

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Who will lead Oregon next year?

As the Oregon Legislature takes a collective breather from this year's up-and-down session, a question hangs over everyone's heads: Who will be in charge next year?

The answer has two parts.

First, the Democrats are likely to retain control. Democratic lawmakers wrote the redistricting plan that reconfigured legislative districts to account for population changes under the 2020 census.

But who knows what will happen in the next seven months leading up to the November general election?

Republicans are likely to make some headway, especially in the state House. Democrats hold a 37-23 majority over Republicans in the House and an 18-10 advantage in the Senate, with two other senators caucusing as independents.



DICK HUGHES

Surveys, as well as coffee shop talk, underscore that Oregonians are in a foul mood about our state's direction, the economy and other matters.

Those attitudes could hurt the majority party at the polls — actually, the kitchen table or wherever the mail ballot is being filled out.

Actually, the majority party in the Legislature isn't the majority among voters. As of March 18, Oregon's 2.9 million registered voters included over 1 million who chose no party affiliation. That could be because they have no interest in any polit-



Dan Rayfield, a Corvallis Democrat, took over as state House speaker this year.

ical party — or no interest in voting at all.

The largest party remains Democrats with over 1 million voters, followed by Republicans with 723,728 and the Independent Party with 139,674. The remaining voters are spread among smaller parties.

Second, the practicality of "who's in charge" comes down to the presiding officers, who control everything from committee assignments to the route that legislation takes.

When the 2023 Legislature convenes, the Senate will elect its first new presiding

officer since 2003. Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, is retiring from that role and from the Legislature. The House already elected a new House speaker this year after Tina Kotek, a Portland Democrat, resigned to focus on her gubernatorial campaign.

Oregon is not unique. Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, Missouri and Montana also are losing both of their top legislative leaders. A number of other states are seeing at least one presiding officer leave, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, which

says such turnover is typical in an election year.

Courtney and Kotek both held those roles longer than any predecessor. It had been the norm, especially in the House, for a presiding officer to serve only a few years. There is precedent for Speaker Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, to continue in 2023 but also for the House to choose someone else. Of course, first he must be reelected in House District 16. Democrats do hold a 3-1 advantage among registered voters there.

Each chamber selects its presiding officer. The party in power decides whom to nominate. An intriguing factor in the House is that at least a third of the members are being elected for the first time this year, although some have been serving through appointment.

In the Senate, it will be a free-for-all for presiding officer. The list of potential candidates runs long, with a heavy emphasis on urban liberal Democrats. Centrist Courtney no longer will be a moderating force. Under Courtney, it was sometimes said of the Senate, "a place where progressive bills go to die," although his influence diminished in recent years as liberal Democrats grew in number.

Regardless of who is in charge, the personalities and politics will be different. Of the three powerbrokers in the Capitol, there at least will be a new governor and a new Senate president.

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



**'Microplastic pollution has been detected in human blood for the first time, with scientists finding the tiny particles in almost 80% of the people tested.'**  
—The Guardian

PoliticalCartoons.com

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Wake-up call

March 24 was World Tuberculosis Day, commemorating the approximately 1.5 million people killed by this horrible disease every year.

In 20 years, global efforts to eradicate tuberculosis and other preventable diseases, led by groups like The Global Fund, have made enormous progress. The Global Fund alone has saved 44 million lives since 2002.

That progress is now in jeopardy. When the world shut down to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it disrupted access to diagnostics and treatments for tuberculosis. One million fewer people were treated for TB in 2020 than in 2019 and, for the first time in a decade, annual tuberculosis deaths rose.

This must serve as a wake-up call. Members of Congress, including U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, must go on the record in support of a \$2 billion per year pledge from the U.S. at The Global Fund replenishment conference this year, so it can continue its

vitaly important work.

2022 can be the year we end COVID-19 once and for all, but it must also be the year we get the world back on track to end tuberculosis, and other preventable diseases, by ensuring everyone, everywhere has access to lifesaving tests and treatments.

MICHAEL KALKOFEN  
Beaverton

### Redeemable coupons

My wife likes to save coupons that are redeemable at stores like Fred Meyer. She has no doubt that when presented, they will be honored and redeemed.

There are two passages in Scriptures. One says, "I know that my redeemer lives"; the other, "I go to prepare a place for you that where I am, you, too, will be."

If we have faith in such a little thing as taking coupons to Fred Meyer to be redeemed, how much greater and import-

ant for us to realize that we are not left in the dark as to our destiny, but to know that our redeemer does live! Thank you, Fred Meyer, and thank you, Lord!

JIM BERNARD  
Warrenton

### Avert

If you were an Astoria police officer, committing your life in service to our community, how might you feel upon discovering an advertisement in an insert in The Astorian for assault rifles?

It is arguably just a matter of time, unless we change things, before we suffer a tragedy compounded of these weapons and mental illness.

Please, we need to do everything we can to try to avert such an event.

ROBERT ADAMS  
Astoria