

# THREE'S COMPANY

Patrick Starnes challenges 'big money' in Oregon governor's race

Governor Kate Brown and challenger Knute Buehler knew the day after the May 15 primary election they would go on in November to run for governor. Patrick Starnes, though, had to wait more than a month to get the official nomination from the Independent Party of Oregon.

Before the Oregon Secretary of State announced the official results on June 14, Starnes relied on his own unofficial count by calling county elections offices to say he would receive the nomination. But it was close because both Brown and Buehler also ran write-in campaigns for the Independent nomination.

"The governor wanted to share her vision for Oregon with all Oregonians, including Independent Party voters," says Christian Gaston, communications director for Brown's campaign.

Oregon's gubernatorial contest is a partisan race, but Starnes says he doesn't lean toward either party.

"I feel like whenever you talk to any Oregonian or American, often they say they pick a party because there's a certain person like Bernie [Sanders]," he says. "Otherwise, they feel like they're independent. They pick a party because the way the system is set up."

Oregon has a closed election, so only voters registered with a certain party can vote for candidates seeking the nomination of that party.

"Thirty percent of the voters didn't get a ballot with a candidate. They didn't have a governor choice," Starnes says. "That's like taxation without representation."

Starnes says Brown and Buehler are "Pepsi and Coke" because they represent the status quo, and voters in Oregon aren't happy with the system.

While driving around Oregon to meet voters, Starnes says, he went to a Republican Party governor candidate forum and talked with some of the attendees. He recalls telling them he knew they wouldn't be happy after the primary and that he would be an alternative choice to Brown and Buehler.

What fuels "Pepsi and Coke," according to Starnes, is special interest money, which gets in the way of leadership in Salem.

Oregon doesn't have campaign regulation, excluding the requirement that election campaign contributions must be posted on the Secretary of State webpage on campaign finance. Because of this lack of regulation, Starnes says, money dictates policy in Salem.

"As long as you have this big shadow of big money behind these state senators, state reps and governors, you're going to have a biased solution," he says.

Notable — and sizeable — contributions to the current candidates in the governor's race include a \$250,000 contribution from Michael Bloomberg to Kate Brown's campaign and \$500,000 from Phil Knight to Knute Buehler.

Starnes adds that Knight's contribution could come from his desire to keep Oregon's minimum wage down, "like he does in China."

Starnes' public service experience comes from serving on school boards, which he says is a way to see the effects of statewide policies. Because of declining money from the state, he says, he's had to fire new schoolteachers during his tenure.

"The last school board I served on, McKenzie River, had blended classrooms," Starnes says. "When the money came in, we would un-blend it and hire a new teacher. When the

money went back down, re-blend it and let the new person go. That really fired me up about Salem. I'm into solutions, not politics."

Starnes says he sees a solution in compromise between environmentalists and property owners, both of whom say the Jordan Cove LNG pipeline project — the 229-mile pipeline that cuts through Oregon and ends up at Coos Bay — is bad for Oregon.

"It's bad for ranchers; it's bad for farmers; it's bad for national forests; it's bad for rivers. What's it good for?" he says. Brown "got \$150,000 from the steel workers. The governor could shut that down."

Starnes does say his political alignment is fiscally conservative and socially moderate, and that he's not concerned with making a stand on polarizing issues — unlike former candidates Sam Carpenter and Greg Wooldrige when it comes to abortion.

Instead, Starnes says, the state needs to worry about things like its deficit, education and jobs.

Among the most difficult issues the next governor will face is fixing Public Employees Retirement System.

Starnes says one solution that could reduce the tax burden of PERS is repackaging it as Oregon Universal Retirement System, a retirement program he would advocate for that all employees in the state could pay in to.

Since every Oregonian could pay into the program, it would be a stream of revenue that would free the state budget for other services, like having state funding for universities that could lead to universal education, which Starnes says he's in favor of.

"Imagine if we didn't have the PERS deficit and those health care costs," he says. "I'm in favor of universal education, and it shouldn't be twice as much. So I can't be a lifelong learner?"

State universities, he adds, have been susceptible to similar special interest funding that leads to dictating policy — just like Salem.

The Independent Party of Oregon said that under Oregon law, any public forum or debate held within the last 60 days of the General Election must include all major party candidates, or it needs to be reported as an in-kind contribution to invited candidates. Rob Harris, an official with the party, says nonprofits that invite candidates must invite Starnes due to their nonpartisan status, and that the party is ready to file a complaint over any debate Starnes isn't invited to.

Starnes says, with admiration, that the 2012 presidential election also had rules set in place to keep Green Party candidate Jill Stein out of the debates, and she was arrested trying to debate. He adds that, like Stein, he plans to do whatever he can to debate the issues with Brown and Buehler, and says, "We'll get rowdy if we have to."

His campaign staff during the primary election period, he says, was just his wife and him, but he knows he'll need a war chest for November. Rather than wooing large organizations, Starnes says he's going to build up \$1 million through individual donations of \$100. By doing so, he adds he hopes to reach out to those who aren't happy with the two-party system.

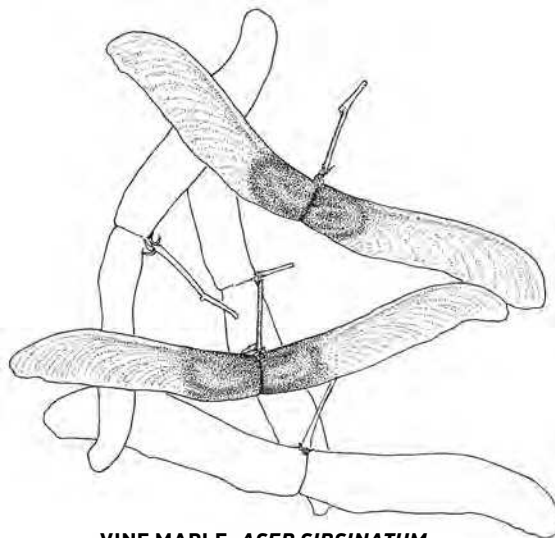
"I want someone who hates politics to vote because this isn't a joke," he says. "It's going to get special interests riled up." ■

## IT'S ABOUT TIME

BY DAVID WAGNER

July is a month of conflicting forces that give human activity direction. Vegetable gardens are well established by now, ready for the strong growing season. July through August provide the most sunlight of any other months of the year. Sunlight coupled with ample water and nutrition (fertilizer) are the ticket for ample production for the table. Once the bean stakes are put in and watering system on summer schedule, yard work demands could slack off. Gardening duties are especially tempting to put aside when sunny skies and warm temperatures lure avid hikers and bird watchers to the forests and hills.

Remember: July is a month for day hikes but not camping in the high mountains. The lingering snow patches in the High Cascades keep snowmelt ponds flooded for mosquito breeding. They will be active until frosts begin. The first mountain frosts are vari-



VINE MAPLE, *ACER CIRCINATUM*

able from year to year. Typically, the mosquito populations taper off by the end of August.

Although there has been a decline in the number of homes using firewood as a major heating source, wood heating has its advocates. Cutting up a downed tree in the front yard and stacking it to season this month saves having trucks haul it away. Stacking this month is important. All our hardwoods need a long summer protected from rain to be good quality for home heating this winter. Oak, maple and ash that has not been split will take a second summer to dry enough for minimum smoke pollution effects.

*David Wagner is a botanist who works in Eugene. He teaches moss classes, leads nature walks and makes nature calendars. He can be contacted through his website, fernzenmosses.com.*