

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Governor's debate highlights divisions

**‘W**hat does a governor actually do each day?’ That’s the first question I’d like someone to ask at the next Oregon gubernatorial debate among Democrat Tina Kotek, Republican Christine Drazen and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson.

No matter which of the three is elected in November, it will be a lively transition from term-limited Gov. Kate Brown. Any doubts were erased by the entertaining yet substantive debate hosted in late July by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association.



**DICK HUGHES**

The candidates went after one another while also managing to mostly stay on topic.

But if the three ex-lawmakers learned anything from the respectful workplace training that had been mandated at the Legislature, they didn’t show it.

Question No. 2 would be: “You’ve spent the campaign castigating each other while at the same time vowing to bring Oregonians together. How can we believe that vow? How would you accomplish that?”

This two-part question is the crux of being a good governor. An effective campaigner doesn’t necessarily translate into being an effective leader. Oregon already is deeply divided. Relationships within the state Capitol often are tense; some would say toxic. And the constant campaign bashing that voters will endure this fall – not only in this race – can’t be good for our state.

Or our state of mind. Building relationships simply within the Capitol isn’t easy. Gov. Ted Kulongoski tried it by going bowling with lawmakers. It helped ... for a while. Brown, a former legislative leader, tried by inviting lawmakers to the governor’s mansion.

Back to Question No. 1, perhaps a partial reason for Brown’s dismal statewide popularity rating is that Oregonians don’t know what she does. Asked for specifics about how she interacted with legislators on an important bill, or what she did to broker a landmark timber agreement, she would offer few details.

That’s the way Brown is. I’ve never figured out why.

As for the first governor’s debate, it solidified the three major candidates’ running lanes:

Kotek is the Portland progressive and policy wonk with a long list of legislative accomplishments. She was right when she intoned that the state’s vexing problems have no quick fixes or easy



Republican Christine Drazen, Democrat Tina Kotek and Betsy Johnson, an unaffiliated candidate, took part in their first debate in the governor’s race in late July.

### THE CANDIDATES

Tina Kotek is the Portland progressive and policy wonk with a long list of legislative accomplishments. She was right when she intoned that the state’s vexing problems have no quick fixes or easy solutions.

Christine Drazen is the Republican change agent running against decades of Democratic rule. She offered the most compelling personal story and was most at ease talking without notes.

Betsy Johnson is firing both barrels, casting the other two as extremes while she tries to claim a unifying middle. Often acerbic, she’s most quotable: “To Tina I’m too conservative and to Christine I’m too liberal.”

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The debate produced only a few stumbles. Johnson talked about converting the former Wapato Jail in Portland and said Bend was considering a similar model for serving homeless individuals. Bend’s pos-

sibility has since been disputed.

In a question to Drazen, Kotek contended that Drazen had never admitted Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election and Donald Trump lost. That question exhibited poor research by Kotek’s team. Drazen long has been on the record saying Biden won, as she did in response to Kotek.

Kotek also accused Johnson of misrepresenting Kotek’s positions, although the same could be said the other way around.

The debate got hottest when Drazen aimed her closing statement primarily at Johnson, who potentially could draw votes away from her as well as Kotek. She accused Johnson of shedding her

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Democratic skin to pursue additional power by running for governor.

Here’s a potential Question No. 3: “What is something you regret saying on the campaign trail this year – perhaps in a debate – and why?”

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

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### All you do

Congratulations to The Astorian for the many, many awards earned from the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association. And thank you! I’m enriched by your hardworking, dedicated and multitalented staff. For all you do, I’m very grateful.

JULIE KENNEDY  
Port Townsend, Washington

#### Drew my attention

I just read the article in the Aug. 4 newspaper by Nicole Bales. In it, Cannon Beach adjusts a camping ordinance to reflect homelessness. Their ordinance is quite restrictive in its parameters, but it’s the statement by the police chief that drew my attention: “Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn said there is no shelter space in Cannon Beach, but added that the police department is readily available to take people to shelters in Seaside and Astoria.”

This is why they have no homeless in Cannon Beach — they happily transport them to other cities.

Again, a question of the have and the have not.

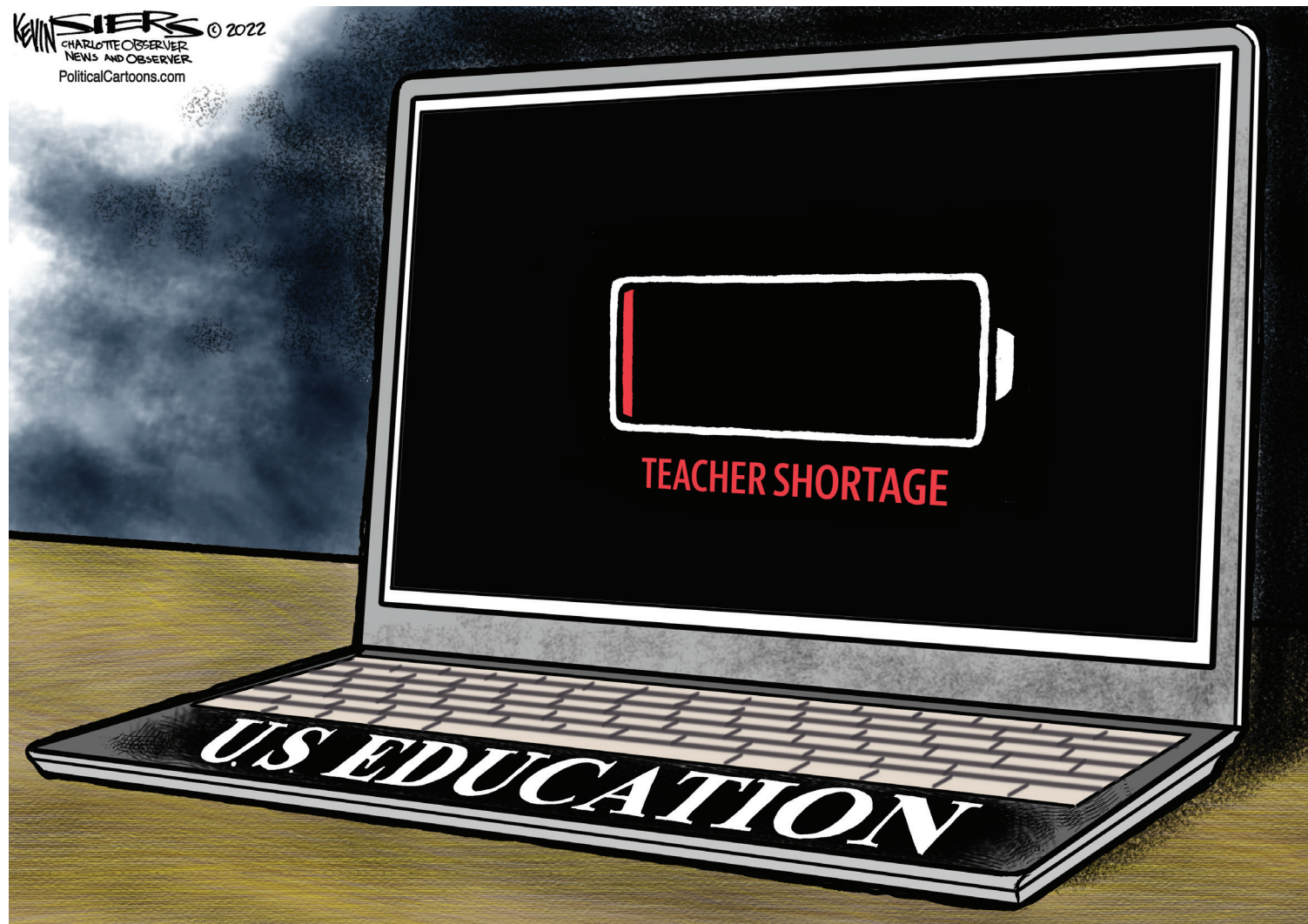
LINDSEY MORRISON  
Seaside

#### Always use

These days it’s very painful to find a business that is truly awesome and truthful — a business that won’t pressure you to purchase their products, let alone respond to tough questions about the product they are selling.

That’s why I always use Hauer’s Lawn Care & Equipment in Astoria. They treat their customers like family and friends. They are truly honest, and

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You will never have a better shop for experience and very knowledgeable at what they do. Big box stores may sell the same equipment, but they cannot beat the knowledge of Hauer’s.

Thank you, Hauer’s, for your excellent experience and knowledge and absolutely incredible service.

THOMAS KRUEGER  
Ocean Park, Washington

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