

Oregon Republicans optimistic about party's prospects

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE Capital Bureau

SALEM — Apparently buoyed by the victory of President Donald J. Trump and Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, Oregon Republicans convening here Friday and Saturday were optimistic about opportunities for the GOP in the Beaver State.

Richardson's election secured the party's first statewide elected office since 2002, resulting in something of a victory lap vibe at the annual Dorchester Conference.

While Republicans lead a solid majority of state legislatures, Oregon is one of 12 states where Democrats are in charge in both chambers, compared to 32 states where Republicans have control of both chambers.

Senate Minority Leader Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, noted in remarks Friday night that one Oregon Senate seat flipped in the last election from Democrat to Republican.

Sen. Alan DeBoer, R-Ashland, won a special election to finish the last two years of the term of the late Sen. Alan Bates, D-Medford, who died in August. DeBoer won the race by just under 400 votes, according to the Oregon Secretary of State's Office.

Salem physician Bud Pierce, the 2016 Republican gubernatorial candidate who lost to Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, said he was feeling optimistic about the future of the Republican party in Oregon.

Pierce, who is on the board of directors of Oregon's League of Minority Voters, moderated a panel of speakers, that included Promise King, executive director of the league, about including people of color in state politics and campaigns.

Asked by a reporter whether he sees a conflict between his party's aim to include minority groups and the rhetoric of President Trump — who has been prone to making gross gener-



U.S. Rep. Greg Walden poses for a photo at the Dorchester Conference Saturday with Promise King, executive director of the Oregon League of Minority Voters. Republicans attending the annual political conference were optimistic about the party's chances to expand its fortunes in the Beaver State.

alizations about minority groups, including immigrants from Mexico — Pierce said he was waiting to see what action the president takes.

"Let's see if he can give a legal status to 11 million people," Pierce said. Pressed about the likelihood of such a reversal by the president, Pierce said: "Well see, you know, it was unlikely that Nixon would go to China."

Pierce points to the state's lack of affordable housing as one example of what he calls the "failures" of the Democrats' policies in Oregon that he believes could attract more voters to the right.

The Legislature is debating proposals to ban rent hikes and no-cause evictions, and many Republicans at the conference advocated instead for loosening up the state's land use restrictions to encourage more development and housing supply.

Pierce said he believes Republicans may benefit from the growing number of voters in the state who are not affiliated with any political party.

Many new voters have been registered recently through the state's new automatic voter registration law, which registers voters as unaffiliated unless they designate a political party.

"Can we become the natural place for the unaffil-

iated votes?" Pierce asked. "Maybe they won't call themselves Republicans, but maybe they'll do it."

State Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, referencing relatively recent political shifts in Michigan and Wisconsin, told conference attendees he believes Oregon could become a red state.

"I think there's a lot of hope in Oregon," Barreto said. "But a lot of these other states, they didn't just change from blue to red accidentally, there was some pain that went on."

Barreto referred to economic woes in those states and continued:

"If we're not careful in Oregon, there's going to be some pain in Oregon, when we talk about PERS, when we talk about Medicaid, when we talk about bills that we can't afford to pay right now, we will feel some pain."

U.S. Rep Greg Walden, R-Hood River, Ore., called on Republicans to stay involved.

"You need to fight back," Walden said, when asked by an attendee if conservative groups were organizing to attend town halls. "If you believe in why we run, if you believe in the policies we're trying to implement, you have to help us fight back, you have to be there shoulder-to-shoulder with us."

Anti-abortion measure supporters can start seeking signatures

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE Capital Bureau

SALEM — Petitioners were granted permission last month to gather signatures to put a measure restricting state funding for abortions on the ballot in November 2018.

The effort, Initiative Petition 1, would amend the state's constitution to prohibit spending public funds for abortions, with certain exceptions, according to the Oregon Secretary of State's Office.

As written, the petition would allow public funds to be spent in circumstances where federal law requires states to provide funding for the procedure or when the procedure is "medically necessary."

Abortions and vasectomies are excluded from coverage required under the

Affordable Care Act, the federal health care law that is under threat of repeal in Congress.

A group of Democratic lawmakers in the Oregon House of Representatives this session is sponsoring legislation — called the Reproductive Health Equity Act — that would require health plans, except for those that are offered by religious employers, to cover abortions and vasectomies. It would also maintain no-cost birth control in the state.

The petition was approved for circulation Feb. 24. The petition needs 117,578 signatures to get on the ballot next year.

Similar petitions were filed in 2012, 2014 and 2016, but failed each time to qualify for the ballot.

Supporters of the initiative petition, in comments

submitted to the Secretary of State's Office, argue that Oregonians who oppose abortion should not be obligated to fund the procedure through taxes.

Mary Nolan, executive director of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, said in a statement that limitations on abortion would negatively affect low-income women, immigrants, young women and women of color in the state.

"When a woman is living paycheck to paycheck, denying coverage can push her deeper into poverty," Nolan said.

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Police, civil rights leaders voice support for police stop data collection

By PARIS ACHEN Capital Bureau

SALEM — After years of disagreement, both Oregon law enforcement and civil rights leaders voiced support Monday, March 6, for a bill that would require police to record data on race during traffic stops.

The legislation, proposed by Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, is aimed at addressing racial profiling by law enforcement.

"The legitimacy of our law enforcement depends on public perception, and there is no accountability mechanism better than sunshine," Rosenblum testified during a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee.

"The experience of other states suggests that law enforcement is often quick to change their policies when confronted with data

suggesting disparate impact on diverse communities."

The legislation also expands mandatory bias training for police officers and downgrades certain drug possession crimes from felonies to misdemeanors — crimes for which people of color are disproportionately prosecuted.

Law enforcement officers would be required to record the race of the person stopped and when a citation or warning is issued, a search is conducted or a person is arrested. The Oregon Criminal Justice Commission would analyze the data for any enforcement disparities and publish any trends in an annual report. Finally, the information would be distributed at a public forum in the law enforcement agency's county of jurisdiction.

Several law enforcement

agencies already collect such data voluntarily. Since 2000, Oregon State Police has been recording data on race, gender, age, reason for contact, citation, warning or search type.

"OSP does believe data collection has value in terms of guiding good policing policy and a critical foundation for discussions relating to policing concerns," said OSP Superintendent Travis Hampton. "Before we have the conversation, I think we do need the data."

OSP data shows that 2.1 percent of trooper contacts were with people identified as black, which is proportionate with the population. But in Multnomah County, court records show that blacks are 10 times more likely to be charged with a drug-related crime, according to a Portland Tribune report.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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