

Questions for Kate

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top 5 in the country, but he's opposed every plan that would increase revenue to pay for it. He says he would make affordable housing a priority, but opposes the Metro bond measure that would build it. And he's campaigning all over the state on a platform of slashing public employee compensation: He wants to take the 6 percent of payroll that most public employees now contribute to individual retirement accounts and use that to make up for investment losses on the employer side of the pension ledger.

Buehler didn't ask for any union endorsements. And he didn't get any. Brown, by contrast, is endorsed by virtually every Oregon union that makes endorsements. [The one exception is the Oregon Machinists Council, which pulled its endorsement during her 2016 campaign after she spoke in favor of the NAFTA-style Trans-Pacific Partnership; they might have considered backing her this year, but she didn't ask.]

As a candidate, Brown is low key — not the sort to whip up audiences up at mass rallies. But union officers who have worked with her see big differences between her agenda and that of her opponent. That's why they're campaigning energetically for her reelection.

To talk about her record and her proposals on some of the issues that matter most to working people, I spoke with her by phone Oct. 2. [The interview has been condensed, with editorial comments in brackets.]

You've been governor three and a half years. By my count, the thing that has most improved the lives of working people has been the minimum wage increase. Can you tell the story of what you did to shape that legislation and get it passed?

As you might recall, our labor friends had filed a couple of ballot measures, and I was adamant that we come up with a legislative solution, as opposed to going to the ballot. So working with key staffers like Elana Pirtle-Guiney [former AFL-CIO political director], we put together a couple of rooms — one of business and one of labor — to talk about what they wanted to achieve. We met multiple times. We never put the room together, but as a result of that work, we were able to shape a proposal to recognize



NO THANKS, KNUTE: Outside KGW-TV studios in Portland Oct. 9 — where the third and final gubernatorial debate was about to take place — about 120 firefighters, teachers and other public employee union members gathered to cheer on Governor Kate Brown ... and denounce Republican challenger Knute Buehler for his plans to slash public employee compensation. Buehler has proposed to scrap the state's defined-benefit pension system going forward, replacing it with a 401(k)-style retirement savings account.

two economic regions. The Senate added a third economic region. And honestly we were the first state in the entire country to have a minimum wage bill reflect the different economic regions of the state.

It's had a huge impact by now — the minimum wage has increased \$2.75 an hour since then in Portland, and \$1.25 in the rural areas.

We were also the fifth state in the nation, I think, to pass paid sick leave. And then we were the first state in the entire country to pass the "fair scheduling" bill.

I live in Portland, and almost everywhere you go, there are people sleeping in the streets. Why are so many Oregonians homeless?

Because between 2000 and 2015 we under-built housing by 150,000 units. And for whatever reason — and I have to tell you, I can't find the answer — we have been a state that has not focused on sheltering people. Both of those need to change, and they are changing quickly. In February I fought for \$5 million for shelter care to get families off the streets — distributed to Multnomah, Lane, Deschutes and other counties, so that they could provide shelter care.

You have a housing plan. What are the highlights of that?

I would say we've made consistent progress, but we cannot only focus on the metropolitan area. Just to give you an example: We have steadily increased the number of affordable units that are low income housing in the pipeline. 2016

was 3,500; 2017 was 4,000. This year we have 7,800 units under development, and they are spread out throughout the entire state. The focus is on getting children and families off the street, the chronically homeless, and our veterans. And we have been working to provide local jurisdictions with more tools, speed up permitting processes, build ADUs [accessory dwelling units], granny flats for example, much more quickly. But we've also worked to move forward on inclusionary zoning, which my opponent opposes. [She's referring to 2016's SB 1533, which slightly loosened a state ban on "inclusionary zoning" — that's where cities mandate that developers make a portion of new units affordable as a condition of getting building permits.] We are hoping to invest significantly more money. Because the best thing you can do to get people off the streets is build affordable units. We've invested roughly \$300 million in affordable housing, homelessness prevention, and rental assistance in the last three years. ... Moving forward, we want to invest \$370 million in the next couple of years.

You mentioned "tools for local jurisdictions." House Speaker Tina Kotek has said that it's time to lift the statewide ban on local jurisdictions enacting rent stabilization [rent control]. Would you sign that legislation?

If it got to my desk, yes. My preferred approach is tackling prohibiting people being evicted with no cause whatsoever, making sure that we are providing tenants with

the technical assistance they need so they have the assistance, get questions answered, concerns addressed. And that we would be focused on providing relocation assistance for tenants who are being dislocated.

Relocation assistance from the state or from the landlords?

I think we're open to what that looks like.

Knute Buehler apparently has said he won't sign any spending bills until there's a PERS [Oregon Public Employee Retirement System] reform bill, and I wanted to know your perspective. Is Oregon done cutting public employee benefits, or do you see more work to be done on PERS?

Bluster and threats haven't been very successful. [Laughs.] Bluster and threats aren't a successful way to lead state government. It certainly hasn't been successful for Donald Trump. So, do I think that we should increase expectations on our hard-working dedicated public servants that give their lives to educating our children, keeping us safe, and fighting fires? I believe our hard-working public servants that dedicate their lives to serving Oregonians deserve a safe, secure, and affordable retirement. Is there more work to be done on the PERS system? Absolutely. But I think there's some things that we can do that don't rip out the rug from underneath our hard-working public employees. And you know, they make a really tough choice. These folks make a decision to go into public service. Some of them could

be making millions more in the private sector, getting large bonuses. Again, they deserve a public retirement system that enables them to lead a good life after retiring, and by that I mean not one living in poverty. You probably know that after the result of the changes in 2003, the average public employee retirement is now about \$2,300 a month, meaning less than \$30,000 a year. So if you really want to reduce employer rates, we have to pay down our unfunded actuarial liability. That's the work I have been doing and working with Republicans and Democrats to do. Do I believe our public employees need to have more skin in the game? Absolutely. That's why I worked to make sure that 98 percent of our state public employees are picking up their 6 percent [Ed. she's referring to the 6 percent employee contribution mandated by PERS, which the state picked up in the 1980s instead of increasing wages.] But we also have to take into account generational inequities, and we have to make sure that we aren't causing more harm to the system and not solving the problem in the short term. So I would just argue that my opponent's proposal may cost more in the long term than it would solve the problem in the short term.

Why do you think Phil Knight is giving gobs and gobs of cash to your opponent?

Because he's a Republican and he wants a governor he can control. I don't know. It is absolutely inappropriate that one person be able to buy a megaphone so loud that it drowns out all the other voices of the system. That's why I have consistently supported campaign finance reform. I continue to do so. My opponent ran on campaign finance reform in 2012, and once he got elected, he said, "Oh, I don't think I want to do that anymore." He changed his mind.

What kind of campaign finance reform do you think Oregon could enact?

I think we can do a Constitutional Amendment, amending Article 2 Section 8, the elections clause, and allow the legislature or the people to enact reasonable limits. I think there's a lot of models out there. I look forward to working with my allies to tackle it over the next couple of years.

READ THE FULL INTERVIEW

Climate change. State college tuition. The special session she called to pass a business tax cut. To read the interview in its entirety, visit:

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