



Mapes on politics WAY WEST OF THE BELTWAY The Oregonian

FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

- About The Author
Subscribe RSS
Politics News

- Latest Posts
Happy politicians on a big birthday
DeFazio a no on stimulus; Obama still needs him
Kitzhaber wants White House health role, but...
Gordon Smith vs. Wyden in 2010? I don't think so
How is Oregon affected by big tax hikes in CA?

- Categories
Ad Watch (RSS)
ballot measures (RSS)
Breaking News (RSS)
Clackamas County (RSS)
Congress (RSS)
culture (RSS)
Democrats (RSS)
DNC2008 (RSS)
energy (RSS)
Gordon Smith (RSS)
Gov. Ted Kulongoski (RSS)
history (RSS)
Idaho (RSS)
Inauguration (RSS)
Jeff Merkley (RSS)
labor unions (RSS)
local government (RSS)
military (RSS)
Money and Power (RSS)
news media (RSS)
Obama administration (RSS)
Oregon governor's race (RSS)
Oregon Legislature (RSS)
Oregon politics (RSS)
Oregon state budget (RSS)
Oregon state government (RSS)
Politics (RSS)
politics and economics (RSS)
politics and education (RSS)
Politics and environment (RSS)
politics and health (RSS)
politics and religion (RSS)
politics and transportation (RSS)
Portland (RSS)
Portland City Hall (RSS)
Portland mayor's race (RSS)
Portlandia (RSS)
presidential race (RSS)
race for attorney general (RSS)
race for treasurer (RSS)
Republicans (RSS)
RNC2008 (RSS)
Secretary of State race (RSS)
Sen. Ron Wyden (RSS)

Kitzhaber wants White House health role, but...

Posted by Jeff Mapes, The Oregonian February 13, 2009 08:31AM
Categories: Congress, Obama administration, Sen. Ron Wyden, politics and health

After former Sen. Tom Daschle's nomination to be President Obama's health czar blew up, former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber's name emerged in the media as a possible health and human services secretary.

I never thought much of Kitzhaber's chances since all the insiders I talked with in D.C. were saying he simply did not have the ties in Congress that the Obama team wanted. And Kitzhaber himself said that while he received a call from the administration about applying for the HHS job, he made it clear he wasn't interested in heading the huge government bureaucracy.



John Kitzhaber

However, I talked with Kitzhaber this week and he is continuing to express interest in what would have been Daschle's second job in the administration: head of a White House health policy office.

As always, Kitzhaber has a densely reasoned explanation of how the administration needs to take a fundamentally different policy approach to health care - and he also acknowledged that this may not be what president is looking for as he navigates the treacherous politics of Washington, D.C.

Kitzhaber explained the situation this way:

"One of the problems with Washington D.C. is that everything is filtered through a political calculus inside the beltway, like, Who is this going to offend? Where are the votes? And that constrains your ability to sort of think about what a new system ought to look like.

"Basically the filter is how you maintain the current system, and I think if they're going to affect meaningful reform of the health care system they have to not let themselves be constrained by D.C. politics. You're going to have to deal with them eventually.

"I think one of the reasons Daschle had both positions is they felt he knew how to pass something through the United States Congress, but it's essential you pass the right thing through the United States Congress."

There's no question that Kitzhaber, the architect of the Oregon Health Plan, has some pretty far-reaching ideas. He lays out his principles on his Archimedes Movement web site, and they contain the basic principles that first made the Oregon Health Plan controversial: control costs by limiting access to less effective treatment, not by leaving people outside the health care system.

Kitzhaber talks about the need to fundamentally change the Medicare, which he says is "going to break the bank" as the baby boomers begin to age into the senior health-care system.

Of course, Medicare is tremendously popular and everyone in Congress and in the White House knows that they fiddle with the system at their own political peril.

Kitzhaber says that coming from outside D.C. is a plus from a policy standpoint. But he concedes that may not be as valuable "from a political standpoint and the people who vet these appointments."