



KARI BORGEN
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OUR VIEW

Grounds for recall

Most voters on the North Coast made the right choice by not signing #TimberUnity’s recall petition against state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell. The recall drive was based on the Astoria Democrat’s vote last session for House Bill 2020, a cap-and-trade proposal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We opposed the bill because the higher fuel costs baked into the idea would have had a disproportionate impact on rural Oregon. But climate change was a theme of Mitchell’s 2018 campaign, so her support for the bill was consistent with the policy priorities she outlined for voters before she was elected. She was one of 36 House Democrats to vote for HB 2020, yet was the only one to face a recall petition. We suspect #TimberUnity saw Mitchell — a freshman who also angered her union allies by voting for pension reform — as an easy target. It was a miscalculation that backfired on a grassroots movement with the potential to be an important voice on rural issues. Over the past few months, the recall petition was the topic of dozens of letters to the editor in The Astorian, as readers argued whether there were sufficient grounds to recall Mitchell. The debate was a good reminder that there are no specific grounds for recall in Oregon. The Oregon Constitution spells out the process but provides no criteria for the kind of behavior that warrants removal from office. Organizers must gather signatures from 15% of the vote for governor in the last election — they needed 4,883 in Mitchell’s House District 32 — to file a petition with the reasons for their demand. The elected official can either resign or face a recall election within 35 days. Oregon was a pioneer. Voters added recall to the constitution in



#TimberUnity stickers are popular on the North Coast.

Nicole Bales/The Astorian

IN OUR HYPERPARTISAN CLIMATE, POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED RECALL PETITIONS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO UNDERMINE PUBLIC FAITH IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN CLATSOP COUNTY, SEVERAL RECALL CAMPAIGNS HAVE BEEN DRIVEN BY POLICY DIFFERENCES OR PERSONALITY CLASHES.

1908 during a decade where people also won the power of initiative and referendum. The progressive reforms — led by William S. U’Ren’s Direct Legislation League — can be critical counterweights to corruption, entrenched power and wealthy interests that corrode government. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia now allow recall, according to the National Con-

ference of State Legislatures. A majority, like Oregon, allow recall petitions for any reason. But eight states have specific grounds. In Alaska, for example, the criteria is lack of fitness, incompetence, neglect of duties, or corruption. In Rhode Island, it is indictment for a felony, conviction of a misdemeanor, or a probable cause finding for an ethics violation. In Washington state, it is mal-

feasance, misfeasance, or violations of the oath of office. We think Oregon would be better off if voters added specific grounds. While recalls are relatively rare, there should be a higher standard for undoing elections. In our hyperpartisan climate, politically-motivated recall petitions have the potential to undermine public faith in the democratic process. At the local level in Clatsop County, several recall campaigns have been driven by policy differences or personality clashes. Political and policy disagreements can be settled at the ballot box in election years. Recall should be reserved for clear, unambiguous violations of the public trust. The criteria in Alaska and Washington state are reasonable models. We should draft our own and amend the Oregon Constitution.

GUEST COLUMN

Schools need professional librarians

What contributes to student success? Across Oregon, educators, parents, students and community members are gathering to discuss just that, and to determine how funds from the recently enacted Student Success Act will be spent at the district level to increase equity and improve student learning. These important conversations beg the question: do our students have what they need? In many cases, the answer is “no.” One striking example is Oregon’s school libraries. In Oregon, fewer than 15% of students attend schools with a professional librarian, a decline of 80% since the early 1980s. Yet more than 60 studies from across the country show that student achievement is higher — from grades and test scores to digital proficiency and graduation rates — in schools with a professionally staffed library. Leaving such an important learning space unstaffed or understaffed is unacceptable. But there is good news. The Student Success Act offers an opportunity to reverse the trend and provide students with the instructional resources they need. You may be thinking that with the proliferation of technology, perhaps students don’t need school librarians anymore. At



MARY KEELING



LAURIE NORDAHL



School libraries are important resources.

a time when student success in school, the workplace, and the community depends on their ability to navigate a complex information landscape, certified information professionals — school librarians — are more important than ever. Students need to develop a continuum of literacies. Today’s school librarians harness technology for expanded opportuni-

ties and 24-hour access to information and resources. Students can take online classes, learn coding, work with robotics, create music, explore career interests and individualize their own learning. Moreover, today’s librarians serve an important role in creating a safe space where all students are welcome regardless of economic status, religion, sexual orientation, race or ability. They are integral to a school’s commitment to equity. Finally, today’s school librarians nurture a culture of reading and inquiry, the very foundation of all learning, both in school and beyond. Most Oregon school libraries are currently staffed by paraprofessionals, not licensed school librarians. Paraprofessionals serve an integral role in the learning community and are valuable partners, yet they cannot provide instruction, nor can they replace certified school librarians. Without a licensed librarian, there cannot be a strong school library. Every student deserves to have a living, thriving library and reap the benefits of such. We can and must do better for our students. Even if you don’t have children who attend public schools, Oregon’s children are our neighbors and our future workforce and community leaders. Adequately staffing Oregon’s schools — in alignment with statewide Quality Education Model — matters to all of us. Take action today. Call your local school and ask if it has a licensed school librarian. If not, request that the principal and administration earmark Student Success Act funds to provide students with the certified staff they need to ensure that your community’s children graduate ready for lifelong learning, the workplace and civic participation — and prepared to fulfill their own potential. Mary Keeling is president of the American Association of School Librarians. Laurie Nordahl is the president of the Oregon Association of School Libraries.