

# Republican candidates promise victory through uncompromising conservatism

BY ANTONIO SIERRA

East Oregonian  
PENDLETON — There wasn't much daylight between the eight candidates on stage at a Tuesday, March 24, Umatilla County Republican Party gubernatorial forum at the Pendleton Convention Center.

The candidates generally agreed they were going to reverse the policies of Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, the state should move to a school choice model, the Second Amendment needed to be protected and all government mandates needed to be repealed.

The candidates didn't get much time to expound on their thoughts. The size of the field — West Linn political consultant Bridget Barton, Hillsboro retiree Reed Christensen, Tigard entrepreneur Nick Hess, Baker City Mayor Kerry McQuisten, Bend marketing consultant Brandon Merritt, White City massage

therapist Amber Richardson, Redmond contractor Bill Sizemore and former Alsea School District Superintendent Marc Thielman — had only 30 seconds each to answer most questions.

But all candidates still got a shot at making their case to a good-sized audience in Pendleton. The candidates were mostly polite with one another but occasionally took shots at some of the candidates who weren't in Pendleton, which included many of the field's top fundraisers: former state House Minority Leader Christine Drazen of Canby, Salem oncologist and 2016 Republican nominee Bud Pierce, Sandy Mayor Stan Pulliam and former state representative and Oregon Republican Party Chair Bob Tiernan of Lake Oswego.

Oregon hasn't elected a Republican governor since 1982, but each candidate explained how they would be the one to reverse the trend.

Barton stressed to the audience both her experience advocating for rural Oregon and her status as an "outsider." She told the audience that she would work hard in Salem to advance their priorities.

"I'm here to tell you that I would stand in front of a train for you," she said.

As governor, Barton said she would immediately replace the state's deputy superintendent of public instruction, who leads the Oregon Department of Education.

Christensen said the most important issue was to end Oregon's vote-by-mail system in favor of a one-day, in-person election so the state could get "election integrity."

He also highlighted his participation in the attempted insurrection in Washington D.C. in 2021. Christensen faces federal charges for assaulting Capitol police.

"I was arrested by the FBI," he said. "I'm currently in the system. I care."

In almost all of his answers, Hess said he would work to make Oregon government more transparent and listen to residents instead of lobbyists.

Like former Gov. Vic Atiyeh, Hess said he was a Republican from the Portland metro area, which would give him an advantage in trying to break the GOP's losing streak in gubernatorial elections.

"I know it sucks to think about a Portland person, but a Portland person is how we get somebody who's conservative elected," he said.

McQuisten used her opening remarks to remind the audience she helped pass a Baker City resolution that criticized Brown and her COVID-19 restrictions.

"I wrote a resolution you may have heard of that told Kate Brown to pound sand," she said.

McQuisten said moderates such as Pierce and Knute Buehler couldn't win the general election, but she, as a "staunch

conservative," could.

Nonaffiliated voters recently surpassed Democrats as the largest group of voters in the state, and Merritt said Republicans needed to win those voters if they were going to win general elections and govern effectively.

He also criticized Drazen for allowing a gun control bill to pass so Republicans could get a seat at the table for redistricting only for Democrats to gerrymander anyway.

"Compromise is never an option," he said.

Richardson said she was intentionally running her campaign frugally, adding she had only spent \$3,000 on her campaign.

She also compared herself to former President Donald Trump, saying she was unpredictable and was able to successfully evade the state's attempts to censor her.

"The state doesn't know what I'm going to do next," she said. "Every time I try

to do something, they never know what to expect."

Sizemore owns a painting business, but he might be best known for passing multiple ballot measures that limited property taxes in the 1990s. He also ran for governor in 1996, but lost to Gov. John Kitzhaber in a landslide.

Sizemore leaned on his experience passing ballot measures and fighting with public employee unions, skills he thought would help him reform Salem.

Thielman touted his time as a "man of action" in Alsea, where he and the school board passed a resolution making face masks optional before the state lifted its own mandate.

He said the state should require schools to teach gun safety courses in fifth, eighth and 10th grade. As governor, he also would have the state arrest Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt.

## Kitzhaber, Roberts endorse Read for Oregon governor

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

Two former governors have endorsed state Treasurer Tobias Read among the 17 Democrats seeking their party's nomination for governor in the May 17 primary.

They are John Kitzhaber, a Democrat who was governor from 1995 to 2003, and again from 2011 to 2015, and Barbara Roberts, a Democrat who was governor from 1991 to 1995.

In statements released by Read's campaign, each had a unique commentary (following below).

### Kitzhaber, on Tuesday, March 22:

"What Oregon lacks today is a vision of where we want our state to be a decade from

now, the steps it will take to get there and an honest conversation about the difficult choices involved with securing that future. Tobias Read has the courage and the integrity to lead us in that conversation and beyond the polarization and divisiveness that is shredding the fabric of our community.

"Bold, outcomes-based leadership, unfettered by the status quo, is what Oregon needs and what Tobias brings to this race. I am proud to support him."

### Roberts, on March 3:

"Oregon needs a governor with a statewide record of tackling tough issues, delivering results, and fighting for Oregonians living in every corner of this great state.

"Tobias has shown he can bring people together, and he

will continue his work to build economic opportunity and a better future for all. That's why I'm supporting Tobias. Oregon needs his proven and steady leadership."

Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, who is barred by term limits from running again after serving almost two full terms, is not endorsing anyone. Neither is former Gov. Ted Kulongoski, a Democrat who served from 2003 to 2011, although he said Wednesday he may do so in the future. Former Gov. Neil Goldschmidt withdrew from public life in 2004 after news disclosures that he had had sex

with a teenage babysitter while mayor of Portland in the 1970s.

Read has been elected twice as state treasurer — he cannot seek a third consecutive term in 2024 — and was a state representative from Beaverton for 10 years beforehand.

He has raised less so far this year than his main rival for the nomination, former House Speaker Tina Kotek — about \$337,000 to \$608,000 — but Read has begun airing TV commercials. As of Wednesday, Read reported \$761,000 cash on hand; Kotek about \$1 million.

Though neither mentioned

it in their endorsement statements, Kitzhaber and Roberts have had past issues with Kotek, who led that chamber for a record nine years.

In February 2015, Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney called on Kitzhaber to resign amid an ethics scandal primarily involving Cylvia Hayes, his fiancée. Kitzhaber finally did so just 38 days into his fourth term and was succeeded by Brown, who was next in line as secretary of state.

Roberts, the first woman to be Oregon's governor, said last year that Kotek and Courtney had been the Legislature's presiding officers for too long. She said their long tenures concentrated too much authority in a few hands.

Courtney, a Democrat from Salem, is retiring after a record

38 years in the Legislature and 20 years as Senate president. Kotek stepped out Jan. 22 as speaker and from her north/northeast Portland House seat, which she held for 15 years, to focus on her current campaign.

Although there is no official limit for presiding officers — who appoint the leaders and members of legislative committees, assign bills to them and otherwise control the flow of legislation — the informal limit was four years, until Jason Boe won a third term as Senate president in 1977. Boe did so despite opposition from a group of Democratic senators, including Frank Roberts of Portland, who was Barbara Roberts' husband. Boe ended up being president eight years, until he lost a primary bid for state treasurer in 1980.



Kitzhaber



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