

OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

State board nominees get little scrutiny

Oregon's police certification agency has made the headlines for the wrong reasons. At times, so have other state agencies overseen by boards appointed by the governor.

Yet without debate on June 3, the state Senate confirmed seven new or continuing members of the Oregon Board of Public Safety Standards and Training.

In fact, all 121 nominations submitted by Gov. Kate Brown were approved as a group, with only two dissenting votes. Those nominees included one state manager – State Librarian Wendy Cornelisen, who began work in March – and Brown's latest appointees to the Tri-Met Board, Commission



DICK HUGHES

for the Blind, Board of Dentistry, Eastern Oregon University Board of Trustees, Land Use Board of Appeals and various other bodies.

That Senate session lasted 20 minutes. And at a public hearing by videoconference and telephone two days earlier, nominees had been asked to speak no more than a minute so the vetting committee could get through the lengthy list.

Leaders of the Senate Rules and Executive Appointments Committee told me much of the vetting occurs behind the scenes beforehand. Members receive extensive paperwork about the nominees. Brown's appointees to the Board on Public Safety Standards and Training stacked up as well qualified, said state Senate Majority Leader Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, who chairs the committee.

Wagner and others are in contact with the governor's office as potential nominees are being developed and will try to head off problematic choices. "I'm not someone who wants to trot people out to the Senate floor and try to publicly embarrass them. I think it's more a question of trying to work with the governor's office to say, 'Hey, can we go a different direction or can you communicate back to someone that they might not be a good fit



The state Department of Public Safety Standards and Training is based in Salem.

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Tim Knopp | state Senate Republican leader

at this time," he said.

Before a public hearing, nominees often make the rounds – in person or via Zoom – for more in-depth discussions with legislators. Committee members also talk with legislative colleagues, community members and others who know the nominees, asking whether they would be good candidates.

When controversy arises, most often it has been around nominees handling natural resource or environmental issues.

"We want to get the best nominees that we can, but I think there's also a recognition for us that it's difficult many times to find people who would serve on the boards and commissions," said Senate Republican Leader Tim Knopp, of Bend, the committee vice chair. "So if someone is willing to serve and participate, our general philosophy is to welcome them

to do so.

"Where the issue comes in is if they have a predetermined political agenda that they're going to pursue on a commission. That's when they'll likely run into concern and opposition from our caucus."

An Oregon governor appoints people to more than 250 boards, commissions and councils, along with the heads of most state agencies. Many, but not all, require Senate confirmation.

"I'm always so pleased to see how many Oregonians will step forward. I think it's a huge challenge for the governor's office to get the word out with the volume of boards and commissions that we have," Wagner said.

"It's a system that's grown up over time, depending on the needs of the era. But there's some really critical roles in terms of oversight of professions and

helping set a policy direction for some pretty important things that the Legislature wants to see."

The Senate usually meets quarterly to act on the governor's appointments. One thing to watch is whether Brown makes a rush of appointments during her final months in office or leaves key vacancies for her successor to fill next year.

Liz Merah, Brown's press secretary, said anyone interested can apply electronically to serve on a state board or commission at any time. Most are volunteer roles.

Applications are reviewed by the relevant state agency and the governor's office. Community organizations, individuals and other parties often weigh in with the governor's staff.

"After a vetting process of each candidate that may include an interview or checking references, official recommendations are processed by the governor's executive appointments office and presented to the governor for consideration of an appointment," Merah wrote in an email. "At the time of a board/commission appointment, the governor's office verifies that the appointment contributes to the goal of having a board that is reflective of the diverse interests of all Oregonians and is in line with statutory requirements."

Roughly 150 boards and commissions currently are recruiting members. They include two new ones — the Emergency Preparedness Advisory Council and the Local Government Emergency Management Advisory Council.

Other boards seeking members include ones dealing with the arts, boilers, cannabis, dentures, education, global warming, government ethics, hearing aids, Hispanic affairs, massage therapists, plumbing, public records, racing, school safety and wine.

"It's incredibly important for Oregon citizens to consider serving on boards and commissions," Knopp said, "because they can have a lot of impact and input."

Dick Hughes has covered the Oregon political scene since 1976.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vested interest

While I'd like to believe my country is essentially fighting for democracy in Ukraine and around the world, I see a major conflict of interest here:

1) The U.S. is dependent on the world's largest military industrial complex — which both controls and sells far more armaments than any other nation — and supplies 800 U.S. military bases around the globe.

2) This enormous business is completely dependent on "conflicts" and perceived threats of war.

3) The immense profits these corporations make go to their CEOs, public relations firms and stockholders.

4) Many of our most powerful politicians (of both parties) are stockholders in these corporations, and receive millions in "donations" from them, as well.

5) Our huge media companies are dependent on the revenues generated from supporting these extensive corporations through advertising, "hot news" reports, special access to politicians and such.

So here's where the conflict of interest lies: Those who stand to profit from the trillions of dollars generated by war, stand to lose money and power should diplomacy result in peace.

They need to paint pictures of monstrously insane, powerful enemies and poor, defenseless friends we need to save from their clutches to gain our support for their wars. Their vested interest is in war. Period.

Think about it. Can you honestly disagree with anything I've written so far?

Google Oliver Stone interviews, The Grayzone and other sources. There are alternative serious and patriotic viewpoints worth considering — and far better ways to spend our tax dollars here at home.

KATE O'NEAL
South Bend, Washington

What is going on?

The American Association of Family Physicians, a couple of years ago, published a position paper titled "Violence in the Media and Entertainment." This document asserts that "despite being home to only 5% of the world's population, roughly 31% of the world's mass shootings have occurred in the United States."

According to the Children's Defense Fund: "U.S. children and teens are 15 times more likely to die from gunfire than

their peers in 31 other high-income countries combined."

What is going on? Is American society becoming the victim of its own lax attitude toward discipline and exposure to violence? Our children grow up surrounded by violence in entertainment. From cowboy movies like "The Wild Bunch" to virtually every other visual type of entertainment, violence plays a major role in entertainment for all ages. Violence sells.

Our children grow up surrounded by violence in entertainment — much of it perpetrated by guns. Many more mass shootings have taken place since a rampage at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, left 19 children and two teachers dead on May 24.

There is absolutely no justification, constitutional or otherwise, for semi-automatic weapons in the hands of civil-

ians. Our governor and Legislature, our entire congressional delegation, must be unequivocal in demanding effective gun control.

ERHARD GROSS
Astoria

The hordes are coming

Dear Astoria: I have loved you for 30 years. Searched for a home for 20 of those to retire in.

I have watched as the leadership of the 1990s brought you up. The Mill Pond project, the Columbia River Maritime Museum, the multiplex theater, the regional hospital, the Astoria Aquatic Center, the new Safeway, restoration of the Liberty Theatre, and so much more. With each passing year, you have improved, and we found our forever home 11 years ago.

Something happened to you in the past few years; what motivated you so long ago is diminishing, and I'm worried for you. Your previous productive leadership has gone, retired or moved away. Your new stewards are not treating you well. They want to hurt your homeowners and businesses by giving them to vagrants and people who cannot help you, but in fact, will kill you.

Be aware, my dear lady, there are people afoot with power that will deface you, and diminish your value, by letting the vagrants take over. Dear sweet Astoria, your crime has risen, and your officials want to make it worse by spreading it throughout your borders.

Wake up, my fair lady, before you are overrun, like Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Ukraine. I love you, Astoria. Please save yourself! The hordes are coming ...

BILLIE O'NEEL
Astoria

