

OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

Lessons from the May election

Tina Kotek, Betsy Johnson and Christine Drazan will have one thing in common as they approach the gubernatorial election in November.

Each will be labeled as “too extreme for Oregon,” regardless of where they sit on the political spectrum. I’ve never figured out why “too extreme” is a preferred pejorative in negative campaigning, as if some unspecified level of extremism is deemed acceptable.



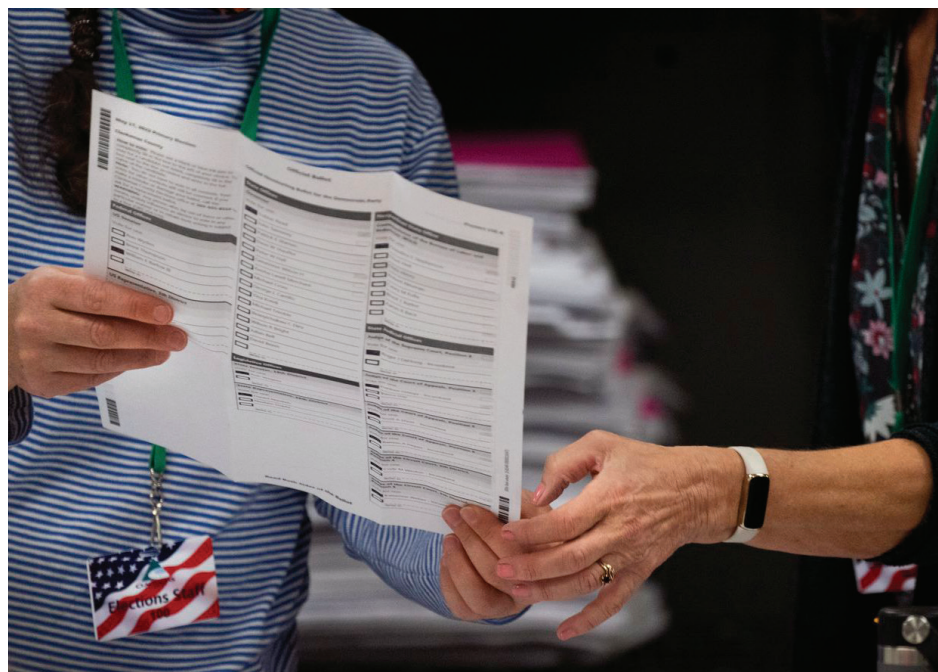
DICK HUGHES

2022 undoubtedly will be the most expensive governor’s race in Oregon history and likely among the nastiest. Labor unions and other Democrat-leaning groups already are savaging Democrat-turned-independent Johnson as extreme. They must be saving “too extreme” for later. Republicans are warning that liberal – or progressive, if you prefer that label – Democrat Kotek is more Kate Brown than unpopular Gov. Brown herself. And Democrats and centrists are painting Republican Drazan as a danger to Oregon as we know it, including to abortion rights.

Author Robert Fulghum is credited with, “Don’t believe everything you think.” An essential corollary for campaign season is, “Don’t believe everything you see, hear or read about how awful a candidate is.” The just-concluded primary election season was rife with mischaracterizations, as multiple news stories have documented fairly. The fall season will be worse.

Campaigns go negative because it works, or so they believe. For most candidates in the primary, it didn’t succeed. They lost anyway.

Carrick Flynn’s supporters, including a cryptocurrency billionaire and a Democratic establishment PAC, discovered that Oregonians still prefer a candidate with whom they can connect in person.



Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian

Clackamas County elections workers are processing ballots by hand after barcode problems were discovered before the May election.

Despite the unprecedented millions of supposedly independent dollars squandered on Flynn’s behalf, he barely got half as many votes as Andrea Salinas, the former state lawmaker who won the Democratic primary for Oregon’s new 6th Congressional District.

Meanwhile, the Taxpayers Association of Oregon is chortling about Matt West, who campaigned on, “Tax the rich and save the planet,” finishing in lowly fifth place.

Of course, those results are suppositions until the Clackamas County Clerk’s Office does its, uh, duty. More about that in a moment.

As for campaigning, a good ground game still matters. Republican U.S. Sen. Mark O. Hatfield consistently won reelection in part because of his well-organized volunteer organizations in every county. Countless Oregonians knew “Mark” on a first-name basis. I believe a weak ground campaign contributed to

Republican U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith’s narrow loss to Democrat Jeff Merkley in 2008.

Fifth District Congressman Kurt Schrader may have suffered that same affliction this year. He came across as detached from the district, whereas such members of Oregon’s congressional delegation as 4th Congressional District U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio routinely are back home in Oregon when not on Capitol Hill.

Wikipedia already says Schrader lost the Democratic primary to Jamie McLeod-Skinner, which seems likely but depends on the final vote totals from, uh, Clackamas County.

Liberal/progressive Democratic women fared well in Oregon’s primary, such as Kotek’s trouncing State Treasurer Tobias Read, 56% to 32%, in their gubernatorial contest.

Central Oregon’s McLeod-Skinner was no exception. Perhaps the moder-

ate Schrader underestimated the political challenges created by the redrawing of the 5th District boundaries and by his taking centrist positions against some liberal Democratic diehard policies. In any case, this became another instance where having the most money for advertising didn’t bring victory.

McLeod-Skinner will face Republican Lori Chavez-DeRemer in a matchup that fascinates me in part because each lives slightly outside the congressional district. In addition, Chavez-DeRemer in the 5th District and Salinas in the 6th District could become the first Latinas to represent Oregon in Congress.

However, the greatest lesson from Oregon’s 2022 primary election is the importance of seemingly obscure local offices, such as Clackamas County clerk.

Any individual or organization can mess up big-time. But County Clerk Sherry Hall’s response to the ballot-counting snafu has been stunning for its lack of urgency and depth, its contradictions and its rejection of outside help.

Elected officials set their own work hours and performance criteria. Some throw themselves fully into their work, growing with the job. Others do not. Regardless, the public has the responsibility to hold them accountable.

Too often, voters embrace local candidates based on superficial factors such as friendships, popularity or ideology. As someone who vetted thousands of candidates during editorial board interviews, I would argue that the more important criteria are unimpeachable integrity and demonstrated competence, including a strong work ethic, ability to hire excellent staff and manage them effectively, embracing best practices and staying up to date, crisis management skills and learning from one’s missteps.

These essential criteria hold true for Oregon’s next governor as well. And every other elected official.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dissatisfaction

Im expressing my dissatisfaction with the recent hiring decision of the Seaside planning director. The announcement to hire the interim planning director, Jeff Flory, to permanent planning director, revealed a lack of transparency in the hiring process, and without regard for minimum professional requirements for planning directors.

Comparing Flory’s professional background (code enforcement, law enforcement) with the American Planning Association’s minimum requirements for planning directors, you will see these stark discrepancies.

I acknowledge Flory’s work as code enforcement officer, and his commendable job of improving the city’s code enforcement system. I appreciate his stepping in to serve as interim planning director. But these credentials do not qualify him for planning director.

It is my understanding that in Seaside, among other city positions, the city manager and assistant city manager are the hiring authority for planning directors and convention center directors. City councilors are the hiring authority for city managers.

My concern is, knowing the formidable responsibilities of the position, and the skills necessary for the position, why was an underqualified person hired? Was this an oversight, or an intentional, but inappropriate, “promotion”?

Those who conducted this hiring should have taken the time to recruit a sufficient pool of qualified candidates in this field. Oregon has a tradition of producing good planners, and good candidates are out there.

We should be concerned that a more thorough effort was not made to fill this position, and require more transparency in the future, so it doesn’t happen again.

REBECCA READ
Seaside

A mess

All the roads and streets here in Astoria are a mess, with potholes and sliding or sinking. All they seem to want to do is patch work, or just let them be.

Does the state or city realize that the roads tear up the undercarriage of everyone’s vehicles, making the shocks, struts, tires and other parts go out, and needing to be fixed?

If everyone who owns a vehicle should take matters into their own hands, and got

their vehicles fixed, and sent their bills to the city, they just might want to get the road fixed the right way.

KAREN WOMACK
Astoria

Cluttered

Iam writing a letter today to target a problem I have noticed for quite some time at this point. I would like to talk about the fact our streets, walkways, bushes, etc., are just cluttered with garbage.

One thing I do want to point out is that yes, the homeless population is a big reason, although they are not the only reason. Many people in our community have very little respect for the fact that we are a community, and it matters what we live in, and what our environment looks like. It’s both physically empowering, but mentally empowering, to have an environment that’s beautiful to live in.

I say no matter if its your garbage, or someone else’s, let’s keep our streets clean. Go out for a walk with a friend, your dog, your significant other, but on that walk, make our environment that little bit cleaner, because every little bit counts, and every little bit puts us closer to having an environment we are all proud to live in, and have something to be proud to show for.

ZOE LEEDY
Astoria

Inspired

There’s much to be outraged about: the partisan politicizing of nearly everything, even baby formula; Vladimir Putin’s war to dissolve Ukraine; daily gun murders and suicides across the U.S.; more people believing in white supremacy and conspiracy theories; the Supreme Court preparing to take away rights of half of Americans, the first time it has removed rights, and not expanded them. And much more. You probably have your own list.

Plus, we endure blood pressure rising, heart pounding, panic and fear. Not a good way to live.

How can we get through the day and not retreat into isolation and rabbit holes? What works for me is finding inspiration, and it’s everywhere. Look around, and you’ll find friends and neighbors helping each other, and working to strengthen democracy.

They’re active in politics, helping to shape our communities by campaigning for local candidates and issues. They vol-

unteer for government committees and other good causes. They find ways to make the world better.

I’m inspired by knowing that each of us has a role in defending democracy and opposing authoritarianism, bigotry and corruption. Saint Augustine reminds us, “Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”

I push myself to use my outrage for inspiration and activism. I hope more of us will. Together we can repair the world.

LAURIE CAPLAN
Astoria

Benefit

The Astorian published four articles on forestry in the past week or so. Unlike the rest of the U.S., private ownership of forests in the Pacific region is dominated by corporations.

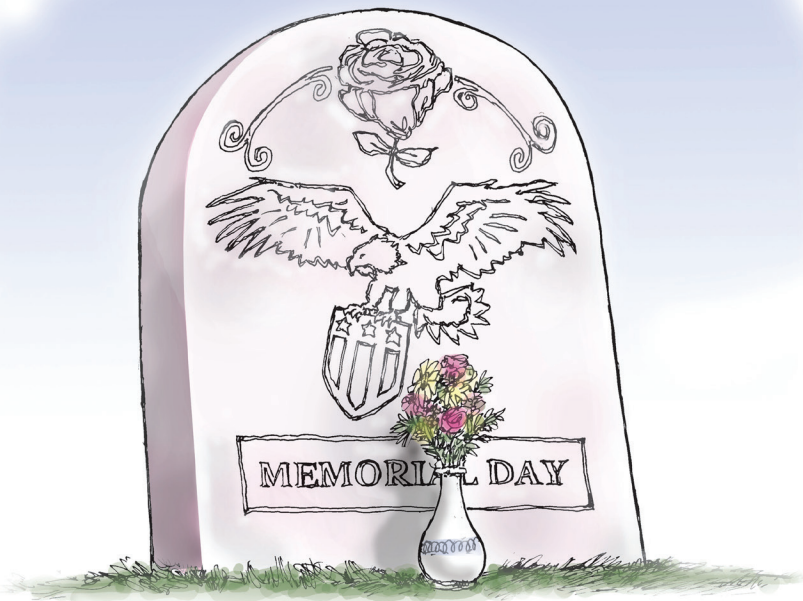
While pine has shorter harvest cycles than fir, individual owners harvest fir sooner than corporations. County Commissioner Courtney Bangs claims 5 harvested acres pays for a teacher every year, but what does that assume? Is the goal cash, sustainability or growing the highest quality wood?

Managing private timberland is tough. You buy or inherit land, harvest, replant, then wait 30 to 75 years before doing it again. Or harvest and sell it cheap. Senate Bill 1501 (Private Forest Accord) aims for a longer-term model. The alternative may look like flipping for forests. House flipping is fine, but not without costs.

Nearly half of industry employees are now government employees responsible for identifying and addressing these issues. Kids who want careers in forestry will benefit more from an Oregon State University degree than from trying to buy timberland or learning to operate heavy machinery.

ED VERDURMEN
Astoria

BillDay
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LETTERS WELCOME

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