

Governor makes lasting impact in Oregon with 100 judges appointed

Gov. Kate Brown has aimed for diversity as she fills vacancies in state courts

By LES ZAITZ
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — Kate Brown was on the job as Oregon's governor for just a week in 2015 when she posted an opening for a state judge.

Three months later, she named a prosecutor to be a Lane County Circuit Court judge.

Now, seven years later, Brown has made her 100th appointment to Oregon courts.

Her influence on the judicial system will last far beyond her time in office, which ends next January.

She has named most of the justices on the Oregon Supreme Court.

Nine of the 13 judges on the Oregon Court of Appeals are her appointees.

Her appointments leave the state's court system more diverse.

The judges she has appointed at the circuit court level deal with everything from divorces to business disputes to murder prosecutions. They work out of the courtroom as mediators and negotiators. They preside in courthouses in every county seat in Oregon.

"This is one of the most important constitutional responsibilities of the governor," Brown said in an interview with the Capital Chronicle.

She has established an elaborate process for picking judges.

A 10-page application form is the starting point. Besides the typical work and school history, Brown asks for the names of opposing lawyers that potential appointees



Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter, File

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has appointed the majority of those on the Oregon Supreme Court and Oregon Court of Appeals.

tees have faced in the courtroom. She also wants the names of judges who have seen the candidates in the courtroom.

Brown's staff consults judges serving in the county where there is an opening, getting a sense of what experience is needed. The vetting process also includes talks with local officials and sometimes a review by the local bar association.

Extensive vetting

"It did add more process, but extensive vetting and including more voices in the selection process is healthy," according to an emailed statement from Kamron Graham, a Portland attorney and president of the Oregon State Bar.

A panel of the governor's lawyers and attorneys from the community conduct interviews, narrowing the field to two or three finalists. The Oregon State Police also conducts deep background investigations of the finalists.

When that work is done, Brown gets a notebook, sometimes 100 pages or more, with detailed information about each finalist. She then does her own interviews, typically lasting 15 minutes.

Brown, herself an attorney, drills deep into the notebook to question candidates

for a particular judicial philosophy, but empathy for Oregonians is key.

"What I hear from Oregonians about the judicial system is that they want to be heard, they want a judge who will listen to them," Brown said.

Brown said life experiences are as important to her as legal knowledge.

"Their decisions have to reflect the communities they represent," Brown said. "They have to be respectful of the people who live in those communities."

She is alert to the impact on criminal justice.

"I want to make sure that I am appointing judges who understand the disparate impact that our criminal justice system has had on people of color and people of low incomes," the governor said.

APPOINTMENTS BY THE NUMBERS

- Women — 52
- Blacks — 10
- LGBTQ — 8
- Asian/South Asian — 7
- Latina/Latino/Latinx — 7
- Native American — 1

Courts:

- Circuit Court — 83
- Court of Appeals — 10
- Supreme Court — 6
- Tax Court — 1

in Eugene, to be a Lane County Circuit Court judge.

"The citizens of Lane County will benefit from her passionate commitment to ensuring equal justice to all litigants," Brown said in her May 15, 2015, announcement.

Almost exactly seven years later, Brown made appointment No. 100, naming Jacqueline Alarcón as a Multnomah County Circuit Court judge.

Alarcón was born in Los Angeles but grew up through high school in El Salvador. She has practiced family law since getting her law degree from Willamette University. She is currently president of the Multnomah Bar Association and Oregon Women Lawyers and is on the board of Basic Rights Oregon and Familias en Acción.

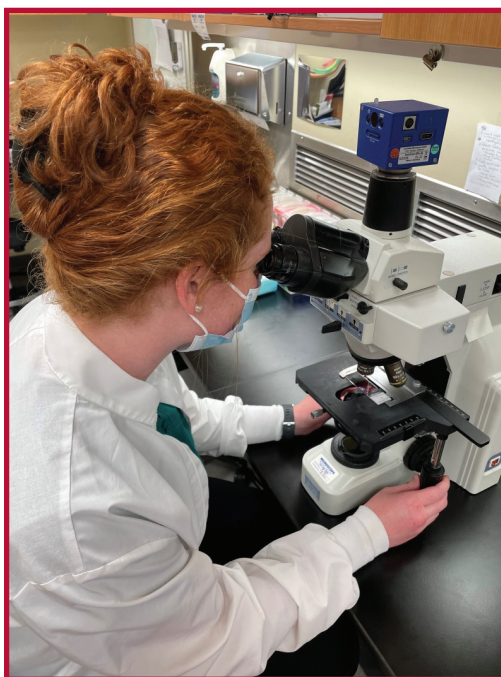
Balance, not quotas

"We are getting closer to a judiciary that better reflects the community," said Graham. "This too is healthy and a goal that the Oregon State Bar supports."

The governor's first appointment was a woman. She named Karrie McIntyre, a former county prosecutor and civil attorney

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