

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

*Lost Your
Lawmakers?
Check Idaho*

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Oregon Senate
Republicans flee;
A cabin hideout

BY IAN LOVETT

SOMEWHERE IN IDAHO—
Four days after fleeing his home in Oregon, State Senator Cliff Bentz is still figuring out how to be a fugitive.

He has changed hotels twice (partly to keep down costs) and bought a burner cellphone (he's sure the authorities can track his regular phone). But on Sunday, he still hadn't set the burner up and was making calls on his usual cell.

"I don't think any of us have really been—I hate to say on the lam, but..." Mr. Bentz said. "It's probably incorrect to be talking to you on this phone. They don't give classes on this."

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Oregon Senators Flee State

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Sen. Bentz and the 10 other Republicans in the Oregon Senate decamped the capital last week in an effort to block a landmark climate bill. Without at least two GOP members present, the Senate—despite the Democratic supermajority—doesn't have a quorum and can't pass the bill, which would create a statewide cap-and-trade system to limit carbon emissions.

Gov. Kate Brown has directed the Oregon State Police to find the rogue Republicans, who are now trying to adjust to life in hiding. The state constitution allows the majority party to “compel” the legislators to attend.

Tensions have grown so high since the senators disappeared

that the state Capitol was shut down Saturday after threats from militia groups, the nature of which police didn't disclose. It opened again on Sunday, but the Democrats, lacking a quorum, still couldn't call a vote.

“They need to return and do the jobs they were elected to do,” Gov. Brown, who supports the cap-and-trade bill, said on Thursday.

The state police's jurisdiction stops at the state line, and so the missing senators have fanned out across the Western U.S. to stay out of their grasp. Most have left the state, and refuse to say much about where they are. Mr. Bentz would say only that he was in Idaho.

Herman E. Baertschiger Jr., Oregon's Senate minority leader, wouldn't even say what state he was in. The answer became clear, however, when Mr. Baertschiger's phone died and he borrowed one from a colleague standing nearby: Mr. Bentz.

Idaho, the closest state controlled entirely by Republicans, is a popular destination for

many in Oregon's GOP diaspora. Idaho state police have said they aren't involved in any search for the senators, because they haven't broken any laws in Idaho. As a result, Mr. Bentz decided he could relax some of the spy-craft. “The hiding piece, I'm not taking that terrifically seriously,” he said on his (non-burner) phone. “There's a lot of discussion about how you should wrap your phone in tin foil.”

After cleaning out his Salem, Ore., apartment near the Capitol—his lease, like the legislative session, ends on June 30—Republican State Sen. Tim Knopp spent Wednesday night in Oregon, then drove to Washington state on Thursday. He thought of staying there, but decided it wasn't safe.

“You have a Democratic governor in Washington running for president on climate change,” he said, referring to Gov. Jay Inslee. “What better way to energize that campaign than to return intransigent Republicans so they can vote on climate change? I was like, I've got to

get out of here.”

He soon drove his Ford Fusion (a hybrid, he noted) across the border to Idaho. A friend set him up in a lakeside cabin, where a reporter from The Wall Street Journal visited on Sunday.

Though the accommodation is basic, he said he has everything he needs there to camp

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out as long as necessary. He watches the Oregon Senate sessions on his iPad, and has enough cell reception to talk to his 11-year-old daughter via Skype. He said he might change things up by sleeping in the tepee outside one night. There is just one thing he's missing. “In the rush to pack the car, the socks did not get there,” he said.

“So, I've got two pairs.” There is a washing machine at the cabin.

The Oregon's Senate Republicans have joined a long tradition of American legislators who flee their states as a last resort to stop legislation. In recent years, as Republicans have taken control of a majority of legislatures across the country, the lawmakers on the lam have more often been Democrats.

In 2011, Democrats from both Wisconsin and Indiana ran to Illinois to stop legislatures in their states from passing bills that limited public-sector unions and collective-bargaining rights. Democrats fled Texas for Oklahoma in 2003, hoping to stop redistricting legislation.

In 2001, Oregon's Democratic state senators went into hiding to stop a Republican redistricting plan—a history members of the current minority party invoke when defending their own unauthorized vacations.

Mr. Baertschiger, the Republican leader, said his members were determined to stay out of the state for as long as it took to get the concessions they wanted

on the climate bill. “I don't know what that means in terms of time, but they're very dedicated,” he said.

Ginny Burdick, the Oregon Senate majority leader, said the Democrats have been talking with Republicans but wouldn't compromise on the carbon cap-and-trade bill.

Gov. Brown has said she would call a special session, set to begin July 2, if the lawmakers don't return and finish their business this month. Creating a special session could keep Republicans on the run.

Mr. Bentz, the assistant Republican leader, said he was potentially prepared to stay away for months, but was already feeling the financial effects of his time away from home. In addition to the \$500 a day fines the governor has imposed on all senators who aren't there, he has a small farm at home, and he has no one to help irrigate it while he's gone. “The little crop of hay and stuff that I raise is burning up,” he said.

—Ethan Millman contributed to this article.