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JACK OHMAN

The Oregonian's award-winning political cartoonist



Cartoon: Prozac and Cons...

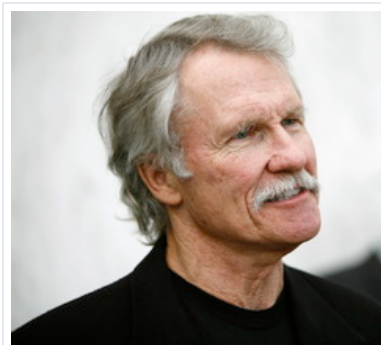
Caption contest!

Kitzhaber for HHS

by Isaac Holeman, guest opinion

Thursday February 05, 2009, 10:05 AM

Former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle recently withdrew his nomination to become the secretary of Health and Human Services and head of the White House Office of Health Reform, citing a controversy regarding unpaid taxes. President Obama now faces the dual challenge of finding a suitable replacement and restoring public confidence in his promise to run a more ethical and special interest-free administration. For reasons technical, political and personal, I believe former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber would be an excellent choice for either or both of these positions.



Former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber

I met Kitzhaber almost three years ago at an old high school in Southeast Portland. There he reframed the issue of health care reform as I knew it, transcending partisan dogmas to argue that we rethink not just how we pay for health care, but whether the way we deliver it is conducive to health.

As the state of health care reform in Oregon and the nation has progressed, so have Kitzhaber's messages.

Though his medical expertise and leadership experience are beyond reproach, perhaps his most unique technical qualification is the fact that his thinking has progressed alongside regular folks like me. He has not relied solely on think tanks, publications or lobbyists to shape his opinions; his perspective is richly colored by conversations, as a citizen and a doctor, with people our health system fails to serve.

His efforts for grass-roots reform have been possible because he has stayed away from Washington. Kitzhaber's outspoken distaste for lobbyists and Washington graft would make his nomination a potent remedy to controversy regarding Daschle's unpaid taxes, recent disclosure that Daschle had received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the industry he intended to reform, and Nancy Killefer withdrawing a nomination for chief performance officer over similar tax issues. Given Kitzhaber's aversion to Washington palm-greasing, some have questioned whether he would take the job if offered. I think he would because he knows how urgently our nation needs him. I also believe he would resolutely challenge President Obama to keep his campaign promise to change Washington.

I support Kitzhaber because I support Barack Obama, and fervently hope neither will see their agendas derailed by special interests.

Finally, as a member of a family that set root in Oregon generations ago, I'm fiercely proud of my state. Oregon's small communities still remember our collective history as pioneer settlements (I grew up in The Dalles). I believe knowing and loving rural Oregon while simultaneously identifying with our largest city, a beacon for the new pragmatic progressives, provides a bridging

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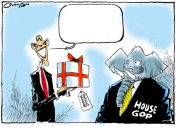
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perspective on many issues, including health care. This is a perspective that I share with Kitzhaber (he was an ER doc in Roseburg for 16 years), and that an Oregonian is uniquely positioned to share with our nation. I would like to see Kitzhaber share this Oregon perspective with our president, and I hope you will [join](#) me in writing a letter asking our president to consider our former governor for this important post.

Isaac Holeman is a student at Lewis & Clark College in Portland.

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COMMENTS (14)

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Posted by **pdxroxx** on [02/05/09 at 10:33AM](#)

Kitzhaber would be an excellent choice, and would prevent the possibility of Oregon losing its superb senior senator if Wyden (also an excellent choice) were drafted.

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Posted by **xIntzee56** on [02/05/09 at 11:20AM](#)

I think Kitzhaber would be awesome. He's been on the front line of the health care crisis. Nobody, imo, has a better handle on this than Kitzhaber.

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Posted by **dell4100** on [02/05/09 at 11:34AM](#)

Oh please, spare us another disastrous choice. kitzhaber is a loser! He was missing in action as Oregon's so-called governor, the same as all the other liberal non-progressive democrats. They have taxed and spent Oregon into the hole!

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Posted by **Snakespeare** on [02/05/09 at 12:19PM](#)

The Republican Spend-like-there's-no-tomorrow-and-Give-Tax-Breaks-to-Rich-Friends program didn't work, so let's put a true progressive liberal in there. Kitzhaber showed how to do it in Oregon. No child is left behind in our health care system here. That's what the whole country needs!

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Posted by **motherducker** on [02/05/09 at 12:33PM](#)

Kitzhaber for Mayor of Portland. Please John, consider it. The City of Portland needs a proven strong and mature leader. Do it as a public service, please.

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Posted by **spalding33** on [02/05/09 at 12:34PM](#)

Mister Holeman this piece is idiotic. You think Kitzhaber should lead the entire nation's health care system? Why? He wasnt even a successful governor. during his time in office he proved to be a difficult, arrogant man with little political skill. The porn star mustache doesn't help matters either.

you met him once in southeast portland and now you think he should hold a cabinet post? Should the meter maid that gave you a parking ticket be the attorney general? Please, wake up, look yourself ih the mirror and repeat after me: I Isaac Holeman, will never again share my infantile views with the world.

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Posted by **Laetitia** on [02/05/09 at 12:56PM](#)

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My husband and I think that Kitzhaber would be an excellent choice since he has been involved in trying to get Health Care to all Oregonians for some time now. Unfortunately the Obama team won't be reading the Oregonian. So I don't know if he is even on their radar. Oh, and thanks dell4100 for the enlightenment. I did not realize that the economic disaster that has befallen ALL states is in Oregon particular the fault of a tax and spend liberal. You clearly are the spokes person for the Oregon brain trust :((

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Posted by **dmbones** on [02/05/09 at 1:45PM](#)

The challenge of reforming health care in America is more of a legislative battle than a social/medical issue. Wyden is better suited to lead that legislative fight, with the good doctor K in close contact.

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Posted by **radxbandit** on [02/05/09 at 3:12PM](#)

dmbones, I agree completely. Let Wyden's tact and familiarity among senators give him the "deal-maker" advantage that Kitzhaber would lack in Washington. Kitzhaber's ideas could be the backbone of reform if he were to adopt some sort of health policy adviser position in close workings with Sen. Wyden. Together, that team would be unstoppable.

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Posted by **dell4100** on [02/05/09 at 4:55PM](#)

laetitia, I would rather be the spokesman for the Oregon brain trust, than a brainless fool like yourself. Remember, a brain is a terrible thing to waste!

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Posted by **dell4100** on [02/05/09 at 4:59PM](#)

snakespeare must be deranged. Oregon has been under the control of the tax and spend liberal, so-called progressives for over 23 years and look at where we are now. They have "wasted" the rainy day fund on their ridiculous agenda and now it is raining cats and dogs. These so-called progressives are nothing more than a bunch of socialist fools with stars in their eyes!

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Posted by **isaacholeman** on [02/05/09 at 5:11PM](#)

@dmbones, @radxbandits

Good points. It would be hard for the Democratic party to give up a senator as strong as senator Wyden though, especially when Wyden's own health care bill is gaining momentum. We will need champions in the senate, **and** working with the senate.

It's important to note that Daschle's withdrawal opened two positions, the HHS secretary position and the "Health Czar" position. Dr. Kitzhaber would be quite competent for either position, but I think he would be ideal as a health reform czar.

@spalding33

you met him [Dr. Kitzhaber] once in southeast portland and now you think he should hold a cabinet post?

I've worked with Dr. Kitzhaber and the Archimedes Movement extensively for the last three years. In the future we all appreciate your restraint when you are tempted to criticize a working relationship you have no basis to know anything about.

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Posted by **ORLonghorn** on [02/05/09 at 6:02PM](#)

I would hope that Sen. Wyden and Sec. Kitzhaber would go down onto the Senate floor and demonstrate physician assisted suicide, Oregon style!

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Posted by **hopefulist** on [02/05/09 at 6:15PM](#)

I agree that Kitzhaber might be just the guy to get it done. I respect and admire his work and focus on the Archimedes Movement over the last few years and think it would be difficult to find anyone with his background who has logged that many solid hours for health care reform. He is a very convincing and charismatic speaker on this topic, also - I think he'll get consideration. Good job Isaac.

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