

# State Democrats seek to expand their reach

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**  
Capital Bureau

SUNRIVER, Ore. — In their first summit since the election, President Donald J. Trump and his administration still loomed large over Oregon Democrats who met in this Central Oregon resort town over the weekend for their biennial gathering.

Trump appears to be motivating Oregon Democrats to action. Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum told summit attendees Saturday that her office has filed suit against the Trump administration seven times.

But many elected officials and others spoke of looking forward to 2018, when they hope to maintain Democrats' grip on Oregon offices and expand the reach of the Democratic Party.

Oregon's approximately 971,000 registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by about 264,000, but there's also 795,000 nonaffiliated voters.

Oregon Democrats say that they have an opportunity with the upcoming election to recruit more rural and minority

voters to their cause, despite the substantial ideological gap between the state's cities and its more rural areas east of the Cascade mountains.

Most state legislative districts on the east side have generally voted Republican in recent decades.

Democratic party registrations exceed Republicans in two House Districts currently represented by Republicans who are expected to vacate office.

One of the districts spans Multnomah, Clackamas and Hood River counties, where incumbent Mark Johnson will soon leave office to run a business association. Another seat in Deschutes County will be vacated by GOP gubernatorial candidate Knute Buehler.

Gov. Kate Brown, in remarks at a reception Friday night, argued that the state could remain a Democratic stronghold, blasting people who think they "can turn Oregon red."

"We know better," Brown, who is running for reelection next year, said. "We aren't going to let that happen, are we?"

But others warned that it

will take work.

"We are not taking anything for granted in Oregon," said U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, who noted that in her Northwestern Oregon district, Columbia and Yamhill counties voted for Trump.

Just as the national election prompted soul-searching in the Democratic Party nationally, the 2016 election created divisions among Democrats in Oregon — and not just along the lines of those who supported Democratic Socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and those who supported former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Brad Avakian, the state's labor commissioner, who is serving his last term, hinted at divisions within the state's Democrats that emerged in the 2016 race for secretary of state.

The primary pitted three Democrats — Avakian, former state representative and House Majority Leader Val Hoyle, and State Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin — against each other before Avakian clinched the nomi-

nation. He lost the general election to Republican Dennis Richardson.

"After you elected me in that primary, it was my responsibility to win that race," Avakian said. "... Regardless of the obstacles we faced, I didn't."

While, Avakian said, the episode "tested (his) notions of friendship and forgiveness," he called on Democrats to work together to achieve their state policy goals, and received a standing ovation in response.

Before the 2018 primary season, though, the next big political battle on the home front will likely be over health care. Oregon voters will weigh in on how the state funds its Medicaid program in a special election Jan. 23.

Ballot Measure 101 asks voters to either affirm or partially repeal the state's plan to fund the Oregon Health Plan — the state's Medicaid program — through assessments on health care providers and insurers.

Democrats and a slew of progressive political organizations support affirming the current plan.

# HERMISTON: 'I don't think they're making this up'

Continued from 1A

Mayor David Drotzmann expressed concern that March would not be enough time to finish, the council voted unanimously to extend the deal even further, to June. Ranch & Home will also have until Oct. 1, 2019 to recruit a grocery store.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said staff recommended an extension on the agreement because the "major intent" of the money was to get Dress to begin construction on the development, and the January deadline was put in place to avoid having an open-ended deal. The city recently had to delay a project putting traffic signals on NW 11th Street because it received no bids from electrical contractors, he said, so "the city can certainly commiserate" with having projects thrown off schedule due to a shortage of electricians in the area.

He also said there didn't seem to be a downside to extending the part of the agreement about the grocery store, because either no grocery store would come

in and the city would not have to pay the road costs, or the city would get a new grocery store.

"The city can continue to recruit, but it just doesn't carry the same weight as another business owner saying 'I've invested millions of dollars here,'" he said.

Drotzmann said he agreed that the real intent of the incentives were to get the ball rolling on construction of the store, and there didn't seem to be any reason why Ranch & Home would want to delay opening if they had a choice.

"I don't think they're making this up," he said. "I don't think they're trying to stall by any means."

Councilor John Kirwan agreed, noting that the company he works for, Union Pacific Railroad, has problems finding electrical contractors. He also agreed with Drotzmann that March may not be enough time, and made the motion to extend the incentives through June.

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# RUN: Students compete in five meets through the season

Continued from 1A

waiting to head out to the field. They're bouncing off the walls, and when their coaches finally lead them outside, they tear across the field for their warm-up lap.

They then meet up on the blacktop for some dynamic stretching, including high-knees, toe touches and lunges.

"The cool thing about these stretches is that not all these kids will go on to run cross country, but may play another sport," Garcia said. "These are common stretches."

The team had their last meet of the season on Friday in Pendleton, and it was a remarkable season. At Umatilla's "Footrace to Valhalla" race in Umatilla, six of the top 10 runners were from Umatilla. And at Hermiston's Bulldog Cross Country Festival, both teams took first place. One of the team's youngest students, a second-grade girl, placed fifth at a meet in Helix.

Garcia said the team has won most of the meets they've attended. Some, he said, keep more detailed scores than others.

"The girls have taken first through fifth at all the races," he said. "Easily, the top 10 kids are most of ours."

Some of the students enjoy running for recreation, but many are eager to race.

"My favorite race was Pendleton," said R.J. Estrada, a fifth-grader in his second year of the program. "It was fun, and I got a prize."

Claudia Castro, a fifth-grader who has been running with the program for three years, said she feels like she has improved through the program, and plans to keep running in middle school.

The team is coached by Garcia and Potts, a substitute teacher in the Hermiston and Umatilla school districts.

The students compete in five meets throughout the season, in Hermiston, Helix, Pendleton, Stanfield and Umatilla. They get to experience different types of terrain — hills and pastures, streets and trails.



Coach Francisco Garcia talks to his kids about their season this year during practice for the McNary USA running team on Monday in Umatilla.



Fourth-grader Benito Soto leads the pack during warm-ups at practice for the McNary USA running team on Monday in Umatilla.

"The one in Stanfield had a big hill," Garcia said. "The kids knew that would affect the outcome of their race."

On Monday, after their final meet the previous week, the students ran just one mile around the school field before enjoying some recess and free time. They take off at a fast clip, with some slowing down as they complete the last laps.

Potts has tried to teach the runners about pacing themselves, which looks different for each person.

"That's one of the biggest things the kids realize on their own after their first race," Garcia said. "For some of them, pacing themselves just

means doing the whole thing without walking."

Though Umatilla has a youth track program, also coached by Garcia, the cross country program is relatively new.

"(P.E. teacher Brandt Lind) and our principal three years ago took kids to a meet in Pendleton," said Garcia. "The kids loved it, and so they pitched it as an idea to (Superintendent Heidi Sipe). She wanted to make it part of the after-school program."

Garcia said many of the students who join the program are in his homeroom and are excited about running, but not everyone is enthusiastic at first.

"We have kids who totally hated running before," he said. "But they end up realizing running is not that bad."

Many students from the cross country team have been inspired to join track, as well, and 120 registered last spring.

The students also learn something many don't associate with running — that it is, in fact, a team sport. They learn how cross country is scored. The top five runners on each team competing earn a score, and each score is in relation to the order in which the runner finishes. The first place runner gets one point, second place gets two points, and so on.

And, Garcia said, they learn about the most important aspect of being a teammate.

"The kids love to cheer each other on," he said. "They're not worried about what they placed, but how their teammates did."

# CAPITOL: Door to Kruse's office to be removed this week

Continued from 1A

In an interview Monday with The Oregonian/OregonLive, Gelsler identified Republican Sen. Jeff Kruse as the colleague she had previously complained about. She alleged that inappropriate touching had occurred for years.

The newspaper also quoted Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick as saying she saw Kruse wrap his arms around Gelsler at her desk on the Oregon Senate floor and step inappropriately close to her during a debate.

"I said, 'Get your hands off Sen. Gelsler,'" Burdick recalled telling Kruse.

Kruse, whose committee assignments were removed Friday by Senate President Peter Courtney as punishment, says he hasn't been informed what he's accused of. He earlier denied any inappropriate behavior.

"Because I am being denied access to any of the specifics of the allegations and actually I am being denied due process in this whole thing there is very little I can say because I don't know what the allegations are," Kruse, who represents the southern town of Roseburg, said in an email to The Associated Press. Kruse served on the health care, education and judiciary committees.

Asked if Kruse had not been given the opportunity to respond to the allegations, Courtney's spokesman said the senator knew his behavior needed to change.

"There are on-going work-place issues which Senator Kruse has failed to resolve. As a result, the Senate President took the action Friday to remove Senator Kruse from his committees," spokesman

Robin Maxey said in an email.

Gelsler said she was voicing the harassment issue on behalf of other women, and she doesn't want attention on her own situation.

"I think as an elected leader in the Legislature, I have a responsibility to the many, many young women that work in the building, and older women too, as staffers and as lobbyists who are encountering these problems on a regular basis," she said.

Maxey also said the door to Kruse's office in the capitol would be removed this week, because he has continued smoking in there despite a smoking ban in the building.

Oregon is not alone in seeing sexual harassment accusations emerge recently.

The California Senate announced Monday that it has hired a law firm to investigate sexual harassment after numerous women working in and around the Capitol described a culture of sexual intimidation. No male lawmakers have been accused by name. But female lobbyists, lawmakers and legislative staffers have described accounts of men making inappropriate comments, touching them and asking them to perform sex acts.

In Arizona, a legislator has joined a growing chorus of women going public about sexual harassment they encountered from men in the workplace. Republican Rep. Michelle Ugenti-Rita of Scottsdale said she encountered harassment soon after taking office in early 2011, including "unwanted sexual advances and lewd and suggestive comments regarding my body and appearance from male colleagues."

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