

# Governor's appointments closely match geographic populations

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

During her tenure as Oregon's governor, Kate Brown has proposed 157 people to fill state boards and commissions.

Seven of those nominees are residents of Eastern Oregon, 4.5 percent, which is almost exactly the same proportion of Oregonians who live on the east side of the state.

Oregon has more than 250 boards and commissions with 1,364 executive appointments, according to public records the *East Oregonian* obtained from the governor's office.

Brown's appointments became an issue in March when she fired Melinda Eden of Milton-Freewater, Colleen Johnson of La Grande, and Morgan Rider of Portland from the Environmental Quality Commission. The move irked Republican Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena, who in early May opposed Brown's replacements on the commission, all who live west of the Cascades.

All of the governor's nomi-

nations must be approved by the Senate.

After reviewing the complete list of appointments Hansell commended the governor for representational parity, but said it matters which boards rural Oregonians are on. He said it makes sense to have Eastern Oregon residents on the Environmental Quality Commission even if state law does not require it.

Brandon Persinger, Hansell's legislative director, said state statutes establish the boards and commissions and some do have geographic requirements.

The Water Resources Commission by law must have three of its seven members from east of the Cascade mountains, Persinger said. Eric Quaepts of Adams is the north-central representative and Bruce Corn of Ontario is the eastern representative. An at-large member serves as the third.

Geography is not a requirement of the 24-member Public Safety Standards and Training Board, which Malheur County Sheriff

Brian Wolfe serves on. Persinger said the board by law must have a minimum numbers or sheriffs, police chiefs, fire chiefs and other public safety professionals, along with one city administrator and one member from the public

Hansell said he met with the governor's office, which promised to work to have more rural Oregonians on state boards. He also said he and Persinger would dig into the data to find out the extent of Eastern Oregon voices serving on boards and committees.

Bryan Hockaday, Brown's press secretary, said in an email that the governor "prioritizes diversifying each board and commission to include gender, gender identity, race, ability, veterans and geographic parity among the membership. She considers recommendations of stakeholders, legislators and staff to ensure Oregonians have access to leadership opportunities that move our state forward."

Hockaday also said the governor balances her appointments across the five congressional districts,

which each have roughly the same population.

Mike Thorne of Pendleton is a former state senator who serves as one of 15 members on the Oregon State University Board of Trustees. State law requires the board have one OSU student, one faculty member and one staff member, but the other seats can be filled at the governor's discretion. Thorne said geography matters, but not at the expense of expertise and ability.

"You want talented people that you also know can do the job," he said.

Thorne said in his years in the Senate — from 1973 to 1991 — as many as 35 residents of Umatilla County served on state boards at one time. To achieve that level of representation, he said he constantly fed names of talented locals to the governor's staffer in charge of executive appointments.

The state's 30 senators and 60 representatives should know better than the governor who would benefit a board, he said, so if lawmakers are not satisfied

with the number of people from Eastern Oregon on boards and commissions, they should regularly propose names from their districts.

Hansell said he is working on that and asked the governor's office for a list of board vacancies. Specific details about executive appointments, including the interest form and membership handbook, are available online at this link: [www.oregon.gov/gov/admin/Pages/How\\_To\\_Apply.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/gov/admin/Pages/How_To_Apply.aspx).

The state of Oregon's population in 2016 was 4,076,350, according to data from Oregon Blue Book. The counties of Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa and Wheeler had a combined population of 181,900, or 4.5 percent of the state.

Some 2 million people — a tick more than half the state's population — live in Portland and its surrounding communities, according to U.S. Census data. Out of the 157 executive appointments made by Brown, 78 are from the Portland area — nearly 50 percent.

## BRIEFLY

### Governor forgives boy for swiping hazelnut, pen

SALEM (AP) — The governor of Oregon has pardoned a fourth-grade boy who swiped a hazelnut and a pen during a recent tour of the state Capitol.

Gov. Kate Brown on Thursday tweeted out a photo of the boy's apology letter along with the hashtag #cutestmailever and the caption, "I think we can forgive Samuel, don't you think, Oregonians?" The tweet immediately got many likes and retweets.

In the pencil-written letter, Samuel explains that he visited the Capitol Building on a classroom tour on April 19 and took the items.

"These things were not mine and it was wrong for me to take them. I'm very sorry," he wrote. "I hope you and the people of Oregon can forgive me."

Included with the letter were the pen and \$1 to cover the cost of the stolen hazelnut.

In a return letter, Brown said she accepted his apology and forgave him on behalf of all Oregonians.

"Oregon is a special place. I hope we can work together to keep it that way," the governor wrote.

As a final gesture of goodwill, she enclosed a new pen for Samuel to "remember this event."

### Eclipse a wild card during wildfire season

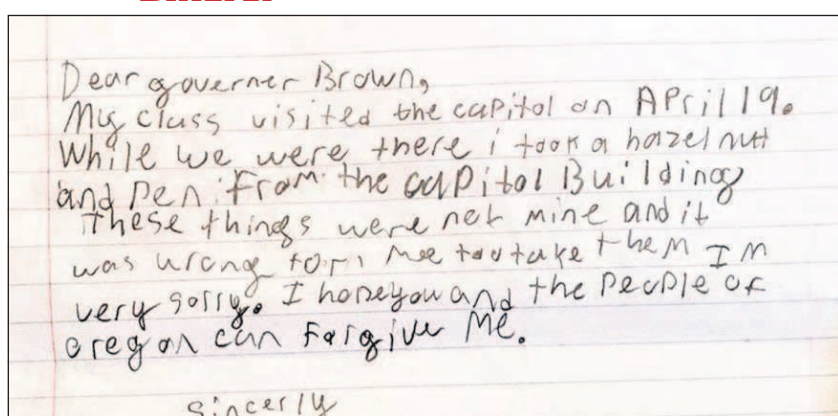
Authorities think this summer is going to be average for wildfire activity.

Despite a cool, wet winter, that still means about 4,000 small and large fires. And while oncoming El Niño ocean conditions may mean a warmer than usual summer, there's no indication of drought.

But John Saltenberger with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says there is one wild card. The hundreds of thousands of people who'll be in the Oregon wilderness to watch the solar eclipse on Aug. 21.

"Traditionally we see spikes in the number of human ignitions that come on holiday weekends such as July 4th such as Labor Day. This is going to outstrip all of that," he said.

"It's unprecedented. At this point, I don't have a feel for how many extra fire starts we may likely suffer during the eclipse event. But it's not trivial," said Saltenberger.



Saerom England/Office of Oregon Governor Kate Brown via AP

This photo provided by the Office of Oregon Gov. Kate Brown shows a portion of an apology letter from a fourth-grader to Gov. Brown, explaining that his class had toured the Capitol on a field trip in April 2017 and how he took a hazelnut and a pen from the Capitol Building. In a note replying to the letter, which included the pen in question and a \$1 reimbursement for the hazelnut, Brown thanked the young man and wrote "I accept your apology and forgive you."

Saltenberger's main concern is that the eclipse coincides with really hot, dry, windy conditions.

About half of all wildfires are started by humans. The rest are sparked by lightning.

— Oregon Public Broadcasting

### Luxury hotel planned in Walla Walla

WALLA WALL — By this time two years from now, guests coming to Walla Walla for its world-class wines will be able to stay overnight at what developers are calling the town's first contemporary four-plus-star hotel.

Developers who plan to revitalize the former 1907 Odd Fellows Building at 28 S. Spokane St. into The Penrose Walla Walla Hotel & Spa have provided a vision for the building, details of its ownership, and a rough opening for the massive downtown Walla Walla project.

Anticipated for an early 2019 opening, the project includes a "significant" new building addition to complement the existing main building, the developers announced.

The 82-room boutique hotel will have a restaurant, bar, meeting spaces and rooftop event terraces, and poolside food and drink service, all located in the restored building that is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The redevelopment of the property has been highly anticipated as Seattle architect and manager Stephen Day and partners have had

contact with the city, county, Port of Walla Walla and Downtown Walla Walla Foundation over the last year.

The construction is intended to complement what exists in the main structure. Similarly, the hotel development is designed to complement what exists in Walla Walla with the emergence of an internationally recognized wine producing region.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

### Lawmaker won't block push for presidential popular vote

SALEM (AP) — Democrats are planning to make a final push this year to have Oregon join almost a dozen states that want to sidestep the Electoral College and elect the U.S. president by popular vote.

Previous efforts to join the so-called National Popular Vote interstate compact have failed three times since 2009, with Democratic Senate President Peter Courtney blocking it in each instance.

This year, however, Courtney says he'll concede if Oregon voters have the final say.

The National Popular Vote movement gained momentum after President Donald Trump's Electoral College victory in November. It's triggered when enacted by states that, collectively, have at least 270 electoral votes. House Bill 2927 would add Oregon's seven electors to the compact, which currently has 165 votes.

## Oregon Child Welfare director resigns after six months on job

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The director of Oregon's beleaguered Child Welfare division of the state Department of Human Services is stepping down after six months on the job.

Lena Alhousseini, who joined the agency in early November after it conducted a national search, submitted her resignation as child welfare director Wednesday afternoon.

She did not return a phone message seeking comment by deadline. A department spokesman declined Friday to provide answers to further questions about Alhousseini's departure.

She will stay on at the agency, leading an effort to recruit diverse employees, until Sept. 1.

DHS Director Clyde Saiki announced Alhousseini's departure in a statement Friday.

"I respect Lena's vision for child welfare — a framework of community engagement and support — and that essential work will continue," Saiki said. "However, Lena and I agree that we have not been able to get the results we need to achieve."

Saiki himself is retiring Sept. 1. He will be replaced by the current director of the Oregon Youth Authority, the state's agency overseeing juveniles in the criminal justice system.

Both departures come as DHS struggles to recover after significant documented problems in child welfare. Starting in 2015, news reports revealed the agency did a poor job monitoring management and safety issues at a Portland foster care provider, prompting further scrutiny of the system

and calls for a culture change at the agency.

Under Alhousseini's direction, which began shortly after the agency released a detailed outside report on the foster care system's shortcomings, the division seemed eager to make improvements.

Alhousseini came to Oregon from Brooklyn, N.Y., where she was executive director of

the Arab-American Family Support Center. She did not return a phone message seeking comment by deadline.

Earlier this year state lawmakers learned children being screened after reports of abuse and neglect remained in unsafe situations after being deemed safe by DHS staff.

In March, Alhousseini unveiled a new training simulation for social workers. Last week, she announced an initiative to equip caseworkers with iPhones and tablets, in what was portrayed as an effort to increase productivity and home visits.

Saiki said that the agency would continue to emphasize child safety.

"Moving forward, our focus must be on the basics," Saiki wrote, including correctly screening reports of abuse and neglect, ensuring safe placements and "ensuring ongoing oversight and support in family foster care and residential placements."

"In addition, we must continue our efforts toward the culture change needed to put children's safety at the center of every decision and action," Saiki said.

According to a spokesman for DHS, Alhousseini's annual salary of \$150,000 will not change with her new position.



Alhousseini

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