

DOGS

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Community members noted the majority of dogs and pet owners in the area are responsible and well behaved and said the meeting was to deal with only a handful of problem animals.

"We don't want to walk around with ball bats," Sharon Smith said. "What's an old lady like me to do?"

Councilwoman Lisa Weigum was in favor of a licensing program for dogs that would add accountability for the owner. Additionally, licensing fees and fines could provide a financial base to add infrastructure and personnel to deal with the issue.

Another major issue brought up was the attitude of people toward wayward animals, that dogs will be dogs and there's no changing that.

"There's gotta be some incentive for social change," Councilman Paul Smith said.

Another possible part of a solution that was discussed was an education program that would inform owners of the current ordinances in place to help keep animals and people safe.

City Manager Nick Green said he would look into funding options and report back to the council.

Katy Coba says goodbye to the Department of Ag

By Eric Mortenson
EO Media Group

Paulette Pyle is a Reagan Republican and Katy — everyone calls her Katy — is a Robert Kennedy Democrat. But Pyle, who for many years was grass roots coordinator with the pro-industry Oregonians for Food and Shelter, loves Katy Coba.

When Pyle deemed The Oregonian newspaper was picking on Katy in its coverage of pesticide mishaps, she called a reporter with a rival publication to complain.

Because everybody loves Katy.

Not literally everybody, of course. Some in the media believe she's been a lax regulator of Oregon agriculture and some in activist groups believe she's too friendly to what they define as Big Ag. But it's fair to say most people who have dealt with her for more than a decade love Katy Coba.

"We do," Pyle said. And as Coba leaves the Oregon Department of Agriculture after 13 years as director — she's both the first woman to hold the job and the longest-serving — people who make a living in farming, ranching and natural resources are bidding her bitter-sweet goodbyes.

They hate to see Coba leave the ag department, but they're pleased Gov. Kate Brown appointed her director of the state Department of Administrative Services and her administration's chief operating officer. They hope Coba's model of collaborative problem-solving and her calm, respectful manner will spread in state government.

Coba herself said the Governor's Office made multiple pitches before she said yes. She finally asked what the governor was looking for, and the answer swayed her. Brown didn't want someone focused on the internal workings of DAS. She wanted



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Katy Coba, Oregon Department of Agriculture's outgoing director, stands in a wheat field near Pendleton.

an ambassador for public service.

"I have two passions," Coba said during an interview in her Salem office as her final month as ag director unwound.

"One is agriculture, the other is public service. I believe in it. I'm concerned about the disconnect between citizens and government, between Oregonians and state government."

She asked herself if she could take the new job and make a difference.

"I would say it grabbed me right in the heart."

Born to it

Jill Thome says her daughter, Katy, and son, Todd, were immersed in public service.

Jill and Mike Thome were Pendleton wheat ranchers, but their world views extended beyond the blonde stubble that covers the rolling hills of Eastern Oregon this time of year.

Recognizing the region's isolation from Oregon decision makers in Portland and Salem, they threw themselves into politics.

"Our theory was, we're so far from the Willamette Valley, if we didn't get involved, who would?" Jill Thome said.

In 1968 they found themselves hosting a campaign breakfast at the ranch for Robert Kennedy as he swung through in a bid to win the Oregon primary and secure the Democratic party's presidential nomination. Kennedy and the campaign

her well when Gov. Ted Kulonowski appointed her ag director in 2003, Jill Thome said.

"She brought to the director's office that background and empathy for the work farmers do and their care for the land," she said.

Loyalty

Jim Johnson, the Department of Agriculture's land and water planning coordinator, is a big man with big opinions. He's a fixture at public hearings, frequently testifying as local or state officials wrestle with land-use decisions that might affect farming. By public employee standards, he is unusually self-assured, direct and plain-spoken. It's a trait some elected officials don't appreciate.

He says Katy Coba is one of the best he's seen at managing inter-governmental relations.

"She's always had my back," he said. "She trusted me to do my job."

Trust

Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, said it takes a certain skill to advocate, market and regulate agriculture at the same time, as the ODA director is required to do. Katy Coba was unique in her ability to do so, he said.

An example: The recession hammered Oregon's nursery industry, as the sale of landscaping and ornamental plants is closely tied to development, especially housing. In 2010, South Carolina began pulling aside and inspecting trucks from Oregon, the leading nursery state, looking for plant diseases.

Stone said other states were attempting to use the regulatory system to protect their own markets. One thing Oregon can't afford, he said, is a trade war between states. Under Coba, the Oregon Department of Agriculture worked with USDA and other nursery states to adopt a "presumed clean until proven otherwise" stance.

Following that, the nursery

association and Oregon State University wrote a Safe Procurement and Production Manual to guide the industry.

"That's a lot of trust, when it means staying in business or not. To have faith in the department to solve a problem that really could bring you to your knees," Stone said. "Trust between industry and the department, those things aren't assumed — they are earned."

The Future

Katy Coba, 54, says she's blessed to have a happy and supportive family. She and her husband, Marshall Coba, a lobbyist on behalf of engineering firms, have two grown daughters, Claire and Meredith. She said her parents, Mike and Jill, are her most important role models. They took the ideals the Kennedys espoused, she said, and "put them into action that I witnessed and experienced."

In her new job, she will seek to develop leadership within state government and attract a younger and more diverse workforce to public service. She'll push for accountability and transparency. She wants to restore trust in government. The occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters was an "explosion" of the public's angst and frustration with government, she said.

The biggest change she's seen in agriculture is consumers' interest in food, she said. "I sometimes say ag suffers from too much love," she said. "If you're a farmer and figure it out and take advantage of it, good for you."

Political challenges for Oregon ag include labor, maintaining transportation infrastructure and continuing land-use disputes and competition for water, she said.

Ag hasn't seen the last of Katy Coba.

"I've already told the governor I'll be an advocate for Oregon's natural resource industries, I'll be an advocate for rural Oregon in this new job.

"And she said, 'Good.'"

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MONUMENT

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"It does heighten the concern he's going to do it," Jordan Valley rancher Mark Mackenzie said about the Maine declaration.

The two cases are not entirely the same. The Maine parcel was gifted to the government by the founder of the Bert's Bees product line,

while the site of the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument is already controlled by the Bureau of Land Management.

Even though the Maine monument involved private land "and had a little different twist to it, I didn't sleep very well that night," Mackenzie said.

Opponents worry a monument designation would severely impact the county's No. 1 industry, ranching, as well as mining, hunting and recreation because of restrictions and regulations that would come along with it.

"Of course the national monument in Maine is caus-

ing concern," Malheur County rancher Sean Cunningham told Capital Press in an email.

He said a lot of his operation's recent business decisions are taking into consideration "whether our backyard becomes a monument and how that'll affect our daily operations."

After the OBSC ran a TV ad on MSNBC in the Portland region during the Democratic National Convention urging people to oppose the proposed national monument, its membership increased by about 2,500 in 10 days, said Mackenzie, who is a member of the OBSC board of directors.

Membership now stands at 8,100 and the coalition has also started producing videos that feature people who live near where the monument would be located explaining in their own words why it would be a bad idea.

Malheur County rancher and OBSC board member Elias Eiguren said putting a face on the coalition's message makes it more personal and allows people to understand that what would happen would affect real people.

"I think as more people see those videos ... it will bring more awareness to what's going on," he said.

If the proposed national monument is created, it won't be because people didn't know about the local opposition to it, said Malheur County Farm Bureau President Jeana Hall.

"The Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition has done a great job of voicing Malheur County's opinion on this and making sure (people) know where we stand," she said.

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