

## EDITORIAL

## Exploring Oregon's great electoral divide

The following is not a complaint. The purpose, rather, is to put into perspective the political realities that Oregon's heavily concentrated electorate creates, as well as to illustrate the dramatic differences between the perspectives of voters in different regions.

Neither is a revelation, of course, to anyone with even a passing interest in Oregon politics over the past 40 years or so.

Indeed the state's political divide, which is approximately consistent with the geographic divide of the Cascade Mountains, is so familiar that it's become cliché.

But we just had an election.

And that election offers some especially stark examples of how much electoral muscle the comparatively puny parts of the state, in size rather than population, can flex.

This contrast played out, in quite similar ways, in both the gubernatorial race and in the most significant of the statewide ballot measures.

In the former contest, Democrat Tina Kotek narrowly beat Republican Christine Drazan, ensuring that the Democratic Party's winning streak in the governor's race, which started in 1986, would continue.

Kotek won about 47.1% of the votes, Drazan about 43.4%.

(These are preliminary numbers; thousands of ballots have yet to be counted in some counties, including Multnomah.)

Kotek won in seven of Oregon's 36 counties, including the most populous — Multnomah, which includes Portland and has 19% of the state's registered voters — and the second most populous, Washington County, which has 13% of voters.

Every county that Kotek carried is west of the Cascades. The five others are Benton, Clatsop, Hood River, Lane and Lincoln.

But it's Multnomah that matters most.

Kotek received 72% of the votes in that county — a total of 258,344 as of Friday, Nov. 11.

That's well more than double the votes that Drazan won in 14 counties, including Baker, that are east of the Cascades. The others are Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Klamath, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Union, Umatilla, Wallowa and Wheeler. In nine of those 14 counties, voters supported Drazan at even higher rates than Kotek enjoyed in Multnomah. Baker County is one of those nine. Here, voters' preference for Drazan — 72.4% — was almost identical to Kotek's level of support in Multnomah.

The situation is similar — albeit even more starkly different — with Measure 114, which imposes some of the more restrictive requirements on people who want to buy a gun in Oregon. Opponents have deemed it — and not without plausibility — as a de facto ban on gun sales.

Measure 114 passed with a margin even tidier than Kotek's victory — 51% in favor, 49% opposed.

The measure passed in seven counties, but not quite the same seven as Kotek won. The one difference is Kotek won Clatsop County, where voters were slightly (51.9%) opposed to Measure 114, while Measure 114 was supported, with 51%, in Clackamas County, where Drazan won narrowly.

As with the gubernatorial race, Multnomah was key. Measure 114 had the highest level of support there, at 74%. A total of 259,522 voters in Multnomah County supported the measure (within 1,000 of the total votes cast for Kotek in the county).

As for those 14 counties east of the Cascades, all were strongly opposed to Measure 114, with 11 of the 14 rejecting the measure at a higher rate than Multnomah County voters favored it. Baker County was in the group, with 81.3% of voters opposed.

The total “no” votes among those 14 counties, though, was just 93,163 — barely more than one-third the “yes” votes from Multnomah.

There is nothing nefarious about any of these numbers.

Or unfair.

We decide statewide elections based on how many voters prefer a candidate or a measure, not on the number of counties (no Electoral College in this case).

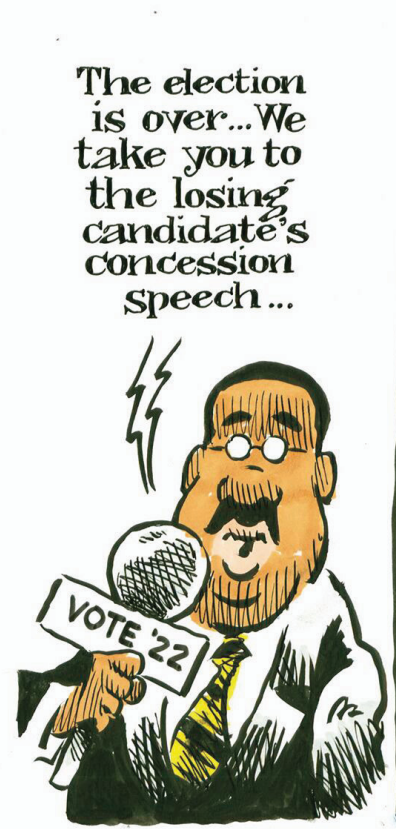
But it happens that in Oregon, not only does Multnomah County have the lion's share of the voters, but those voters, to a large extent, feel quite differently about matters of public policy than their counterparts in Baker County and much of the rest of the state.

We ought to encourage people to vote, of course — ballots contain local issues as well as statewide ones.

But to many voters in Baker City and Burns and John Day and Lakeview and dozens of other towns, the quaint platitude that “all votes matter” might, in the aftermath of some statewide races in the Nov. 8 election, seem a bit hollow, and even patronizing.

Because when it comes to not insignificant issues such as who Oregon's top elected official ought to be, and how we should treat law-abiding citizens who only want to buy a rifle or a pistol, voters in the remote hinterlands might today be feeling lonely indeed.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## YOUR VIEWS

### Some growth would benefit Baker City residents

Baker City and county revenue: As a retired former radio broadcaster, I have had the unique experience of seeing it happen. Small cities, no money. No vision for future growth, housing, employment, an economy that sustains all the people.

In 1900 the population of Baker City was 6,663, and in 1940 it was 9,342. In 2022 the

population is around 10,000 people. Agriculture, ranching, mining, have all shared the benefits thru the decades, ignoring the growth of a possible hub for the eastern part of Oregon. A river thru town, a major interstate I-84, and yet little growth in over a hundred years. Change happens, expand and attract retail and tech, manufacturing, music, festivals, dirt bike circuits, choice to stay stagnant or have an economically sustainable future.

Revenue and city budgets rely on population and business, at present, it seems monopoly rules, one corporation owns three major stores, one corporation owns four motels and the land is owner landlocked, good luck. Baker City deserves a shot at investing in the future. ... growth. Some resist the change, some are for change. No growth, and landlocked, good for some, not for all.

Martin Settle  
Haines

## COLUMN

## Book brings reader back to Baker's big game

I spent some time recently in the winter of 1971-72, moving between several high school gymnasiums, and I'm grateful to my tour guide, Andrew Kaza.

I felt at times that I could almost smell the popcorn, could hear the squeak of Converse sneakers on hardwood, could experience an era when the players' shorts never came close to their knees.

Kaza is the author of “High Contrast,” a book that chronicles a single 32-minute basketball game played more than half a century ago.

But Kaza, who owns a movie theater in Sisters and grew up in Beaverton, has accomplished quite a lot more than describing one game.

What a game it was, though.

The event that serves as the climax for “High Contrast” — the reason the book exists, in fact — is the 1972 Oregon AAA state basketball championship game. On the Saturday night of March 25, 1972, the Baker Bulldogs played the Jefferson Democrats, of Portland, for the title in Portland's Memorial Coliseum.

In those days, long before the current six-level system for Oregon high schools in which the large-enrollment schools, primarily west of the Cascades, compete against each other, Baker was in the top category.

The Bulldogs, and other regional teams including Ontario, La Grande and Pendleton, were in the same group as the big city schools, including Jefferson.

The 1972 championship game was a classic mismatch, with Baker the decided underdog.

The Bulldogs had six losses, the Democrats only one.

The consensus, among sportswriters and other prognosticators, was that Baker, deploying the deliberate offensive style that longtime coach Gary Hammond (who was, it turned out, coaching his final game) insisted on, would struggle to keep up with the fastbreaking Democrats.

As you might have guessed, considering this half-century-old high school basketball game inspired a book, the contest turned out quite differently.

Baker was ahead most of the game.

Jefferson rallied in the final four minutes to win, 59-53.

That scenario alone, of course, would hardly justify Kaza, or any other author, devoting a couple years to researching and writing a 260-page book.

The 1972 championship game wasn't



Jayson Jacoby

unique in having a team from a smaller school nearly pull off a stunning upset.

Sometimes the underdog even wins.

But it's the subtitle of Kaza's book that explains why he undertook such a daunting project.

“A Story of Basketball, Race and Politics in Oregon 1972.”

Although Kaza describes the championship game in great detail, those 32 minutes inside the Memorial Coliseum serve as the fulcrum for the author's wide-ranging exploration of Oregon in that distant year.

Kaza extends his analysis far beyond the superficial contrasts between Baker and Jefferson — the Baker players' crewcuts and the Democrats' Afros, the small town Eastern Oregon “farm boys” (although the Bulldogs didn't all milk cows and wrangle cattle) versus the big city residents, the Jefferson roster made up of all Black players, the all-white Baker squad.

Kaza examines each of those themes both at the fine level — quotes from players and coaches — and in the much wider context of race relations in Oregon and nationwide.

Yet for all Kaza's trenchant commentary and thorough historical study, for me his greatest accomplishment is his ability to recreate that distant winter, to bring readers into those hot, loud gyms on winter nights from one end of Oregon — Ontario — to the other — Astoria.

I was alive on those nights.

But I was scarcely more than a year old — I was born Sept. 22, 1970 — so I have no recollection of any of the events Kaza writes about.

Yet I always find historical accounts more intriguing when I know I was around at the time, even if my only concerns were the next feeding or diaper change.

For readers who, like me, have no personal memory of the events, Kaza has created vivid scenes, the drama palpable.

That might seem a bit overwrought. It

was, after all, high school basketball.

But I don't think any reader will feel, after reading “High Contrast,” that Kaza has oversold this story.

The most compelling aspect of this book, it seems to me, isn't the game itself, or the contrasts between the teams.

(Although I'll concede my assessment is influenced by having some familiarity with the events with the events from previous reporting on the topic.)

Rather, I found myself repeatedly amazed, as I turned the pages, by how prominent high school basketball was then.

The obvious measurement is attendance. The 1972 Baker-Jefferson championship game brought 13,395 spectators to the Memorial Coliseum. No game before, or since, attracted as many.

But Kaza doesn't rely solely on statistics to illustrate to readers how much more the sport meant then compared to now.

He writes about the extensive coverage newspapers, including the state's largest, The Oregonian, devoted not only to the state tournament, but to the entire basketball season.

He describes the influx of Baker residents to Portland, and the gyms, from Eastern Oregon to Portland, that were crammed with spectators for regular season games.

The situation he describes is both familiar — even today the student section in the Baker gym can generate a lot of decibels — but also strange, in the reality that high school basketball once was a major cultural event across Oregon.

This was, of course, an era before the Internet.

But it was also before cable TV. I'll not indulge in that misleading cliché and contend that it was a simpler era.

There was nothing simple about America in 1971-72. American troops were dying in Vietnam. Richard Nixon was seeking his second term as president.

But it surely was a different era.

And thanks to Andrew Kaza, we can understand, in a way that wasn't possible before, how high school basketball contributed to making it so.

■ Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

**President Joe Biden:** The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley:** D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; [merkley.senate.gov](mailto:merkley.senate.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden:** D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97500; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. [bentz.house.gov](http://bentz.house.gov).

**U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District):** D.C. office: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515; 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97500; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. [bentz.house.gov](http://bentz.house.gov).

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

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**Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum:** Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us).

**State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario):** Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., 5-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: [Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov)

**State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane):** Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: [Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov)

**Baker City Hall:** 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Kenyon Damschen, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

**Baker City administration:** 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

**Baker County Commission:** Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

**Baker County departments:** 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Duffinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

**Baker School District:** 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Chris Hawkins, Andrew Bryan, Travis Cook, Jessica Dougherty, Julie Huntington.