

E. Oregon native, ODA's Coba, named state's COO

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau



Katy Coba

Katy Coba, the director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, has been appointed the state's chief operating officer and director of the Department of Administrative Services, the state's overarching administrative agency, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's office announced Wednesday.

Coba's appointment is effective Oct. 1 but requires confirmation by the Oregon Senate in September, according to a news release from the Governor's Office.

Coba, who has been agriculture director since 2003, started working in state government in 1985.

Kristin Grainger, a spokeswoman for the governor, said Coba, a Pendleton native, was a "proven leader" and "committed to excellence" in state government.

"Her roots in rural Oregon and Eastern Oregon were influential as well," Grainger said.

Grainger said the state's budget development process will likely be a focal point for Coba in her new position.

A news release from the Governor's Office also cit-

ed Coba's experience as part of the Enterprise Leadership Team, a group of state agency leaders that advises the governor and chief operating officer.

The Department of Agriculture's deputy director, Lisa Charpillou Hanson, will serve as interim director starting Oct. 1, until a successor to Coba is appointed, according to the news release.

George Naughton has been the interim director of DAS since March 2015, according to Wednesday's news release. He will continue to be the department's chief financial officer.

Naughton was appointed interim director when Michael Jordan, the chief operating of-

ficer under former Gov. John Kitzhaber, announced his resignation, effective April 1 of that year.

Clyde Saiki, who now heads the state Department of Human Services, also served as interim director of DAS before he was appointed to lead DHS in November. At that time, Naughton stepped in again to lead DAS in an interim capacity.

Coba, reached by phone Wednesday, said she wanted to be an "ambassador for public service" in her new role.

She said she intends to focus on outreach and recruiting new, diverse employees to state agencies to replace the state's retiring workforce.

She also said another prior-

ity during her tenure would be addressing Gov. Brown's stated intention to improve accountability and transparency in state government.

She said there are a number of complex challenges facing the agency, and although they are somewhat familiar territory thanks to Coba's role on the Enterprise Leadership Team, she said, she plans to begin her new role by meeting with other state agency directors, legislators and "other leaders around the state" and listening to their feedback on DAS.

Coba said she also wanted to inform Oregonians about state government and its purpose and functions.

"The Department of Agriculture is really a great role model," Coba said. "We focus on education and outreach and providing technical expertise to the people we interact with, and that is our first goal in the work that we do."

She said that it was an "interesting time" in public discourse around state government, citing the distrust of government displayed by protesters during the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County earlier this year.

Although the occupiers

were protesting what they characterized as federal overreach, Coba said the underlying message of a "regulatory burden" was one shared by other state residents.

Coba said she had been approached previously by the Governor's Office about the position, but said she indicated at the time that she was not interested.

But the governor's office persisted, Coba said, and the first "serious conversation" about Coba taking over the job as head of DAS occurred less than a month ago, she said.

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, described Coba as a qualified leader with the "character," "smarts," and "bona fides" to lead the agency.

"With as many agencies as have problems right now, the [Oregon Department of Agriculture] is not one of those that my constituents call me about, and I represent a rural and agricultural district," Johnson said.

Although Coba will be leading what Johnson describes as "huge bureaucracy" at DAS, the state senator said Coba would quickly gain the trust of other agency di-

rectors because of her experience as an agency head.

"...If anybody is up to the task of trying to wrestle with the issues at DAS, it's Katy," Johnson later continued. "She's a seasoned professional."

Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, echoed Johnson's statement.

"If I know anything about Katy Coba, she'll get the job done," Courtney said in a statement Wednesday.

State service is something of a family business for Coba.

Coba's husband, Marshall Coba, is a lobbyist, and her parents served in state government.

Her father, Mike Thorne, was a state senator from 1973 to 1991, going on to serve as director of the Port of Portland until 2001 and as the chief executive of the Washington State Ferry System from 2002 to 2004. Coba's mother, Jill Thorne, was an aide to former Gov. Neil Goldschmidt.

According to Coba's biography on the state Department of Agriculture website, she was raised on a wheat farm and attended Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, earning a B.S. in economics.

Review: DHS could do more to prevent foster care abuses

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

The Oregon Department of Human Services might be able to prevent the abuse of children in Oregon's foster care system by placing their charges more appropriately and better coordinating its response to allegations of abuse, according to draft of an outside assessment of the agency, released Thursday.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown charged an External Advisory Committee comprised of legislators and stakeholders in the state's foster care system with conducting an independent review of DHS late last year. The draft assessment, prepared by management consultancy Public Knowledge, LLC, was presented to the committee Thursday.

The assessment highlighted how the agency could improve its service to children in state care.

DHS has faced public scrutiny after high-profile allegations of abuse at substitute care facilities, and is also under fire for how some incidents were addressed on an administrative level.

The agency has limited capacity, the draft report found, and children are placed in foster care facilities based on available space, rather than their individual needs. Those facilities, in turn, may not have enough or appropriate assistance, especially for high-need youth. The draft assessment also found case workers ask providers to take in more children than they are certified or licensed to handle.

The assessment also

found that the agency is inconsistent in investigating allegations of abuse. The reporting, screening and investigating of alleged abuse in foster care is done locally and so could yield different results in different places.

Information could also be better shared between different entities in the system, the draft assessment found. At least six lawsuits against the agency involved "multiple reports of abuse that were closed at screening or never fully investigated."

When surveyed, youth in foster care and other reporters of abuse rated the reporting system as "untrustworthy."

The findings also identified "barriers" to making improvements to the system, which were split into three main categories: "unreasonable" caseloads, the recruitment and retention of providers and a lack of adequate data. Reported abuse of children in foster care has increased in the past several years, the report found.

The External Advisory Committee includes state legislators, as well as care providers and other stakeholders. It's chaired by Clyde Saiki, the head of DHS.

Governor confirms five debates with Pierce

By Paris Achen
Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown announced details Thursday for five debates she plans to participate in this fall.

Her campaign has said the sitting governor who is seeking election for the first time would agree to at least three debates. As former secretary of state, Brown succeeded Gov. John Kitzhaber when he resigned in February 2015 amid an influence-peddling scandal.

The five scheduled debates with GOP nominee Bud Pierce will be held in Bend, Portland, Eugene and Medford.

"I'm proud of all that we've gotten done in just a year and a half. And, there is much more work to do - for families, for our environment and for better government," Brown said in a statement Thursday. "I'm looking forward to traveling across our state and sharing my vision for how we will move Oregon forward, together."

Pierce said Thursday he's glad to see Brown has increased the number of debates she'll accept.

He noted that Brown declined to join in the traditional first debate of general election season sponsored by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association July 22.

"I'm glad the governor now feels ready to be in front of the people," Pierce said in a statement Thursday. "Throughout the entire campaign, I've told voters that I will attend any debate at any time and have accepted ev-



Gov. Kate Brown Bud Pierce

ery single debate invitation I've received, since I believe debates are very important."

In addition to the debates with Brown, Pierce has accepted three other debate invitations and "is anxiously awaiting the governor's decision" on those debates, according to Pierce's campaign. Those include a debate sponsored by KDRV in Medford on Oct. 16.

Pierce also accepted an invitation for a debate by the Pamplin Media Group/EO Media Group/Skanner News Group/KOIN 6 News/University of Oregon Agora Journalism Center and another debate by KATU, both of which had dates to be determined, said Stacey Kafka, Pierce's communications director.

Liz Accola Meunier, a spokeswoman for Brown's campaign, said Brown has declined the debate by Pamplin Media Group/EO Media Group/Skanner News Group/KOIN 6 News/University of Oregon Agora Journalism Center and is still considering the other two.

"We've received a lot of

great proposals and the governor is eager to talk about a variety of issues that matter to Oregonians," Meunier said. "Unfortunately, due to scheduling constraints, decisions on this fall's debate schedule so far have been made primarily on logistical grounds."

The five confirmed debates between Brown and Pierce are:

- Sept. 24, Bend. Sponsored by: Society of Professional Journalists, the East Oregonian, Jefferson Public Radio and KT-VZ-TV.

- Sept. 30, Portland. Sponsored by: Portland City Club.

- Oct. 6, Eugene. Sponsored by: League of Women Voters and Oregon Public Broadcasting.

- Oct. 13, Medford. Sponsored by: KOBI-TV and KO-TI-TV.

- Oct. 20, Portland. Sponsored by: KGW-TV and the Oregonian.

Brown's campaign says proposals for additional debates, forums or appearances will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

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