

KATE BROWN AND GREEN AGENDAS

Where is Oregon's new governor on the environment?

• **Springfield is in mourning**, as are we all, for the pedestrian tragedy on Main Street that killed three children and seriously injured their mother Feb. 22. As we go to press we haven't heard why the pickup driver hit the family, but regardless, the long and busy Main Street corridor has long been hazardous for walkers, bicyclists, pets and wildlife. Reducing the speed limit on this state highway would be an obvious first step. More pedestrian refuge islands are needed. And we appreciate those crosswalks we see around Eugene that allow pedestrians to activate flashing warning lights day and night. All this takes money, but how much are lives worth?

• According to the *R-G*, **Lane Community College** received a "scathing" review from its accreditation board, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, but we are not seeing it and neither is LCC President Mary Spilde. After the *R-G* article came out on Feb. 22, Spilde emailed LCC faculty and employees to say that "scathing" is pretty much an inaccurate and severely misleading way to put it." She points out that out of 113 standards, the community college was only out of compliance with five standards, and tells her colleagues, "Accreditation is a process of continuous improvement and receiving recommendations is a normal result."

The letter from the board to Spilde spends as many words praising LCC as it does suggesting improvements, lauding its "innovative, creative work." And as long as we're pointing out the good LCC does, we noticed the school is starting an Egan Warming Center on campus for 10 of its homeless students. Has someone at LCC made a difference in your life? Send us suggestions for Happening People to editor@eugeneweekly.com.

• **Shelley Poticha** came home to Eugene Feb. 23 to speak at the UO School of Art and Architecture as the director of Urban Solutions for the Natural Resources Defense Council. She is formerly director of the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities in President Obama's Department of Housing and Urban Development, and is leading NRDC in a new direction, into our cities, in the fight against extreme climate change. That makes sense with 80 percent of Americans living in cities and nearby suburbs. Her theme is a familiar one in Eugene: "We must get people out of their cars."

• We were convinced even before we heard **UO professor of education Jerry Rosiek** talk to the Eugene City Club on Feb. 20 that mandatory, standardized, high-stakes testing is not good for school improvement. He effectively nailed down that thesis and added a new challenge: "We need to renew trust in schools and teachers." Let's do it. How?

• How easy is it to get **historic designation** for a residential property? Last week we wrote in our news section about the convoluted and time-consuming process in Eugene. A public hearing was held Feb. 19 on a property at the corner of Jefferson and 13th and we hear the city has given the owners tentative approval for City Historic Landmark designation (see story and photo at wkly.ws/1yc). Is Springfield doing more than Eugene in saving and honoring its significant buildings? This week the historic Washburne District in Springfield celebrates a new addition: The historic Jenkins House has been moved from Glenwood, where it once faced a bulldozer to make way for a new hotel. The Jenkins House, now at the corner of 4th and D, has been restored and remodeled and will open to the public to view from 4 to 6 pm Thursday, Feb. 26. We like these stories.

• We've run **Activist Alert** every week for more years than we can remember. Why? As Peter Benensen, founder of Amnesty International, famously said, "It's better to light a candle than curse the darkness." Being politically engaged is healthier than being cynical. Doing something, even reading a newspaper and having a conversation about current issues, feels better than doing nothing. And standing up for principles of truth and justice is the best way to honor all those people who have sacrificed so much for us in the past. There's much work to be done, and always will be. Let's get to it.

While her previous position as Oregon's secretary of state typically did not put her in the environmental spotlight, Oregon's new Governor Kate Brown is no stranger to green agendas or protests. In summer of 2012, members of Cascadia Earth First! and Eugene's own Cascadia Forest Defenders locked themselves together at Brown's office at the state Capitol to call attention to logging in the Elliott State Forest.

As secretary of state, Brown was a member of the State Land Board, which governs the Elliott, and she will continue on the SLB as governor. Logging on state and federal lands is among the many green issues that Brown will be asked to take a position on in the coming months.

In addition to a law degree from Lewis and Clark, Brown has a BA in environmental conservation from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

The media and GOP lawmakers have linked former governor John Kitzhaber's downfall to his fiancée Sylvia Hayes' clean energy work, and some predicted this would slow down climate bills in the Legislature, but so far that has not borne out. The clean fuels bill, a Kitzhaber priority that extends Oregon's low-carbon fuel standard, has passed in the Oregon Senate.

"There might have been a scandal, but that doesn't follow to Kate Brown," says Doug Moore of the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV).

"I think we just have to be a little patient right now because folks in the Legislature are hurting; it's a weird position for them to be regardless of party," he says, adding that OLCV wants to give her "time to develop her own environmental agenda" and "do what she does best, which is think things through."

Moore points to Brown's legislative voting record, tracked by OLCV: In the 2007 session as a state senator she scored an 89 percent, and in 2005 and 2003 she scored a 67 percent. Before that, in 2001, she scored a 92, in 1999 a 93 percent and, in 1997, she scored 100 percent.

Moore says the fact that her "lifetime" average green voting scores were in the 80s is even more impressive, given that she was in the minority with the Republicans in power during much of her tenure.

Once Brown develops her agenda, Moore says OLCV hopes that "the number one issue is climate; it's the environmental issue of our time." He continues, "The victories we have had can all be undone if we don't take action on climate."

According to Moore, "Without states like Oregon to lead on climate, we won't see action, and that's not acceptable."

And Oregon has a lot of areas where it can step up its efforts to slow human-caused global warming. Conservationists are fighting fossil fuel projects including coal export terminals, oil trains — such as the one that exploded in West Virginia last week — and liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and their associated pipelines.

"Oregon's billion-dollar sportfishing economy depends on clean water," says Michael O'Leary, deputy director of the Northwest Steelheaders Association. "But we're frighteningly unprepared to face the exponentially increasing risks of an oil train disaster along our waterways."

O'Leary says, "We desperately need Gov. Brown to give the DEQ [Department of Environmental Quality] and ODOT [Oregon Department of Transportation] the tools they need to respond to — and to better prevent — these increasingly likely catastrophes."

Josh Laughlin of Eugene-based Cascadia Wildlands, which has been fighting a natural gas pipeline and an LNG terminal in Coos Bay, says of Brown: "We definitely have high expectations in terms of her ability to be an environmental champion." He calls LNG one of a "myriad of conservation issues squarely in her court."

"Will she pull the plug on the reckless scheme to build a 230-mile natural gas pipeline?" he asks.

"The stakes are incredibly high on this one," Laughlin says, "for wild salmon, clean water, climate stability and rural communities in southwest Oregon, which are being steamrolled by the fossil fuel industry and government regulators in terms of eminent domain and other scare tactics."

Laughlin says Kitzhaber was "a mixed bag for us on our issues." He says, "Some things he stepped up on, and on some things he was a real disappointment,"

such as advocating for "ramping up the cut" on federal forestlands. On the other hand, he says, the former governor "helped broker a settlement setting up a plan for wolf recovery."

He says Brown will have an opportunity to stand up for wolves, as Cascadia Wildlands expects "to see bills stripping protections for wolves and trying to kill wolves, as we do every session."

Cascadia Wildlands is also keeping an eye on where Brown will go in her continued position as a member of the SLB and its governance over state lands. "On the Elliott she's expressed a real interest in finding a conservation solution," Laughlin says. "But the jury is still out in terms of what that means and what a solution looks like."

He says, "The solution to us is very clear, and it's beginning to gain more and more traction in Salem." That solution, he says, is to "decouple the Elliott from the Common School Fund" so that the old growth in the coastal rain forest is no longer earmarked as a revenue for schools. "It makes no sense in this day and age to tie old-growth clearcutting to school funding," he says.

Laughlin says Cascadia Wildlands would like to see Brown take a leadership role in terms of finding a solution. He asks, "Will she step up in finding a conservation solution Oregonians will be proud of?"

Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics, which is working to limit aerial sprays of pesticides on forestlands in Oregon, also has hope for Brown's green credentials, pointing to her work on Oregon's Sustainability Board and calling her "gung-ho" on seeking solutions.

During Kitzhaber's three terms as governor, conservationists did not see improvements in Oregon's weak Forest Practices Act, which governs logging and the use of pesticide sprays on private lands. Laughlin and Arkin hope Brown will change that and strengthen Oregon's laws.

We have "high hopes in terms of her ability to be an environmental champion," Laughlin says, "and hope she recognizes these issues we are working on are in the best interests of the Oregonian she represents." ■

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— MICHAEL O'LEARY, NORTHWEST STEELHEADERS ASSOCIATION