforts to get sober, and I learned from that. When I was in kindergarten, she joined Alcoholics Anonymous. To maintain her sobriety, she quit her job so she could attend meetings during the day and spent her free time cleaning houses and local businesses to pay the bills.

For me as a child, that often meant sleeping on the couch of a hair salon while my mom cleaned in the middle of the night. I was that kid.

The chaos of my childhood followed me.

I was a terrible student. I struggled with ADD. I didn't graduate from my high school on time because I failed an entire term for not showing up to class. Imagine what it means as a teenager for the police to rush into your neighborhood because of physical abuse by your stepparent. I was that kid.

So I drank and experimented with drugs when I should have been focused on school. During this deeply painful period in my life, I was arrested four times for things like a DUI, reckless endangerment, and criminal mischief. When I got to college, I did even worse. I left college after two terms with a 1.4 grade point average.

What was my Plan B? I didn't have one. So, I did the only thing any of us would do in that situation. I became a Jungle Cruise Skipper at Walt Disney World.

You might think getting a job helped me start to turn my life around and get my head on straight. If that's what you thought, you would be wrong. My jokes were so bad that I actually got fired from that job. That's correct - I was fired by Disney World from my job as a Jungle Cruise Skipper.

Everybody has their own version of rock bottom – this was mine. I felt like an endless failure and I had zero confidence. I remember being with my mother – angry, fearful, desperate, and in tears – not knowing if I could even pass a single community college class.

I had no choice but to look in the mirror and ask: What the hell am I doing with my life? The answer was not easy, nor was the path short or straight. But it has led me to this moment, standing before you as the Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives.

There are so many Oregonians who find themselves where I was two decades ago – except for the Disney World part. We have all cared deeply for someone who has struggled to find their way forward in life.

I stand before you as someone who has been in that dark place. Who has been called “dumb” and “stupid” by my own family. Who relates to the financial anxiety that so many of our students go through because I am still paying off my own student debt.

Who felt like an absolute failure.

But I also stand before you as living proof that the worst moments of our lives don't have to be our destiny.

I believe you are not defined by your failures, but instead how you move forward. We can continue to see the positive potential in people, even when they can't see those traits in themselves.

I recognize that during the most challenging moments of my childhood, I would have been treated differently by the criminal justice system if my skin color was different. It's part of the reason why I believe we must continue to center equity in our work.

That is why I wanted this job and that's why many of us are here: to make a difference in people's lives and create opportunities for Oregonians to build a better future.

That is why the work we do here in this chamber matters.

I'll conclude by saying that I believe this is the most important short session we've ever had. This is why short sessions were created — to respond to crises like the ones we are facing right now.

Like the rest of the country, Oregonians have faced immense challenges these last two years. We can give them hope that stability, safety, and a better tomorrow are possible.

We know our kids learn best when they're in a safe school environment five days a week, which is why we will work to support our teachers and schools to make that happen.

We'll bring support to working families and the small businesses that make up the backbone of our economy.

We're going to work to bring down the cost of living by making investments in key areas like housing and health care, and we'll work to address the homelessness crisis in every community in the state.

And we're going to prioritize keeping our communities safe, while we invest in mental and behavioral health services to help some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

It's been an incredibly difficult two years for all of us. That's why I ask that we extend empathy to one another and keep our focus on the work before us to help Oregonians.

Thank you. Let's get to work.