



March 22, 2021

Office of the House Speaker
900 Court St NE Room 269
Salem, OR 97301

Speaker Kotek,

I have received your letter detailing your approach to this unprecedented legislative session. I share your concern for maintaining public health, and would add to that a rising concern for the need to come together to heal and recover as a state and nation.

The Oregon Legislature is not alone in navigating our obligation to fulfill the people's work while minimizing health risks. In fact, several states have implemented measures that reflect innovative management of the legislative process, focusing not only on masks and social distancing, but recognizing the inherent inadequacy of the policymaking process itself under these circumstances. Below are a sampling of states that have announced and adopted changes to their legislative approach:

- Alaska's Legislature announced an intent to [focus](#) on budget and coronavirus.
- Washington House Democrats [agreed](#) to limit the number of bills introduced in 2021.
- Virginia's House and Senate [introduced limits](#) to the number of bills that can be introduced.
- The Maryland Senate [capped](#) the number of bills a senator is allowed to introduce.
- Minnesota lawmakers announced a [focus](#) on the budget and the pandemic.

Here in Oregon, the House is running a crushing number of committees and pushing controversial legislation which impacts and reshapes our energy markets, labor practices, business mandates, criminal penalties, public safety, land use laws, housing policies, tax and spending policy, constitutional rights and quality of life. These concepts, many of which are being drafted on the fly and pushed to work sessions, are moving through committees despite substantial opposition and without a willingness to compromise or work to build bipartisan support.

Here are a few examples of the points of concern from this virtual session:

- Committees are moving contentious legislation with substantial opposition across multiple subject areas.
- The public has been given one minute, including introductions, to make their virtual case in committee, while invited proponents are given free rein.
- Committees have failed to give opponents of measures adequate opportunity to share their concerns before the members, on the record.
- Committees routinely reject alternative compromise language.
- Committee members have been asked to refrain from interactions with witnesses and instead direct their questions in writing outside of the public process.

- Work groups have not been inclusive or have been scheduled with inadequate time to fully vet complex issues.

This is not authentic engagement. This is closed door, offline, predetermined outcomes, not to be confused with meaningful bipartisanship in a public process.

As long as the building is closed to the public and deeply controversial legislation continues to be fast-tracked in committees, we will continue to depend on the Constitution, to remind the supermajority we should not operate like it's business as usual while the public is shut out.

I understand from your letter you recognize that your recently proposed work schedule does not support public health. I agree. Branch staff and legislators alike are put at extreme risk by the proposed work schedule, which is designed to exert pressure and ensure the passage of controversial legislation, at the expense of public health.

The solution to this challenge is not to marginalize the minority or dismiss the concerns of the public.

Experts have declared it is unsafe to open the building. It is no less dangerous to expose staff to more than 12 hours a day, working in a closed Capitol.

There is a better way.

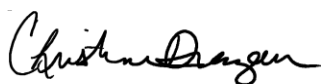
We are ready and willing to limit bill reading when the House changes course with a demonstrated commitment to work together:

- Do not exceed a regular full-time schedule for session days, to maintain public health for legislators and branch employees.
- Only advance budgets and legislation which have bipartisan consensus support.
- Shelve legislation which is divisive or controversial and not directly responsive to the pandemic or natural disasters.
- Require committees balance time among opponents and proponents.
- Make agenda space for full participation from committee members in deliberations and amendments.

This is a year for healing, in our state and nation; a time to come together. It is not a time for deeply divisive, partisan legislation while the public is locked out of the building. Struggling Oregonians don't deserve to be traumatized further. Instead, let's give them hope.

I look forward to working with you to find a path forward and encourage you to work with us to not only protect public health but find common ground in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,



Christine Drazan
House Republican Leader