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GUEST COLUMN

Keep Oregon politics weird

Oregon voters have passed a new state motto: “Keep Oregon politics weird.”

In the past few days, the state elections director has been fired — via text message — despite a seemingly successful mail election that drew an 82% turnout. Oregon’s longest-serving House speaker faces a rebellion. A special legislative session apparently is among the latest victims of the coronavirus. The governor’s top aide is headed to the Biden-Harris transition team. And while the nation focuses on close races elsewhere, Oregon has its own election uncertainties.



DICK HUGHES

Let’s start with that last point. The GOP picked up a coastal seat in the state Senate, as voters chose Lincoln City Mayor Dick Anderson to succeed retiring Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay. Among the election peculiarities is that Anderson won in Coos County, where the Democratic candidate Melissa Cribbins is a county commissioner, but lost on his home turf of Lincoln County. By varying margins, Anderson prevailed in Lane, Douglas, Polk, Tillamook and Yamhill counties.

In Salem, Republican Sen. Denyc Boles and Democrat Deb Patterson remained 505 votes apart, with Patterson’s lead growing gradually. In Hood River, Democratic Rep. Anna Williams was 175 votes ahead of former Republican Rep. Jeff Helfrich. Of the 38,845 votes counted so far, 1,039 went to Libertarian Stephen Alder.

Several other legislative races remained relatively close but seemed unlikely to change as the final ballots are tallied. Voters have until Tuesday to fix missing or incorrect signatures on their ballots.

Republicans have already gained one House seat. Tillamook Mayor Suzanne Weber defeated Debbie Boothe-Schmidt, a former trial assistant.

House Democrats are not thrilled



Paula Bronstein/AP Photo

Election worker Kristen Mun, from Portland, empties ballots at the Multnomah County Elections Division on Nov. 3.

about losing any seats, despite maintaining their hefty majority. That could play into some members’ supporting the upstart bid of Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, to become the House’s presiding officer. Capitol onlookers say Bynum is making a credible but difficult challenge against Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland.

The full House elects the speaker, but Democrats typically unify behind whoever their caucus has chosen, rather than someone becoming speaker through a coalition of disgruntled Democrats and Republicans.

Bynum, who has not been one to seek the political limelight, is a fascinating challenger. She holds a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering — she was a steering systems engineer for General Motors — and a master’s in business. She and her husband own McDonald’s restaurants, making her one of the few legislative Democrats with a significant background in business.

There are several reasons that some colleagues might support Bynum. One is

the opportunity to have a person of color lead the House, especially after a year in which civil rights and the Black Lives Matter movement have galvanized Oregon’s attention. Bynum, who is Black, has emerged as a legislative leader on police accountability and racial justice.

Some Democrats are irritated with Kotek for stripping Rep. Diego Hernandez, D-Portland, of his committee roles and calling for his resignation over sexual harassment allegations, even though the legislative investigation still is not finished. Voters overwhelmingly reelected him. Kotek had similarly demoted David Gombert, D-Otis, before the House Conduct Committee acted. The committee ultimately found he had not violated legislative rules. Gombert also happened to be winning reelection in the latest ballot counts.

Further, the tight margins of victory in several races have some Democrats worrying that they have overreached in passing so much progressive legislation and burdening businesses.

By the way, the sentiment that legis-

lative Democrats are anti-business runs strong in state Capitol circles, regardless of whether it is accurate. During the 2019 session, Republican Rep. Cheri Helt, of Bend, told a visiting group of constituents that legislative colleagues referred to her as “one of the good business owners,” as if business owners were inherently bad. Helt, who co-owns two Bend restaurants with her husband, lost her reelection bid to Democrat Jason Kropf.

Special session: Oregon legislators won’t be returning to the Capitol soon for a lame-duck session. Gov. Kate Brown had been expected to call this year’s third special session for right before Thanksgiving. That now would seem unconscionable, given her increased coronavirus-safety restrictions.

Elections firing: As for state elections director Steve Trout, whom I mentioned at the start of this column, his abrupt firing by Secretary of State Bev Clarno was a stunner. She apparently did not appreciate his sending a memo to the Democratic and Republican candidates vying to succeed Clarno, in which he detailed issues with the state’s centralized voter registration system.

Blosser, Biden and Harris: Meanwhile, Brown’s chief of staff, Nik Blosser, will become the state lead in the intergovernmental affairs office for the transition team of President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. Replacing him in Brown’s office will be Gina Zejdlik, a longtime Brown aide who is deputy chief of staff.

Blosser’s new gig will heighten speculation that Brown is headed for a job in the Biden administration. Were Brown to resign before Oregon’s incoming secretary of state is sworn in, Treasurer Tobias Read would become governor. If Shemia Fagan has taken office as secretary of state, she would be elevated to governor.

Oh, as for Oregon’s state motto, the actual one is “She Flies With Her Own Wings.” It was adopted by the 1987 Legislature.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Finally

I am grateful to finally have the election called, and elated to have Joe Biden as our next president.

It has been a tortuous experience to watch the vote counts, and a revelation in the democratic process to see how many people voted this year. We have witnessed how important each vote is and the value of each vote being counted, no matter how long it takes.

What is most disturbing is how the sitting president has reacted all along to the entire voting process, undermining it in any way he could. In the middle of a pandemic that is raging here, he disparaged people from casting mail-in ballots that would keep them safe from virus spreading crowds.

He said that the U.S. Postal Service would not be able to deliver ballots in time, and questioned their validity. He tried to claim victory on election night with millions of ballots uncounted, and tried to shut down vote counting. He has made up stories about voter fraud that he cannot substantiate.

When Donald Trump won the election in 2016 with small margins in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, did Hillary Clinton throw tantrums, spread disinformation and send out the lawyers, like Trump is doing now?

No, she graciously accepted the vote tallies and reaffirmed the trust in our electoral system that has served us well for over 200 years.

Good riddance to you, Trump, with all your lies, tyrannical ways and fundamental misunderstanding of how democracy functions.

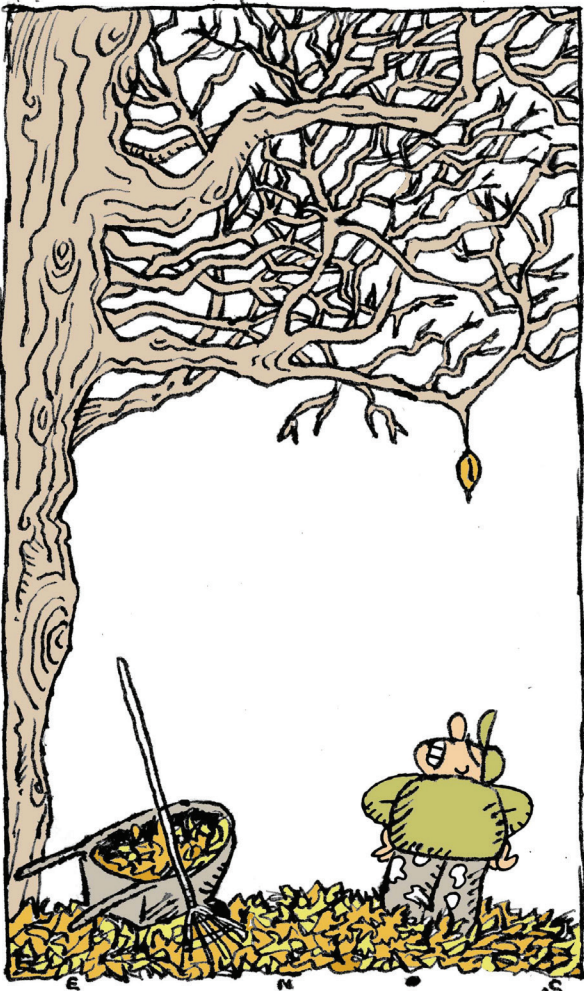
NED HEAVENRICH
Astoria

Capable and professional

I want to report to your readers about the capable and professional job which the county clerk, Tracie Krevanko, and her staff did in handling this 2020 election in Clatsop County.

I served as organizer of the election observers for the Clatsop County Democratic Central Committee, composed of your neighbors and community members. Over 20 of these volunteers chose to go sit and quietly watch, in order to assure that our votes were safe.

The staff, part-time workers and supervisors were all efficient and careful in doing this demanding and repetitive work.



We wore masks, sat nearby and were quiet, noticing each step of their systematic approach.

They escorted us in and out, checking our credentials as we arrived. All of you should feel confident that these public servants are doing their jobs and protecting your vote.

There were seven different ballot drop boxes located across the county, increased from two in the May primary elections. Election workers and local police ensured that they were safely transported to the clerk’s office. So many people voted early, that hours were shortened on some days until more ballots came in.

In these days when many are critical of public agency workers, it’s important to give credit to the people and processes that allow our democracy to work fairly for us all.

JAN MITCHELL
Astoria

Dow surge

Just looked to see what the stock market would do on the news of a “President Joe Biden” win. No, the market surged



because of President Donald Trump’s “warp speed” attack on COVID-19.

No doubt the Harris-Biden administration will claim all credit for all the hard work Joe did in his basement. No doubt they will also claim credit for the market surge.

President Trump may just have saved millions, if not billions, of lives, and will get no credit from the loyal opposition.

My advice ... buy Pfizer stock ... last week.

MATT JANES
Astoria

It’s time

President Donald Trump supporters, please. It’s time. Time to return to decency. Time to return to respect. Respecting our fellow human beings. Respecting our democratic norms and institutions.

Trump is not a decent man. He does not respect other people, nor our democracy. He insults and demeans people. He tears our social fabric apart for his own personal and political gain.

He is making a mockery of our most

sacred democratic right, that of electing our leaders and a peaceful transfer of power. His claim of voter fraud is the actual fraud, and we all know it.

Diligent and dedicated election workers all over this country did an amazing job of running this election, during a pandemic, with record numbers of ballots, many of them coming by mail (completely legal), under heavy time pressure and under a microscope.

We should be heaping praise on these hardworking Americans. Instead, Trump insults them. The lieutenant governor of Texas offered a \$1 million reward for evidence of voter fraud. If it was so rampant, he would not have to dangle such a valuable bribe.

In one state, they’re yelling “stop counting ballots”; in another, they’re yelling “count the ballots.” We all know this is nuts. Trump is an emperor with no clothes. He, his enablers in the Senate, the House and the conservative media are taking the U.S. to a very bad place.

Trump lost this election. Joe Biden, a decent man, won. It’s that simple. Please. It’s time.

ERIC HALPERIN
Gearhart