

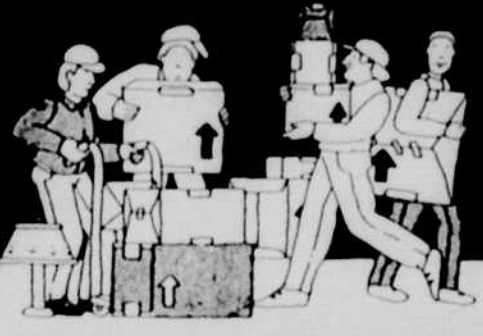
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Candidates exchange jabs



SALEM (AP) — Democrat John Kitzhaber responded angrily Wednesday to a jab from another candidate for governor, Republican Craig Berkman, who said "not every patient left his emergency room alive and well."

"I take my career seriously, and it was a cheap shot," said Kitzhaber.

Kitzhaber also accused Berkman of "flip-flopping" on the Oregon health plan by first endorsing it and then trashing it during an appearance at last weekend's Dorchester Conference in Seaside.

Berkman denied that he had done an about-face on the health plan, and also said he did not mean to insult Kitzhaber with his comment about emergency room patients.

"Tell the good doctor to lighten up a little bit," Berkman said.

The controversy began Sunday when Berkman and his rival for the GOP nomination, Denny

Smith, took turns criticizing the health plan at a joint appearance at the Dorchester Conference, an annual Republican meeting.

Kitzhaber, an emergency room physician and former Senate president, has gained national attention for writing the health plan and helping shepherd it through the Legislature.

But Smith said the plan would cost the state too much by extending Medicaid coverage to 120,000 poor people. Berkman said it would bankrupt small businesses by forcing them to provide health coverage for uninsured workers.

Berkman made the comment about Kitzhaber's emergency room patients almost as an aside at Sunday's Dorchester meeting.

The Portland businessman said he was trying to make the point that "not everyone's ideas work out just as not everyone who goes to an emergency room leaves there cured."

"All I was saying is that all of his ideas didn't work out," Berkman said.

Kitzhaber said Berkman's use of the emergency room analogy

was "shallow behavior" that "brings into serious question Mr. Berkman's ability to lead our great state as governor."

"I have a thick skin," Kitzhaber said. "But tearing down one's opponent instead of telling people why they should vote for you is what's wrong with American politics. It says a lot more about him than it does about me."

Kitzhaber said it is "enormously inconsistent" for Berkman to criticize the health plan after taking him to dinner at the White House in April 1992 so that he could lobby then-President Bush for federal approval of Oregon's plan.

But Berkman, who was state Republican chairman at the time, said he wasn't endorsing the plan but thought Kitzhaber should at least have a chance to try to sell the health plan to the president.

"His logic is as fuzzy as a peach if he's suggesting that I was endorsing a plan that wasn't finalized until a year and a half later," Berkman said.

Deputy hired to keep the peace

LA PINE (AP) — For the first time in the history of this central Oregon town, somebody is wearing a gun to school. And a badge.

Deputy Neil Mackey, a 10-year veteran of the Deschutes County Sheriff's Department, has been hired to patrol the town's school district, a service previously limited to schools in urban areas such as Portland and Eugene.

Dressed in the same uniform he wore on the streets — complete with badge, walkie-talkie and a loaded gun — Mackey has been on the job for two weeks, talking to kids from kindergarten through high school.

Concerned about slow law enforcement response times, La Pine residents and school staff lobbied to bring a deputy to the school full time. Some parents and many students question whether the schools really need him, but he has been welcomed during his first two weeks on the beat.

"He's pretty cool," said Kate Boles, a high

school freshman.

The job is paid for partly by the school district, which may have trouble finding money to renew the position next year.

Mackey, 35, will teach crime prevention courses and deal with emergencies or lawbreakers. He already has experience visiting schools to talk about issues such as stranger awareness, gun safety and avoiding drugs.

Other potential topics range from babysitting to the legal system, he said.

Besides visiting classrooms, he plans to talk to students, walk the campuses and eat in school lunchrooms so kids get to know him.

"Respect is not something you can demand," he said.

Mackey says he would rather give advice than interfere, telling students: "I'm not here to change your lives. I'm not here to harass you. I'm here to help if I can."

Boy learns to adjust to being different

ASHLAND (AP) — He reads just like any kid, but with his hands; he plays like any kid, but doesn't move around as much; and he sees just like any kid, with every sense but vision.

Alexander Prince is a typical, lively and inquisitive 9-year-old. He is also congenitally blind, and learning to recognize his differences and adjust to them.

"Anyone who's different from me is different, whether it's a different gender or different culture," said Agafia Prince, Alexander's mother, describing the problems associated with a visually impaired or blind child trying to fit into a sighted world. "Blind people are different. You can't change that, you just accept it."

Prince said that the key for a blind person to be successful and learn is experience. The common responses of "wait" or the redundant "I'm sorry" will never help a blind child to grow, she said. And the attitude that "I'll just do it myself so it's easier and faster" may accomplish tasks faster, but sacrifices the blind child's role.

"He has to understand all the possibilities of what a person could mean when they say, 'There's a chair to your left,'" Prince said about her son. "When he touches it, he's not touching a chair, he's touching a corner —

a fragment."

Prince used the example of stuffed animals. "They may seem like the perfect gift, but most blind people don't like them."

Instead of playing with furry animals, Alexander likes to get the eggs from chickens, feed the goats and play with the parrot. "It makes these noises — and says, 'Give me a kiss, give me a kiss,'" said Alexander of the parrot.

A popular boy whose schoolmates call him "Axi," Alexander is now at the age where he is gaining awareness of how he differs from sighted children. He hears one classmate talking to another from across the room and feels kids rushing past him, moving and talking quickly. Sometimes, "he's sad that he's different," his mother said.

The problem, she continued, is that Alexander doesn't know how. He has spent a lot of time lately with a trained aide, who is helping him to learn, but the experience isn't contributing to the natural interaction with other kids.

"If a child is offended by someone with a disability, they won't say 'cut it out' or punch the child," said Prince. She compared it with being a stranger to a new culture: Without knowing what is right or what is wrong, the person will often just not do

anything. Blindness is a separate culture in itself too, she said. People aren't sure how to act, so many times the easiest method is to walk away.

Prince said that instead of using visual signals as a means of interpreting others, blind people need verbal communication to understand. Blind children can't understand frustrated or angry looks. They don't know that folding your arms means you're annoyed or backing away from the conversation. They don't see tears until they feel them, and they don't always understand happiness without laughter.

Learning nonverbal language in order to communicate and fit in with other kids is not only difficult, but also "trying to make someone live in a culture that they don't belong in," said Prince.

Alexander's favorite movies are "Aladdin" and "Pinocchio."

He'll keep drinking Coke when his dad orders espresso, and he'll play basketball with his friends as he usually does. And with time, he'll understand that his difference isn't a setback.

"My goal for him is independence," said Prince. "I just want him to figure it out like we can figure it out — on his own terms."