

Testimony for Special Committee on Dec 21, 2020

From: Casey Kulla, June 10, 2021

As both a Yamhill County Commissioner and a resident in House District 23, I ask you to vote to move the resolution to expel Rep. Nearman to the floor of the House for a vote. It is the right thing to do, for staff safety and for our democracy.

As you learned, Rep. Nearman planned and opened a locked door at the state Capitol to allow folks into the closed-to-the-public Capitol, folks who immediately clashed with Oregon State troopers and assaulted them with bear mace. After being pushed out of the Capitol, they then smashed windows on the Capitol building and assaulted journalists (the assembly of protesters was then declared a riot by Salem police).

As I mentioned when I called for Rep. Nearman to resign back in January (<https://newsregister.com/article?articleTitle=casey-kulla-nearman-has-forfeited-right-to-hold-public-office--1610834951--39131--commentary>), the protesters engaged in protected behavior initially while outside the Capitol. Once they forced their way in, their behavior was no longer protected and was unlawful. Rep. Nearman's behavior in planning and executing this breach was also unlawful. And, his email inbox was filled with the same emails as mine before the attack, many coming from an email petition organized by the Peoples' Rights Network. Many of these emails were violent in language and imagery, from phrases like "awash with blood" to threats of "frontier justice."

Unless Rep. Nearman was completely ignorant or did not read his correspondence, he was fully aware that the folks he let in to the Capitol were violent and expressed the intent to stop legislative proceedings. In many ways, the breach of the closed Oregon Capitol looked like a dress rehearsal for the attack on the US Capitol, which was also an attempt to stop legislative proceedings. It is my understanding that there were Oregonians who participated in both attacks. This extreme, violent, and anti-democracy behavior must stop, and there must be consequences. Expulsion of Rep. Nearman is a way to hold him accountable for his actions December 21st.

I realize that there are Oregonians who think Rep. Nearman did nothing wrong, including people within his own district. A portion of Oregonians distrust the legislature and the courts and the Governor, and think the you at the legislature are not acting properly. His unlawful actions and the looming expulsion vote and the disagreement over them are another example of profound disagreement in our state about the very fundamentals of our democratic society. All around me, I see wedges pounded into our communities, driven in to divide us one from another, forcing us to take sides in issues we never considered before. I take the side that I believe is right and just (the side of "expel Rep. Nearman"), but I also realize this fundamental truth: we are all Oregonians who still live, work, play, cry, and love in this beautiful state.

How, then, do we get along? *Can* we get along? Each of us has a unique story, a life full of heartache and joy, trauma and gratitude. And in Oregon, just like the rest of our nation, there are people who feel left out of decisions, alienated from power, subjects rather than agents of their own lives. From the Klamath Basin to House District 23 to urban Portland, there are Oregonians who feel left behind and out of options. Some people lash out, in response, and some support unlawful actions and inflammatory and dangerous speech. To be clear: I believe that a person's beliefs are their beliefs, however repugnant, but crossing over into intimidation and harm towards others is completely unacceptable.

Can we get along? Is that even a worthwhile goal? Yes. We all have different experiences in life, and sometimes, those experiences create what looks like diametrically opposed views. But, our state is large: I think there is room for all of us. And we share many concerns: mental health crisis is still mental health crisis, whether in Malheur or Multnomah County. Ending homelessness is a priority across the state. Safe and fairly-compensated work is a priority across the state. Love of outdoors? That, too. Over the past three Legislative sessions, I've watched you as legislators go from working together to being profoundly opposed to back to working together, even on contentious issues. You have found the space to get along, and I think we all can, too. Thank you for modeling that work.

For some Oregonians, getting along looks like "live and let live," or "you do you." Others don't have a choice but to work together: the Klamath Basin overallocation of limited water is an example, as is the ongoing mediation between timber companies and environmentalists. I am a member of one of the rules advisory committees for the state greenhouse gas reduction

program, along with advocates for social justice and climate action and lobbyists for petroleum and natural gas associations. I have seen the advocates on both sides agree that we have to take climate action, while disagreeing about the details. And somewhere in the middle, we'll find a spot where there are meaningful cuts to carbon emissions and improved health for vulnerable people while limiting the harm to the fuel companies and users.

Rep. Nearman's actions were wrong, and he should be held accountable through expulsion. *And*, there are Oregonians who agree with him who continue to feel left out. To be clear, *across* the political spectrum, significant numbers of Oregonians feel left out, feel like they don't have access to power, and feel like the systems don't help them. We still have a democracy, and elected leaders have a mandate to hear, to listen, to learn, from all the diverse voices in our land, and to re-build our society so that each person can live their life, as much as possible, on their own terms.

Extremism needs to be stopped, and violent suppression of democracy has no place in our state. And, all Oregonians should feel like they can be part of the process, even those of us who cannot vote. Can we get along? Yes, but first, there needs to be healing and accountability; Rep. Nearman's expulsion is an important step.

Thank you for taking on this hard work of doing what is right.