



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Senate Democrats to propose bills to prevent future walkouts

SALEM – The Oregon State Senate will not send invoices collecting fines against 11 Republican state senators who walked off the job toward the end of the 2019 Legislative Session. Instead, Senate Democrats will focus on efforts to protect Oregon’s democracy by removing the ability of a minority faction to halt the work of the people by denying quorum.

Senate Democrats achieved historic results for Oregonians in the 2019 session, including passage of the Student Success Act, stabilizing Oregon’s housing crisis, paid family leave and criminal justice reform for juveniles. But twice during the 2019 Legislative Session, Senate Republicans abandoned their constitutional duties and hid in another state to deny the two-thirds quorum currently required to conduct business. During the second walkout, the Democratic Senators who remained at work moved to fine each absent senator \$500 per day for not showing up to work.

“Stopping the work of the people by denying a quorum is unconscionable and undemocratic. Senate Democrats will work to protect Oregon’s democracy by giving Oregonians and their representatives more tools to stop any future quorum denials,” Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick (D-Portland) said. “I hope our Republican colleagues now see that this is not a tactic that should ever be used again, and that they will work with us to prevent either party from walking off the job.”

Specifically, Burdick will introduce a constitutional amendment in the 2020 session to apply the same quorum requirements as all but three other states: a simple majority, which means 16 in the Senate and 31 in the House of Representatives. The current quorum requirement is two-

thirds, which means 20 Senators and 40 Representatives must be present to conduct business. The amendment would ultimately be decided by Oregon voters in the 2020 General Election.

The decision not to issue the invoices was a difficult one, given the seriousness of the walkout. But imposing the fines would have been bogged down by lengthy litigation and hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxpayer-funded legal fees. Senate Democrats will instead channel the energy that would have been expended on that effort on preventative measures, including the constitutional amendment and other bills in the short session to ensure that a small minority of legislators cannot completely shut down the legislative process.

“The 2019 Legislative Session is over,” Burdick said. “It’s time for us to focus on Oregon’s priorities for 2020 and beyond, and to ensure that we are able to deliver the results that Oregonians are counting on us to produce.”

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