

EDITORIAL

New city council will be busy from the start

The newly constituted Baker City Council will be busy. Although final election results likely won't be released until Nov. 30, based on preliminary totals, and the number of ballots that could still be counted, it's pretty certain that when 2023 dawns, just three of the seven current councilors will still be in office — Jason Spriet, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

Waggoner and Guyer, based on preliminary results, were elected Nov. 8 to four-year terms. Spriet is in the middle of a four-year term.

Of the four other incumbents, Joanna Dixon declined to run for reelection, and Kenyon Damschen, who was on the ballot, wasn't among the top four.

Mayor Kerry McQuisten is resigning later this month because she's moving outside the city limits and will no longer be eligible, per the city charter, to serve as a councilor.

Shane Alderson was elected Nov. 8 as chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners, and since he can't hold both positions simultaneously, he'll be leaving the council at the end of the year.

Spriet, Waggoner and Guyer will be joined in January by newcomers Matthew Diaz and Beverly Calder. Diaz received the most votes Nov. 8, and based on preliminary results, Calder, a former councilor, finished fourth. That means she'll serve a two-year term. Diaz, Waggoner and Guyer will serve four-year terms.

Among the first tasks for these five councilors will be to appoint replacements for McQuisten and Alderson. The city charter delegates that authority to remaining councilors.

Although the charter doesn't prescribe how the councilors should go about assembling a group of potential appointees, the five councilors do have some attractive options — the four candidates who were also on the Nov. 8 ballot and have significant support among city voters.

Katie LaFavor received 1,779 votes (51 fewer than Calder, based on preliminary results), Joe Johnson had 1,734, Damschen 1,328 and Donald Frank Cody 1,160 votes.

Once the council is up to its usual complement of seven, the group will need to address the financial challenges that City Manager Jonathan Cannon outlined during a special meeting of the city budget board Nov. 9.

Cannon said he's concerned about the city's ability to maintain the current budgets for the police and fire departments based on projected revenues and expenses over the next several years.

Although the trends are troubling, the new council should not act rashly. City residents have already seen the fire department's capacity substantially reduced, from 16.25 full-time equivalents last year to 10.5 for the current fiscal year, which started July 1. That was due to the council's unfortunate, and unnecessary, decision earlier this year to have the fire department cease ambulance service as of Sept. 30.

(The city has been replaced by Metro West, a private ambulance company.)

Unless the city can find new revenue sources for its general fund, which includes both the police and fire departments, there are limited options for curbing expenses. The police and fire departments, even with the significant cuts in the fire department, account for about 54% of the general fund expenses.

But the financial trends aren't solely negative.

The beginning working capital in the general fund — money the city uses during the early part of the fiscal year, before property tax revenue begins to arrive — has increased from \$1.19 million in 2019-20 to \$2 million for the current fiscal year.

That doesn't mean the city has almost \$1 million readily available, of course — the city needs to maintain the working capital, and \$2 million is not an unreasonable amount.

But the increase in that part of the general fund also means that councilors shouldn't feel pressure to make dramatic cuts immediately.

They will have important discussions, however, both this winter, when Cannon hopes to reconvene the budget board, and in the spring of 2023 when councilors will adopt a budget for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Sending troops to Haiti would make a bad situation worse

Editorial from Bloomberg Opinion:

Already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti is on the brink of social collapse. At least 40% of the country's 11.5 million people are suffering from acute hunger. Gang warfare and rolling antigovernment protests have blocked the distribution of food, fuel and water. A cholera outbreak has killed dozens and sickened many more. Surging murders, kidnappings and rapes have caused tens of thousands to attempt to flee, compounding the region's migration crisis.

At the request of Prime Minister Ariel Henry, the U.S. and its regional partners have been exploring a possible armed intervention to restore stability and deliver humanitarian aid. They should think twice. Haiti's rich neighbors must do more to help, but sending foreign troops into such a chaotic environment risks an even greater disaster.

Haiti has long suffered from lawlessness, drug trafficking and corruption, in addition to a string of devastating natural disasters. Those chronic sources of instability have been

exacerbated by a political crisis sparked by the assassination last July of then-president Jovenel Moïse. At least 40 suspects have been arrested in connection with the crime, but the investigation has failed to resolve whether government officials were involved. (Despite allegations that Henry was in contact with a suspect in the case, he has denied any involvement.)

Meanwhile, Henry has refused to set a timetable for new elections, adding to public anger over food shortages and rising gas prices and further weakening the government's authority. It's estimated that gangs control more than half of the country, including its main ports.

Last month, the U.S. co-drafted a resolution seeking United Nations authorization for an international security mission to Haiti.

In hopes of limiting the involvement of U.S. troops, President Joe Biden's administration has proposed that a "partner country" lead the effort. Possible candidates include Mexico and Canada.

The U.S. and its partners have an interest in preventing

Haiti's collapse. But under the current conditions, any foreign military intervention would likely do more harm than good. There's little chance the operation would remain limited and "carefully scoped," as the U.S. intends; a previous U.N. peacekeeping mission to Haiti lasted 13 years and was riddled with scandals.

Attempts to secure ports, roads and warehouses to enable the flow of humanitarian relief will inevitably produce clashes between foreign troops and heavily armed local gangs. And because the international force would be acting on behalf of a government that lacks popular legitimacy, its ability to earn the trust and cooperation of the Haitian people would be compromised from the start.

Better to focus on building the capacity of Haitians themselves. The State Department has pledged \$48 million in assistance this year to Haiti's 14,000-person national police force, which is a good start. The U.S. should expand similar programs that have shown promise, such as a joint effort with France to train anti-gang SWAT teams,

and press partner governments to increase contributions to a U.N. fund focused on bolstering Haitian law-enforcement capabilities. More humanitarian relief should be provided directly to government agencies with a proven record of distributing funds effectively.

In response to Henry's request for an international security mission, meanwhile, the Biden administration should rule out putting U.S. boots on the ground, but offer to deploy additional maritime assets to Haiti's ports to curb drug and arms smuggling. In return, Henry should commit to hold new elections; bring opposition groups into the government; and work with business leaders, labor unions and other civil-society groups to develop plans for an orderly democratic transition.

The world can't ignore the suffering of the Haitian people — but it's imperative that outsiders avoid making a bad situation worse. Sustained diplomatic engagement and security assistance, not military intervention, holds the best chance for success.

COLUMN

What Republicans can learn from Texas

BY CYNTHIA M. ALLEN

FORT WORTH, Texas — If you were a foreigner who knew nothing about American politics and you looked at the electoral map after the Nov. 8 midterm elections, you might not think it was a disaster for Republicans.

The map of U.S. House races, in particular, looks mostly red, except for the typical blue strongholds along the coasts.

As of this writing, there are several races waiting to be called and the GOP is expected to have a majority, albeit a small one.

Even New York, one of the country's most populous and most politically progressive states, now looks mostly red — a wave that didn't reach the governor's mansion, but came as close as anyone has in decades.

Of course, we know that the anticipated red wave never materialized. Despite the nationwide discontentment with the state of the economy and the rise in crime, most voters seemed oddly satisfied with the status quo — which, in many places, isn't good.

Pundits will be unpacking that one for quite some time.

But there were bright spots for conservatives; the Lone Star State being one of them.

Indeed, if there was a gradient electoral map, Texas would be a deeper shade of red than it was last election cycle.

It could be a function of the massive influx of disgruntled Californians, frustrated by their former state's restrictive COVID policies and frightening spike in crime. Texas is attractive to people looking for economic opportunity and personal freedom.

I've yet to meet a California transplant (and I've met A LOT) who didn't come here to start a business or seek a better environment for their children; they all voted Republican this cycle. Maybe all the California progressives are shoring up Austin? Clearly, some of them are helping to keep Tarrant

County red.

But to give credit where it's due, Beto O'Rourke, the Democrats' three-time great hope, failed to generate anywhere near the kind of enthusiasm he did in his campaign for Senate in 2018.

I'd wager that's because his opponent this time around was a serious, able and generally well-liked governor.

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Gov. Greg Abbott beat him handily by double-digits. As my colleague wrote, three times is not the charm for O'Rourke. If he doesn't realize that it's time for him to stand down, some benevolent member of his party needs to tell him so.

With O'Rourke at the top of the ticket, there seemed a substantial enthusiasm gap among Texas voters whose desire to turn the state blue — and whose promise of a pro-abortion wave — seemed to fizzle.

The congressional delegation looks much the same, except for the flip of the 34th District, which Republican Rep. Myra Flores won in a special election less than a year ago but lost Tuesday.

So does the leadership in Austin, which is as red as it ever was. Even embattled Attorney General Ken Paxton won handily.

As for the Dobbs decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, only in states with ballot initiatives on abortion — Michigan, Vermont and Kentucky, which either enshrined "abortion rights" or attempted to restrict them — did the issue seem to make a difference in turnout.

But "abortion rights" notably wasn't a big motivator in Texas, the state often assailed as having the most restrictive abortion laws in the nation.

Not even O'Rourke's creepy TikTok shimmy for "women's rights" seemed to move the needle in his direction. Shocking, I know.

Then there was Florida, the one state in which a red tsunami actually broke the shore.

While Gov. Ron DeSantis' massive victory (20 points!) is in part due to his charisma and political skill, he ultimately won for many of the same reasons as Abbott and Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp: competence.

Notably, all three also kept varying amounts of distance from President Donald Trump.

Analysts will spend the next several months unpacking the reasons why so many Americans chose the status quo instead of change.

In Texas, the status quo is a good thing for conservatives.

Most of this election's lessons — as countless conservatives have already noted — will have to do with candidate quality and the need for the GOP to cut ties with Trump once and for all.

But Republicans should look not just at where they failed but also where they succeeded. Texas is one of those places. And after the Nov. 8 election, it's a good place to be.

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