

EDITORIAL FROM POLITICAL REPORTER DICK HUGHES

Would ousting Brown improve Oregon?

As Oregonians decide whether to sign petitions to recall Gov. Kate Brown from office, it is worth thinking back to whom she displaced as governor. That would be Gov. John Kitzhaber and first lady Cylvia Hayes.

Kitzhaber was hounded from office in 2015 after both were accused of conflicts of interest, particularly by blurring the lines between Hayes' public role and her private business endeavors. Subsequent investigations uncovered more smoke than fire. Kitzhaber agreed last year to pay a \$20,000 fine to the state ethics commission, and this spring Hayes settled for a \$50,000 fine.

It is difficult to argue that the state was well-served by the public rush to judgment against Kitzhaber.

His resignation catapulted then-Secretary of State Brown into the governorship. A continuing irony is that it was Republicans who stood up for Democrat Kitzhaber and helped finance his legal defense. Republicans recognized he was being railroaded from office. They also preferred his collaborative approach and moderately progressive views to Brown's all-out liberalism.

Brown served the rest of Kitzhaber's term and was elected last fall to what would be a final four-year term for her. Now, separate recall efforts have been launched by the Oregon Republican Party and by Michael Cross of Flush Down Kate Brown and the Oregon First! PAC. To force a recall election that could remove her from office, either group has until mid-October to collect just over 280,000 valid signatures from voters.

The first lesson from the Kitzhaber fiasco is whether Oregonians would be better off with a known quantity as governor or someone new.

A successful recall would elevate State Treasurer Tobias Read to the governorship. The current secretary of state, Republican Bev Clarno from Central Oregon, was appointed to the position after Dennis Richardson's death and, as an appointee, is barred by the state constitution from filling a gubernatorial vacancy.

Read, a Beaverton Democrat, is bright, politically ambitious and well-regarded nationally for Oregon's programs to promote retirement savings. To much of Oregon, however, he remains relatively unknown.

Voters should be paying close attention and evaluating his leadership because there's a good chance he will run for governor — whether it's to succeed Brown in 2022 or, if she is recalled this year, as the short-term incumbent in a special election next year to finish her term.

In contrast, a related question is whether Brown, like Kitzhaber, eventually will mellow and moderate while in office. Of course, that took Kitzhaber until his unprecedented third term as governor; and, unfortunately for Oregonians, Brown has shown no such inclination. Asked recently whether she planned to veto Republicans' legislation in retribution for their state Senate walkout in June, Brown told Politico, "I will just say ... revenge is a dish best served cold and slowly."

Brown was the Democrats' key negotiator in the deal with Senate Republicans that ended their first walkout. She takes things personally, instead of recognizing that her and others' lack of clarity and specificity in that deal led to the second walkout.

Still, Brown is not the dominant cause of our state government's overreach and undisciplined spending. She is the enabler. She possesses the bully pulpit, she can institute her will through agency appointments and directives, but the greater fault lies with the Legislature that makes the laws — and ultimately with voters who have allowed one political party to dominate.

Instead of making gains in 2018, Republicans went the other way, allowing Democrats to achieve supermajorities in both chambers of the Legislature. One-party rule is not good for the state, regardless of which party it is.

Next year, three statewide offices are up for election — secretary of state, treasurer and attorney general — along with a majority of legislative seats. With the exception of certain urban legislative districts that are inexorably Democratic, each of those races provides an opportunity for Republicans to bring balance to our state government. A case can be made that the GOP should focus on those efforts — recruiting and financing excellent, independent-minded candidates who can appeal to voters in swing districts.

The recall campaigns against Brown may be great for venting political frustration, but the question for voters is: Would ousting a governor improve Oregon?



Investment in rural business is vital

It's a story I've heard too many times in my own life and in the lives of the many small business owners I meet:

Person grows up in a small town. Person moves to a city or urban area for college or work. Person yearns to return to the small-town life they love or return to raise their children in the same environment where they grew up. However, a lack of job opportunities makes this American Dream unattainable.

While it's heartening to see many of our region's major metropolitan areas flourish in this unprecedented booming economy, we need to include investment in rural communities as well. Forty-six million people live in rural America. And according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 69% of counties in Oregon are defined as rural — a substantial segment.

Rural small businesses make a huge and critical impact on our state's economy, the U.S. economy and even the global economy. For instance, many of the top 10 exports from Oregon are manufacturing products, a mainstay industry of rural communities.

While traditional rural sectors such as agriculture, mining and manufacturing employ a smaller percentage of the population than before, they continue to anchor the economies of more than half of the nation's counties, including right here in our own backyard.

Our strength depends on our rural communities' ability to thrive in the new global economy, build and attract an educated workforce, expand its population base, and use its diverse and abundant natural resources to provide food, fiber, forest products, energy and recreation.

Rural communities face economic challenges different from those in urban areas. Access to public transportation, housing, higher education and job training may limit rural areas' abilities to thrive economically.

Resourcefulness, innovation, common-sense problem-solving and a reverence for hard work are familiar attributes of people in rural areas. They're also the attributes of successful entrepreneurs.

At the U.S. Small Business Administration, we see an opportunity to elevate rural economies through entrepreneurship and small business support. That is why the SBA teamed up with the USDA to empower rural America through our Rural Strong initiative. We are putting special emphasis on supporting rural economies with additional outreach to educate rural communities about access to technical assistance, capital, exporting resources, Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZones) and Opportunity Zones. The SBA is also offering fee relief on SBA-guaranteed 7(a) loans up to \$150,000 in rural counties as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

My Voice

Jeremy Field is the regional administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration Pacific Northwest Region. The SBA



empowers entrepreneurs and small businesses with resources to start, grow, expand or recover. My Voice columns should be 500 to 750 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

Like most things in life, we can't do it alone. It takes all of us to invest in the communities that define our nation and many of our shared values.

By investing in rural small businesses, we invest in growing our local and national economy. We invest in strengthening our contribution to the global economy. And most important, we invest in our neighbors living the American Dream.

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