

and even spoke out against him on the floor of the Oregon House. Helt tells *EW* that she criticized Trump about his environmental policies “because climate change is real.”

Helt says that she grew up as a young Republican (despite having a short spell as a Democrat) and because she owns two restaurants in Bend, she says she has the party’s fiscal values. “I want to make sure our businesses can operate,” she says.

In 2016, Deschutes County was Trump country; he won 46 percent of the vote (three more points than Clinton). But Helt spoke out about the party’s leader on Facebook in an election year anyway.

“I’m speaking out with my voice,” she says. “I’m providing the leadership I want to see in my community and for my community.”

She says when the U.S. enters a crisis, it almost always unites its people — but the White House hasn’t been encouraging and is instead using politics to divide during a pandemic. “We’ve got to make sure that we leave this crisis better than we went into it,” she says. “And we need a president who can do that.”

Helt says the U.S. needs someone to lead with compassion and heart — and if a leader doesn’t exhibit those qualities she can’t support them. But in the meantime, she says she’ll work on the local and state level so her community can get the leadership it needs.

## Leaving Trump in 2016

Kerry Tymchuk has a long history with the Republican Party. His resumé includes working for former Sen. Gordon Smith and for former Sens. Bob and Elizabeth Dole, as well as co-authoring a book with the Doles (plus he notes that he knew the Dole’s dog, Leader, well).

Tymchuk says he left the Republican Party just days after Trump visited Eugene in 2016. It was the day Trump had enough delegates to get the party’s presidential nomination in 2016. He left the party that he had a long history with, he says, because it nominated a person who lacked qualities like dignity, decency and civility.

Tymchuk says he felt it was his duty to leave the Republican Party. “Any party that would nominate him as president, I didn’t want to be a member of,” he adds.

He says people close to him weren’t surprised about his leaving the party since he was vocally critical of Trump during the primaries — and donated to former Ohio Gov. John Kasich. And to this day, Tymchuk says he hasn’t regretted his decision to leave.

In 2016, he went on to support Hillary Clinton and says she would’ve been a great president. During his time in Washington, D.C., he says he had seen Clinton at work and was impressed with her ability to lead.

Four years later, Tymchuk says, he supported Biden immediately when the former vice president ran for the nomination. According to individual contribution data from the Federal Election Commission, Tymchuk has donated more than \$6,600 to Biden since April 25, 2019, the day Biden entered the race.

“Especially when I was with Sen. Bob Dole, I saw Biden every day for six years. I saw his work ethic,” he says. “I saw those qualities in him — the decency, the civility, the dedication to public service and reaching across the aisle.”

Despite Tymchuk’s resumé with the Republican Party, the time that he spent working with Bob Dole and Elizabeth Dole (and even supporting an exploratory presidential committee in 2000 for Elizabeth) in Washington or alongside former Sen. Gordon Smith, he doesn’t think he’ll ever return.

“I can’t imagine going back in the near future given the enablement that has gone on,” he says. “They turned themselves over. The Republican Party became the Trump Party.”

Tymchuk says in his years of working in politics and public service, the most important qualities he’s observed in leaders were decency, civility, an ability to reach across the aisle and not see the other party as enemies.

“You can question their stances but not their beliefs and motives. And the ability to understand that we’re one country,” he says. “In my view, that’s how we succeed.”

## Getting the Orange out of the Red

Assuming that Trump was going to lose the 2016 election, Kasich had planned to have an event after the 2016 election that would have essentially rebooted the Republican Party. Of course, that’s not what happened, but Kasich went on to be a critic of Trump and is on the speaker list for the Democratic Party’s virtual National Convention.

But the Republican Party had been broken before Trump came along because the problem is the two-party system, says Rich Vial, who left the party to run as a nonpartisan for secretary of state in 2020.

“I think Trump got elected because the two-party system was busted, and he made the case that he wasn’t an insider,” he says. “Once he got in, he used the party to his advantage.”

Vial says a political party reinventing itself won’t make a difference. The Republican Party has reinvented itself countless times — from Barry Goldwater to Reagan.

He says the problem is with the two-party system and George Washington’s concerns have come true: parties mobilize generals, not policymakers.

“I believe George Washington had it correct that if we allowed parties to be a formal part of the system, it’ll destroy our abilities to lead the democratic republic,” Vial says.

The result of growing partisan party politics, he adds, is the emergence of fringe candidates on general election ballots — like Jo Rae Perkins, Art Robinson and Trump himself — because only a fraction of voters participate in primary elections.

Vial says the solution is to have open primary elections, ranked choice voting and get rid of caucusing (at least at the state level).

Vial isn’t alone in his views on the two-party system. According to July 2020 voter registration data, Oregon has 932,826 unaffiliated voters, a number that exceeds registered Republicans and is almost as many registered Democrats.

However, Tymchuk says the two-party system is better than the multi-party system often found in parliamentary systems, but the issue for him is that there are times when the country is more important than the party — and voters and leaders failed to realize that in 2016.

The U.S.’s political system works best when there are two “healthy” parties that lean left and right, he says, because progress happens in the middle, Tymchuk adds.

And it’s that middle spot that Lockwood says is a promising place for Oregon to innovate politically. He says he’s not satisfied with either party — and when he talked with *EW* he didn’t say whether he’d support Biden. Good governance needs a healthy two-party system because it creates a competition of ideas, he adds.

Lockwood says he wants to see a conservative party return to the roots of fiscal conservatism, an ideology based on spending money wisely that benefits taxpayers.

He says Oregon is a place where another party could emerge — something like a centric party — at the state leadership level.

After Nov. 3, Oregon and the rest of the U.S. will move forward knowing where it goes next with the Republican Party and its next evolution — and whether Trump will be a part of it — or if another party is needed to make conservatism great again. ■

