



OFFICE OF THE HOUSE SPEAKER

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NEWS RELEASE

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Oregon House of Representatives re-elects Dan Rayfield to serve as Speaker

Rayfield will highlight session priorities including housing, homelessness, behavioral health, public safety, education and more in joint session

SALEM – Today, on the opening day of the 2023 legislative session, the Oregon House of Representatives re-elected Rep. Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis) to serve as Speaker of the House.

Speaker Rayfield also addressed the joint session of the legislative assembly and highlighted the importance of working together to solve the most significant issues facing the state, including housing, homelessness and behavioral health.

“All too often we look back on a session and focus on the problems we faced,” Speaker Rayfield said. “When we look back on this session, I want it to be remembered as the session we seized unprecedented opportunities and helped government deliver on its promises.”

Speaker Rayfield was first elected as the House presiding officer in February 2022. In his first session serving in the role, he guided critical investments to support housing development, prevent homelessness, support small businesses, working families and stronger schools.

This included more support for continuing summer education opportunities; increasing and enhancing behavioral health services; a dedicated climate budget to address drought, extreme weather and infrastructure needs; and a bipartisan infrastructure package for rural Oregon.

Rayfield was formally nominated on the floor by Rep. Rob Nosse (D-Portland), chair of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care.

“We know Representative Rayfield for his ability to get things done, and his approach – his kindness and his patience,” Nosse said. “... I have trust in his values, his commitment to this state, and his ability to do this difficult job.”

The full transcript of his remarks to the joint session are available below.

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Thank you. It's wonderful to be back in the Capitol with all of you.

Growing up my dad was larger than life for me. Part of this was growing up in a military family – he was a colonel in the air force reserves and this played a significant role in our life. Much like being a legislator plays an oversized role in our family's lives.

One of the ways I connected with him was listening to the stories he'd tell when he came home from work. One of these stories has stuck with me.

It's this story that keeps popping into my head as I've been thinking about the importance of our collective leadership entering this session.

As with every weekend my father was on duty, he came home dressed in his uniform. He was standing in our kitchen decompressing during the that awkward time before changing clothes and eating dinner. In a matter-of-fact tone he told us about an about an accident that happened earlier in the day.

He described how during a mid-air refueling exercise a pilot had cut the refueling line with the rotors of his helicopter. The rotors of the helicopter were damaged and the pilot was forced to immediately set the helicopter down.

As my father finished recounting this, I was surprised to learn that the focus of the story wasn't the pilot at all. It was about the wing commander. His career, my father told me, would be negatively impacted because of this incident.

I was confused, because in my mind, the wing commander hadn't done anything wrong. It was the pilot that made the mistake. My father's response: as a leader you are responsible for everything on your watch.

This story has been on my mind lately because in a way, we are like that wing commander. All of us are united as part of a team that is collectively responsible for helping to solve our communities' greatest challenges and seizing the unprecedented opportunities facing our state right now.

So many Oregonians are relying on us to find solutions to stop their skyrocketing rent, their inability to get behavioral health care, feeling a sense of insecurity in their neighborhood. The weight of this responsibility can be scary.

I find it intimidating to acknowledge my own responsibility in this role. And if I am honest, I sometimes fear not living up to the challenge. It would be much easier to minimize my responsibility as being a part of a bigger system.

On any given day, we don't always know how we're going to deliver the results Oregonians so urgently need. But I will continuously challenge myself, and all of us, not to retreat to the bunker of problems being too big, or too complex, and pick up that weight. As individuals we will not be able to lift it. But together, on this our watch, we can.

One of the challenges we must face up to is the strength of democracy itself. Democracy is how we come together as a community to address our problems and find common cause. But trust in government is at one of its low points in American history. And we have to address this, at a time when politicians are about as popular as a root canal.

We alone, can't fix the polarization and trust issues in our country. But we can accept responsibility for our actions within these walls and make Oregon an example of how things can be done.

Part of that responsibility is to own my mistakes when I have fallen short. I have said things in this building I shouldn't have. Things that

have contributed to our overly polarized culture. And I've rightfully had to reflect on the impact of my words.

So, I ask all of us to consider what is our responsibility, as leaders of this state, to build community instead of succumbing to the pressures of a political system that incentivizes demonizing each other. We all have the chance to be a part of the problem, or part of the solution.

The truth is, regardless of affiliation, Oregonians want us to help build more housing; they want to be safe in their communities; they want better schools; and they want better support to help people struggling with mental health and addiction crises.

It's why I'm calling for us to deliver on a package of housing investments in the first 60 days of this session. Oregonians have called out for fast, decisive action to fix this crisis. We have to deliver.

Taking decisive action on this and other issues Oregonians care most about are how we strengthen our democracy and begin to change the public perception of the work we do.

All too often we look back on a session and focus on the problems we faced. When we look back on this session, I want it to be remembered as the session we seized unprecedented opportunities and helped government deliver on its promises.

And I believe that we have genuine opportunities.

We have an opportunity to improve housing supply, provide supports to those who are houseless, create pathways to homeownership, and ensure the historic investments we have made in housing, mental health care, addiction services are making an impact on the ground.

We have the opportunity to help draw down millions of federal dollars for the semiconductor industry that would put people into working

family jobs 10, 20, 30 years from now and lifting future generations of Oregonians out of poverty.

We have the opportunity to support investments in water that both improve ecology and support our agricultural industry that makes up more than 1/8th of our state's gross product.

And there are many more opportunities this session.

Now, I don't want to suggest that every moment of this session will be unicorns jumping over rainbows. We are going to have differences and challenging conversations. In fact, we should expect and embrace them – when done respectfully it's a hallmark of an effective democracy.

We'll be taking action to improve access to reproductive health care in the state. Too many Oregonians must travel over 300 miles across the state to find a provider for life-saving care.

We'll be also taking action on a series of measures to prevent the growing threat of gun violence in our communities. My son was a 1-year-old on the horrific day of the Sandy Hook tragedy. He has only known a world where events like this aren't unimaginable — they are commonplace.

I want to acknowledge it's not going to be easy for everyone in this building to take up these issues. But Oregonians expect us to do these things – and we're going to do while fostering a culture of respect. How. We. Treat. Each. Other. Matters. It will be hard, and tedious at times. That is what democracy in action looks like, and it is worth it.

I'll close by telling you how I first got involved in this work.

When I was 19 years old, I was looking for direction in my life. I found it when I learned about an opportunity to gather signatures to get campaign finance reform on the ballot.

On my days off from community college and work, I stood outside a grocery store in California. If you've ever done this work, you know how tiring and tedious it is. But I was excited about the work because I believed – and still believe – that getting money out of politics is foundational to our democracy.

I expect that each and every one of you had an experience like this. There was an issue or a candidate or a life event that sparked something inside you to say, I want to do this work.

It was a powerful enough motivator that you made this commitment to serve, knowing the sacrifices it means for you and your family.

I do not take this lightly. My son, Adam, is now 11. And while I will never complain about the opportunity to do this work on behalf of Oregonians, I know he and my wife, Amanda, would like me home a bit more.

It's why I'm so focused on how we treat each other and that we assume good intent in each other's actions. I will do everything in my power to earn and maintain your trust in me as a leader. Because while we didn't individually cause the problems facing our state today, we have a collective responsibility, on our watch, to fix them.

In that spirit, let's get to work.