

High-priced House race in Bend could be a key to power in Salem

Republican Helt outraises Democrat Kropf in House District 54

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

With the election just a week away, the price tag of the race for the linchpin House District 54 seat in Bend is spiraling toward \$1.5 million, as a Republican freshman attempts to hold onto a district with a large Democratic voter tilt.

Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend, has raised over \$900,000 to try to keep the seat, while Democrat Jason Kropf has pulled in just under \$400,000 for his insurgent campaign.

The stakes go well beyond Bend, as Democrats see HD 54 as the best shot to expand their 38-22 supermajority. Republicans want to keep Helt's seat and try to flip some of the suburban Portland districts they lost in 2018.

Much of the HD 54 campaign has centered on local growth and environmental issues, along with COVID-19, education, taxes and health care.

But in the past two weeks, it's unexpectedly centered on a controversy over contributions to the Kropf campaign by the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association.

Armed with a much larger campaign war chest, Helt has been able to keep the issue front-and-center in advertising and joint virtual appearances such as the recent City Club of Central Oregon forum.

Kropf returned a \$10,000 contribution to the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association on Oct. 13. A Deschutes County deputy district attorney, Kropf gave back the cash after it surfaced that the attorney's group had tried to pressure a former Kropf colleague to stop criticizing him.

Jasmyn Troncoso, a former prosecutor in Deschutes County, claims in a tort notice that the DA's office was a sexist and racist workplace. She's now a prosecutor in San Bernardino, California.

Troncoso has not accused Kropf of any wrongdoing, but says he could have been more outspoken in supporting her complaints about a toxic workplace. District Attorney John Hummel ordered an outside independent review that did not support most of Troncoso's allegations. Troncoso has threatened



Contributed photos

Cheri Helt, left, and Jason Kropf.

legal action, but has not filed a lawsuit as of Tuesday.

Helt is pushing Kropf to not just return the lawyer group's cash contribution, but also pay back a \$10,370 in-kind contribution and what Helt estimates is another \$12,000 in individual contributions from attorneys who are members of the group. Helt said Monday she wasn't going to back off the issue because Kropf's current cashflow is low.

"That's his problem," Helt said. Maddy Woodle, Kropf's campaign manager, said Tuesday that the \$10,000 cash contribution from the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association had been returned, as noted in a filing with the Secretary of State.

Sending back an in-kind contribution was problematic.

"Since it is not returnable, the campaign will be making contributions to local Bend organizations that support those in need in our community," Woodle said.

How much the contribution flap affects the vote won't be known until Nov. 3. Oregon votes by mail. Many ballots have already been sent to homes, and officials report a high rate of early returns to drop boxes around the state.

As of Tuesday morning, the Oregon Secretary of State reported 17% of registered Democratic voters in Deschutes County have returned their ballots. Among Republicans, it was 6.8%.

Democratic leaders in Oregon see Helt as vulnerable — she's the latest moderate Republican to represent a district with an ever-growing Democratic voter registration edge.

As of September, Democrats have

a 9,325-voter edge over Republicans in HD 54 voter registration. About a third of the district is "non-affiliated," but studies by Jim Moore, a political science professor at Pacific University, have shown that the group tends to reflect the overall partisan vote in any district.

Helt has shown independence from the mostly staunchly conservative House Republican caucus. She's voted with Democrats on issues such as limited gun control, access to abortion and Medicaid funding. She sponsored legislation requiring vaccinations for children attending public schools that was backed by Democrats, but received almost no support from her party.

When House Republicans walked out during the 2020 session to deny a quorum for Democrats to pass a carbon cap bill, Helt was the only Republican to stay in Salem. The walkout ended the session with several bills still on the agenda.

Democrats have praised Helt's breaks with the GOP, but when it comes to election time, they would prefer to have one of their own in the HD 54 seat.

Kropf agrees with Helt on her votes with the Democrats, but party leaders say Kropf will also support a carbon cap and won't be as likely a pro-business vote as Helt has been when siding with the GOP.

While Helt has frequently criticized President Donald Trump, her party affiliation in an election where Trump is a major motivating issue for Democrats in Bend could slop over into the House race if voters aren't in the mood to split their ticket with choices from both parties.

As a swing seat, HD 54 has attracted big money before. Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend, raised over \$1 million in 2016 in his re-election bid against Democrat Gena Goodman-Campbell, who raised over \$400,000. Buehler won the race over Goodman-Campbell by 52% to 48% of the vote.

Democrats thought they had a shot at the seat in 2018, when Buehler did not seek re-election, opting for an ultimately unsuccessful bid for governor. Bend city councilor Nathan Boddie ran unopposed in the Democratic primary. But his campaign imploded over allegations of sexual harassment. Though he remained on the ballot, Helt won 58% of the vote.

Campaign finance records as of Tuesday show Helt well ahead of Kropf in fundraising.

The numbers are just a snapshot, as they change daily. Campaigns are currently required to report donations and spending within seven days of a transaction. Large last-minute donations and expenditures are not uncommon in Oregon, where there is no limit on the size of campaign contributions.

Helt got a running start in the race, rolling over \$111,918 from her campaign fund last year. She's raised an additional \$796,202 since Jan. 1. Helt has spent \$809,054 and now has \$99,684 in available cash.

The state's list of contributions to Helt's campaign through Monday show her largest donation is a total of \$152,576 from Evergreen Oregon PAC, the political arm of the House Republican Party.

Real estate and business PACs donated the other largest amounts to Helt's campaign. She's received \$56,265 from the Jobs for Everyday Oregonians PAC, which receives the bulk of its funding from the Chicago-based National Association of Realtors and from a variety of Oregon real estate interests. The Oregon Realtors PAC has contributed \$45,000.

The Oregon Business & Industry Candidate PAC has given Helt \$55,000. The Oregon Automobile Dealers Association contributed \$27,500. Helt also received \$20,000 from the Association of General Contractors PAC. Oregon Health Care Association PAC has given \$12,500. Helt received \$10,000 from Larry Keith, CEO of Entek, an engineering firm based in Lebanon.

The list of expenditures through

Oct. 19 show Helt has spent heavily with out-of-state companies that are frequently used by Republican candidates in Oregon.

Helt has spent \$420,081 on FPI Digital LLC, a Washington, D.C., campaign ad buyer focused on television. Helt has spent from \$33,000 to nearly \$60,000 with WP1 per week and plans to continue at the same pace.

Helt paid G Squared LLC, a Boise-based campaign consultant, a total of \$96,000. Helt has paid \$78,075 to Arena Communications of Salt Lake City, Utah, which makes and distributes mailers and other printed materials.

Kropf's campaign has leaned heavily on union and Democratic party funds to keep pace with Helt.

Through Oct. 20, Kropf has raised \$392,927 and spent \$360,221. He reported having \$22,961 in available funds.

More than half of Kropf's contributions — \$208,511 — have been in-kind donations in which supporters lend services, staff and other resources instead of giving money directly to a candidate.

The \$10,000 that Kropf returned to the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association is the second largest cash donation he has received in the campaign.

His largest cash contribution is a total of \$82,250 from Citizen Action for Political Education, a political action committee affiliated with the SEIU union, which includes many public employees.

He's received a total of \$78,372 in in-kind donations from the Democratic Party of Oregon, with the donation going to such things as literature, brochures, printing and postage. Kropf has received \$68,934 from Future PAC, the political arm of the House Democratic Caucus, which includes surveys and polls. His campaign received a total of \$21,255 in in-kind donations from Oregon League of Conservation Voters, which includes broadcast advertising.

On the spending side, Kropf has paid \$51,500 to Winning Mark, a Portland company that buys broadcast advertising time. Another \$18,000 was paid to GBAO, a Washington, D.C., polling firm. SWAY in Bethesda, Maryland, received \$16,058 for advertising production. Hawaii-based Media Analysis was paid \$6,798 for broadcast advertising buys.

Citizens work to erase racial slurs from Oregon maps

By Kevin Harden
Oregon Capital Bureau

It started as a comedian's global online challenge. Fifteen months later, proposals to rename two Southern Oregon mountains inch closer to approval.

Wilsonville's Margo Schembre wants to change the name of Negro Ben Mountain in Jackson County. Her proposal was expected to get a green light Saturday afternoon, when Oregon's Geographic Names Board meets online.

Schembre asked the board in July 2019 to change the name to Ben Johnson Mountain to honor the Black man who operated a blacksmith shop near Ruch, Oregon, along the Applegate River.

Southeast Portland attorney Jennifer Kristiansen's proposal to rename Big Squaw Mountain in Douglas County on the same agenda could have more difficulty gaining approval. Kristiansen asked the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in late July 2019 to change the name to Sacajawea Peak. Douglas County commissioners rejected the idea. Even state Geographic Names Board members (who must approve all state site name changes) were skeptical of the proposal, mainly because Sacajawea didn't set foot in Southern Oregon.

Negro Ben Mountain is one of 18 places around Oregon with "negro" still in the name. There's Negro Ridge in Douglas County, a handful of creeks with negro in the title, Negro Springs in Harney County, Negro Knob Trail in Grant County and Negro Rock Canyon in Malheur County.

"I picked this particular mountain because I found out how many landmarks in Oregon still have 'negro' in the title," Schembre said. "I hoped it would bring attention to all the others."

The mountain is near where Schembre and her husband have vacationed for years. They're both actors, so annual trips to Ashland to see Oregon Shakespeare Festival

productions fostered an affection for the region, Schembre said.

An online Change.org petition Schembre started in July 2019 to rename the mountain sought 100 signatures. It got 42. She then sent her proposal to the state Geographic Names Board.

Schembre's proposal caused a minor stir nearly a year ago when it was first discussed. A Medford Mail-Tribune article about the suggestion caused some local residents to question her motives, Schembre said. "The one time it got some press, people were kind of like, 'she doesn't live here, why should she care?'"

Kristiansen said she chose Big Squaw Mountain, about 32 miles from Glide in the Umpqua National Forest, because it was south of her hometown, Cottage Grove. She said "squaw" was a derogatory and racist term to describe Native American women. Renaming it for the 1804-06 Lewis and Clark

Corps of Discovery guide Sacajawea would honor the Shoshone woman's bravery and "inspire people to learn more about her," Kristiansen said.

"Squaw is an insult, a slur," she said. "Looking around the state, you see how much is named for Lewis and Clark in places where they never set foot. Without Sacajawea leading their expedition they would have been lost, they would have been dead."

"If they don't want to call it Sacajawea Peak, then rename it something else. There's no reason to keep that name."

There are about 65 places in Oregon still called "squaw." Among those are a couple dozen squaw creeks, a handful of squaw buttes and a few squaw lakes.

Blame the comedian

Both Schembre and Kristiansen were part of the Greatest International Scavenger Hunt, an online competition, known as GISH, with thousands of players on teams

around the world. In July 2019 scavenger hunt item No. 185 (of 227 items) was to "find a place on the map or a street name that celebrates a known racist or slave-holder or war criminal or simply a place name that uses a derogatory term and petition to have it changed to an inoffensive alternative." That spurred hundreds of online petitions and name-change proposals to federal and state geographic

names groups.

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names, which usually gets one to three proposals a week, was hit with 40 in the next two weeks, said board researcher Jennifer Runyan in Reston, Virginia.

Blame it on comedian Hasan Minhaj. He highlighted offending site names in a July 2019 episode of his Netflix show "Patriot Act." Minhaj pointed out that there were

more than 1,400 places across the United States with racially insensitive names. He urged viewers to file name-change petitions in their states.

GISH teams created more than 300 petitions. In Oregon, Schembre was part of the Troop de Loop team that proposed changing the Negro Ben Mountain name. Kristiansen was a member of Team LSG, which asked that Big Squaw Mountain be renamed.

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NOVEMBER 3, 6:30 P.M.—? GRANT COUNTY AIRPORT CONFERENCE ROOM

- ★ Watch the Election Returns
- ★ Free Dinner and lots of snacks
- ★ Door Prizes
- ★ Trump T-shirts for Sale
- ★ Great Time with Good Friends

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Committee Volunteers Needed

Grant County is now recruiting volunteers to serve on active boards and committees.

Obtain an Application to Volunteer from County Court, 201 S. Humbolt, No. 280, Canyon City OR 97820; (541-575-0059) puckettk@grantcounty-or.gov Applications are due by Tuesday, Nov. 3rd, 2020

Committees are formal public bodies required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

College Advisory Board
Seven members plus three ex-officio members serve a three year term and meet monthly to promote local educational opportunities and identify educational needs within the community.

Extension & 4-H Service District Advisory Council
Eleven members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to provide guidance and assistance to local OSU Extension staff in planning, developing, and evaluating balanced educational programs directed to high priority needs of county residents. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Library Advisory Board
Seven members serve four year terms and meet monthly to promote public awareness and support of library services, receive public input, review and update library materials, and coordinate activities with the Grant County Library Foundation. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Mental Health Advisory Board
Seven members (including two consumer representatives) serve three year terms and meet no less than quarterly to facilitate the provision of quality mental health services to county residents and enhance community knowledge of available programs and services. Acts as the Local Alcohol and Drug Planning Commission and Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board. The board is a formal public body required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Natural Resources Advisory Committee
Nine members serve one and two year terms. Members must live in Grant County and constitute a representation of agriculture and livestock production, timber and wood products production, recreation, hunting and fishing, water resources, mining, cultural resources and advocates for natural resources stewardship through continuation of the customs, culture, health, safety and economic stability of Grant County.

Planning Commission
Nine members serve a four year term and two alternates serve a two year term, meeting as needed to review land use and zoning applications and discuss city and county growth issues and siting new facilities. Members must be residents of various geographic areas within the county and no more than two voting members shall be engaged in the same kind of business, occupation, trade or profession with agriculture designations of livestock / forage crop production and horticulture / specialty crop production. Commissioners serving in this capacity must file an Annual Verified Statement of Economic Interest with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. Members must re-apply to the County Court before their term ends if they wish to be re-appointed. The commission is a formal public body required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Senior Citizens Advisory Council
Five members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to define the needs of older adults, promote special interests and local community involvement, and represent senior citizens as an advocate to the local, state and federal government and other organizations.

Wildlife Advisory Board
Created by Resolution 1993-29. Nine members serve three year terms and meet as needed to discuss issues regarding big game management and make recommendations to Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, including tag allocation and hunting season structure as they relate to population and damage of property.

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