

EDITORIAL

Governor's race
and gun laws

Last month a gunman killed 19 children and two adults at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. Two weeks earlier a gunman killed 10 people in Buffalo, New York. Gun laws were already going to be an issue in the November election for Oregon governor. Now, perhaps more so.

Three candidates for Oregon governor — Democrat Tina Kotek, independent Betsy Johnson and Republican Christine Drazan — have distinctly different positions.

If you want Congress to do more, you may have to wait. In Congress, the recent debates over gun laws have mostly ended in stalemate. Bills may pass the House. There have not been 60 votes in the Senate to overcome the filibuster.

In Oregon, it's been different. Gun control advocates will argue the state could do more. But control of the governor's office and majorities in the Legislature mean Oregon does have more recent laws that some other states do not.

One Oregon law in 2015 required a background check on sales of private firearms. Kotek voted for it. Johnson voted against it. Drazan was not in the Legislature. A second law was passed in 2017. It's termed "a red flag law," enabling the police to take away a person's guns in certain circumstances. Kotek voted for it. Johnson voted against it. Drazan was not in the Legislature. The most recent example was in 2021. It was a gun storage safety bill. Kotek voted for it. Johnson and Drazan voted against it.

Kotek has already mentioned three more gun laws the state could adopt. It could ban "ghost guns." Those are ones people can assemble at home. Oregon could raise the minimum age to buy an assault-style weapon from 18 to 21. And it could ban more people from owning guns, such as those convicted of hate crimes.

Johnson, who is a gun owner, does not believe the solution is passing more laws for law-abiding citizens. She wants more enforcement of existing laws and more help to law enforcement to accomplish that. Johnson recently tweeted: "First, stronger mental health prevention and intervention. Second, support for locally designed safety measures in schools across the state."

In the wake of Uvalde, Drazan has not called for new gun laws. She has spoken about increasing school security measures that "...includes investing in school resource officers and ensuring that individuals who should not have access to a classroom do not gain access to a classroom. As governor, my budget will provide dedicated funding to strengthen school safety measures to prevent these kinds of heinous attacks from occurring," she said in a statement to KGW's Channel 8. Her campaign website emphasizes her A rating from the NRA for upholding the Second Amendment.

Gun control is not the only issue of the governor's race. But the three major candidates do bring different approaches. Which one appeals to you?

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.



COLUMN

Primary results show split in GOP

BY RANDY STAPILUS

With 19 distinctive — not to say sometimes colorful — candidates for governor, Oregon Republicans should have told us something about themselves by their choices in the just-ended primary election.

They did: They are split. Many seem driven by abortion or other culture issues, some are powerfully drawn by regional preferences, but a plurality just want to win in November.

No single overriding motivation appeared to apply overwhelmingly to Oregon Republican voters.

Former legislator (and House Republican caucus chair) Christine Drazan was the clear winner from early on, and she won a majority of Oregon's counties. She led (decisively) in the three Portland metro counties, and her four best counties (in order — Willamette, Clatsop, Curry, Klamath and Benton) were widely scattered across the state. Her win cannot be called narrow.

What drew Republican voters to her?

Likely not the media endorsements (her website's endorsement page didn't even link to them). But she was endorsed by a slew of Republican elected officials and a number of GOP-leaning organizations. She had an extensive county organization, and it seems fair to say she was the closest thing to an (informal) candidate of the statewide Republican organization.

That helps a lot. And she was articulate and likable.

Careful messaging

She did not emphasize hard-edged messages. Her website's tag lines called out "lower taxes, safer neighborhoods, brighter future, better schools" — something Democrat Tina Kotek could use as easily (maybe with some tweaking of the first one). She did offer some specific policy proposals, but she was

not among the candidates with quotable lines on abortion, stolen elections and similar subjects.

Was this the candidate considered by voters as best equipped to fare well in November? Probably that was part of it.

Remember though that she received just 22.7% of the Republican primary vote, a support level that looks better only in the context of her 19-person field. Her nearest competitor, former state Republican Chair Bob Tiernan, was not terribly far behind with 17.8%. Seven candidates received more than 5% of the vote.

If there's another contender who might logically be called a Republican establishment candidate — because of service in elected office and as chair of the state party — that would be Tiernan, who won six counties — Clatsop, Coos, Columbia, Douglas, Lane, and Tillamook. His second-place vote actually may owe to some of the same factors as Drazan's.

Candidates who lost past major races, like Bud Pierce and Bill Sizemore, underperformed.

So, there's a good chance electability was heavily on the minds of close to half of the Republican electorate, maybe reflecting both desire to win and a sense that 2022 might not be a good Democratic year.

But that still leaves a majority of the Republican primary voters apparently signaling other concerns.

What powered Sandy Mayor Stan Pulliam to a third-place showing with 10.4% of the vote? There are a few possibilities, but a good bet might be abortion, high profile during the voting period. Though not endorsed by Oregon Right to Life, Pulliam got attention for the edgiest abortion stance in the campaign, criticizing his competitors as being wimps on the subject and saying without qualifica-

tion he would as governor sign any "pro-life piece of legislation."

Votes for him may be a reasonable measure of the abortion-driven segment of the Republican vote.

Anti-masker fizzles

That seems a little bigger than the climate change and anti-masking approach of Marc Thielman, the former Alsea school superintendent who won a straw poll at the Dorchester event. He had backers statewide — he had more than a few signs in Eastern Oregon — but still managed just 7.8% of the vote.

If you're looking for a candidate testing the salience of rural and anti-metro appeal, look at Baker City Mayor Kerry McQuisten. She won seven counties, more than anyone but Drazan, carrying most of the land area of Eastern Oregon with Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Sherman, Union and Wheeler counties. No candidate got a higher percentage in any single county than McQuisten did in Grant (44.6%).

Of course, relatively few voters live in those counties, and McQuisten wound up just sixth in the results. But she left a stronger mark of the east-west and urban-rural gap in the state.

Some messages seemed not to catch on. Nick Hess, who pressed for a traditional conservative style (and was nearly alone in the field to do so), got only 1.1% of the vote.

And if there had been more "electable" candidates and fewer "message" candidates? This primary could easily have seen different results. The instability of the parties — Democrats too but especially the Republicans, even in a time of polarization — may be one of the primary lessons of this year's Oregon primary.

■ Randy Stapilus has researched and written about Northwest politics and issues since 1976 for a long list of newspapers and other publications.

COLUMN

Widening the focus on school shooting scourge

The compulsion to try to explain disasters such as the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, is all but impossible to resist.

This is human nature.

Confronted with the incomprehensible — that someone would purposely murder innocent children in their school — we instinctively reject the notion that we could be as powerless against these tragedies as we are to prevent natural disasters such as the tornado that careens across a town, or the bolt of lightning that kills indiscriminately.

But as we refuse to concede our impotence, we sometimes indulge in oversimplification.

I don't condone this, though I understand it.

There is comfort in being confident that these inexplicable events can be blamed on one factor or another. If we can pinpoint that culprit, the thinking goes, then surely we can deal with it.

The roster of villains, in the emotional aftermath of this latest catastrophe, is predictable, each with its acolytes.

Guns.
Mental health.
American cultural decadence.
The breakdown of the nuclear family.

Lax school security.
Ineffectual police response.

The depressing reality, it seems to me, is that each of those factors, and no doubt others, is implicated to

some extent in this continuing national scourge.

Which is to say, school shootings are complicated, indeed unique, despite certain commonalities.

And I don't believe that we can have any reasonable hope to even partially solve this problem if we refuse to address everything that contributes to these terrible recurring results.

The tortured logic and the half-truths that tend to dominate the national conversation following the latest school shooting fatigue me.

Some commentators dismiss as ineffective any legislation dealing with access to guns, citing such meaningless statistics as how many violent crimes don't involve firearms, or pointing out that school shooters, who readily commit the ultimate crime, would hardly be deterred by another law.

Of course people commit murder with knives and other weapons.

But when the topic is mass shootings at schools, guns — and in particular how the killer obtained the guns, whether legally or not — couldn't be more relevant.

Pointing out, to mention one especially obnoxious example I heard recently, that some murderers use hammers is an insulting deflection from the reality of school shootings.

When the issue is kids getting shot, talking about hammer-wielding killers is about as helpful as discussing their gardening habits.

Conversely, those who focus exclusively, or mainly, on guns, who con-



Jayson Jacoby

tend that "common sense" gun control laws offer a sure remedy and that cold-hearted legislators who block progress are in effect abetting murderers, seem to me to be more interested in propaganda than in sober analysis.

The inevitable "blood on the hands" accusations leveled at politicians and the National Rifle Association and many others are as useful as statistics about murder by hammer.

It is, of course, as easy to criticize these pundits for their tunnel vision as it is for them to blame one factor and dismiss, or understate, all the others.

I think we ought to examine in great detail all the elements that contribute to this plague. And I believe it's possible to take actions on each element that could, when combined, potentially prevent some future shooting sprees.

I'm not talking about a solution, per se — at least not as that word is commonly defined.

There are 400 million guns in America.

This is a free society where the government can't incarcerate people who act strangely.

This helps to make America the great country that it is.

But it also makes us vulnerable.

That lethal combination that we can almost always identify, after Uvalde or Sandy Hook or Columbine

— mentally ill young men who everyone seems to agree ought not have access to guns but who did anyway — can't be excised with a few precise cuts, like a lump of malignant tissue.

But surely that combination can be prevented in some cases.

I have no proposal for how we can change the laws, regarding guns and mental health, to stop that fatal intersection.

And I understand that such changes almost certainly will affect mostly people who would never attack schoolchildren. It can hardly be otherwise, considering the infinitesimal percentage of people who will ever commit such acts.

But those effects, which might include such a minor inconvenience as having to wait longer to buy certain types of guns, or the more significant matter of confining people who today roam society with no restraints, seem to me small things put up against the deaths of children.

Our choices, ultimately, are nothing like as dramatic as the propagandists claim — we needn't decide to either scrap the Second Amendment or accept every school shooting as inevitable.

Nor do we have to transform our schools into figurative prisons, with bars in every window. Merely locking a door can potentially thwart a shooter. This costs nothing, requires no new laws, and impinges on no one's rights.

Should we encourage, or at least allow, teachers and other school staff to

carry guns if they've proved they can do so safely?

This seems reasonable to me. Still and all, I think the mantra that goes something like this — "only a good guy with a gun can stop a bad guy with a gun" — is awfully simplistic, even though the concept is not implausible. The notion that putting guns, handled by responsible adults, in classrooms would be the one factor that persuades a deranged person not to attempt a school shooting seems to me egregiously naive, however.

The universal outrage that follows each school shooting is terribly frustrating in its predictability. But it also renews my hope that this one point of consensus — our collective horror at the carnage — might finally persist beyond our initial disgust and result in tangible changes — to laws governing gun and ammunition purchases, to the incarceration of people with mental health issues, to school security protocols, to police training for mass shootings.

Any one of these could conceivably prevent an individual school shooting.

Working on all of these factors — which is likely to happen only if a lot of people abandon their illogical focus on the one factor that most satisfies their personal political feelings — could yield more substantial results.

And in this situation, those results are measured in the most precious statistic.

Lives.

■ Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.