

OPINION



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Progressive Democrats win big

Progressives rule Oregon's Democratic Party, and they won big last week.

In the courts, a judge's initial report indicates that Oregon Republicans stumbled badly in how they challenged the new boundaries for congressional districts, which were created by legislative Democrats.



DICK HUGHES

At the Oregon State Capitol, moderate Democratic state Sen. Betsy Johnson, of Scappoose, was bounced from her role as co-chair of the powerful Joint Ways and Means Committee, which handles money issues and writes the state budget.

That move apparently was in response to her announcing she would leave the party next year to run for governor as an independent.

Let's start with the second item, although it is not surprising that Johnson would be removed — "canceled," in her words — as a co-chair. Johnson has been a reliable Democratic vote on procedural issues in the Senate. But she has remained fiercely independent on policy legislation, including firearms, natural resources and environmental regulation — to the consternation of progressive Democrats. At times, that has publicly put Johnson at odds with House Speaker Tina Kotek, of Portland, who at this point arguably is the Democrats' leading contender for governor and the most influential person in the Capitol.

Senate President Peter Courtney, of Salem, announced the committee changes Thursday afternoon. Himself a moderate Democrat, Courtney first appointed Johnson and progressive Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, of Beaverton, in 2018 to jointly serve as Senate co-chairs of Ways and Means. The pair proved a good team. Yet Courtney also later sidelined Johnson when she stood in the way of progressives' legislation to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

As progressives have increased their numbers in the Senate Democratic caucus, they have pushed Courtney leftward. He has not said whether he will seek reelection to the Senate next year. He already is both the longest-serving legislator and the longest-serving Senate president in Oregon history. Once Courtney left the presidency, whether by retiring or by being supplanted



Facebook

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, shown here at a #TimberUnity rally, was removed as co-chair of the Joint Ways and Means Committee. The senator has announced she will leave the Democratic Party and run for governor as an independent next year.

ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT BETSY JOHNSON WOULD BE REMOVED — 'CANCELED,' IN HER WORDS — AS A CO-CHAIR. JOHNSON HAS BEEN A RELIABLE DEMOCRATIC VOTE ON PROCEDURAL ISSUES IN THE SENATE. BUT SHE HAS REMAINED FIERCELY INDEPENDENT ON POLICY LEGISLATION, INCLUDING FIREARMS, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION — TO THE CONSTERNATION OF PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS.

by progressives, Johnson was unlikely to retain her Ways and Means role.

Gallup recently reported that nationally, "The Democratic rank and file has long encompassed a wide diversity of perspectives, but the power center has shifted from moderates — who were the largest group in the early 2000s — to liberals, who are the largest group today." That rings true in Oregon.

Johnson, who brought a rural perspec-

tive and business sense to budgeting, will remain on Ways and Means but not in leadership. Steiner Hayward is the Senate co-chair. Progressive Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, is the House co-chair. Sen. Fred Girod, R-Lyons, who recently stepped down as the Senate Republican leader, remains the Senate co-vice chair.

Back to redistricting: Senior Judge Henry Breithaupt is a retired Oregon Tax Court judge acting in this case as a special

master. His report goes to the panel of five retired judges whom Supreme Court Chief Justice Martha Walters appointed to handle the Republicans' lawsuit.

Breithaupt's tentative findings were that the congressional districts, passed during an acrimonious special legislative session in September and signed by Gov. Kate Brown, generally met legal criteria. He could be right — I'm not a lawyer — but his findings suggest that Republicans mounted a weak challenge.

The state Department of Justice, in defending the plan, brought in three expert witnesses to one for the Republicans' side, Dr. Thomas Brunell of the University of Texas at Dallas. Breithaupt was not impressed with Brunell, writing:

"While I find Dr. Brunell generally to be a credible witness, the methodology he employs, and therefore the conclusions he reached, lack credibility and are therefore unreliable.

"Several of Dr. Brunell's conclusions lack even a minimum of academic or methodological rigor. He was unprepared to testify about several components of his submissions."

Breithaupt also said the Republican petitioners provided insufficient evidence that their alternative map complied with statutory criteria.

State law states, "No district shall be drawn for the purpose of favoring any political party, incumbent legislator or other person." Independent analyses have indicated that the new congressional boundaries benefit Democrats to varying degrees. However, Breithaupt accepted the statistical argument from the state's experts that any Democratic advantage would not be significant.

Hmm. Why then, was the state's Democratic congressional delegation — with a vested interest in the new boundaries — exerting so much pressure on Democratic legislative leaders? The congressional and legislative district maps were not put together in public, so what was being said behind closed doors?

We might never know. Apparently, Democratic legislative leaders could not be forced to testify in this case. A legislative provision in the Oregon Constitution states, "Nor shall a member for words uttered in debate in either house, be questioned in any other place."

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Just a thought

I just read in tonight's paper that Harney County now also wants to move to Idaho. Wouldn't it be a lot simpler to just cede Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties to Washington state?

That way Oregon could keep all of her farm, ranch and recreational areas, while at the same time redistributing her law-making powers to better represent the rural areas. Just a thought.

WILLIAM BELL
Astoria

Distrust

It is sad to see that there are people who seem to think that Fox News is engaging in some kind of treason, as Troy Haskell does in "Distrust is the goal" (The Astorian, Nov. 2). The people who believe that are deluded.

They listen to the drumbeat pounded out by the Democrat media echo chambers. I bet they do not actually listen to arguments from the two sides. They just hear the drumbeat.

Here is some advice. Try turning on that program you claim is "spewing lies, hate and discontent." See if you can spot any factual errors for yourself, before echoing the blanket statement coming from the likes of CNN.

Yes, Fox News commentators are partisan, and sometimes strident. It is apparent. And overtly stated. They believe in the American dream.

Haskell has the wrong idea about who is sowing the hate. I can point to so many blatant lies told by the current administration that I cannot keep count.

Yet we, most of the people of the United States of America, are not confused. We are not racist, nor any of the epithets used by the Democrat elite.

This is a republic, not a fascist state that labels the loyal opposition as our own worst enemy, and seeks to shut them up. The current crop of Democrats should not be telling you how to think. Think for yourself.

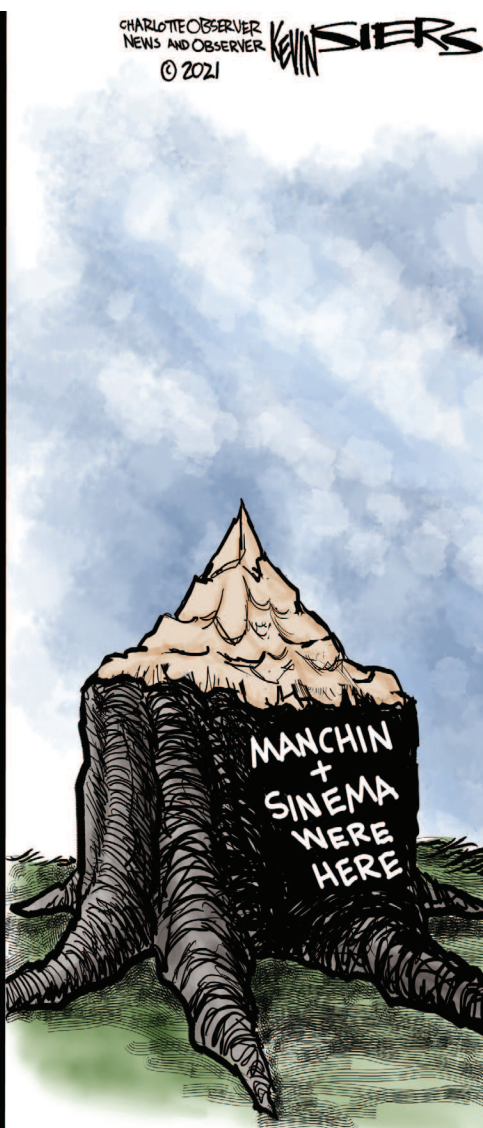
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