

Kitzhaber, Bradbury mix it up at environmental debate

By Jeff Mapes, The Oregonian

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Democrats Bill Bradbury and John Kitzhaber tangled with each other over Oregon's energy future, campaign contributions from polluters and transportation issues as they competed for environmentalist support at a Portland gubernatorial debate Tuesday night.

A third candidate on the stage, Republican businessman Allen Alley, knew he wasn't going to win much support from any of the five environmental groups sponsoring the debate. So he frequently parted ways with the environmentalists, at one point telling a questioner that he was more interested in reducing Oregon's high unemployment rate than in figuring out how to reduce toxic chemicals in the environment.

The debate at Portland State University attracted a packed house of about 1000 people that also included its lighter movements. When asked what environmentally incorrect practices they engaged in, both Bradbury and Kitzhaber admitted to a fondness for large, juicy steaks. Alley joked, "Wow, there's so many things, I don't know where to start," before adding that he was an avid "car guy."

Kitzhaber, a former governor, and Bradbury, a former secretary of state, were longtime political allies before this campaign. And they generally offered similar philosophical approaches as they both said it was crucial for Oregon to move toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions, even if it means joining with the other West Coast states to adopt their own efforts to battle climate change.

But they differed on some key specifics. Bradbury said the Boardman coal plant, which provides much of the state's electricity, should be shut down when Portland General Electric's permit to operate the facility expires in 2014.

"That will create some real challenges for us," he said, "and that means we have to be really serious about investments in energy efficiency and developing renewable resources because the Boardman plant is a huge part of the electricity we use in Oregon."

Kitzhaber countered that the state should only shut the plant down before 2020 – PGE's preferred closing date – if it can find other sources of supply. Otherwise, he said, industries and low-income individuals could be particularly hit hard by rising rates.

"If we move it up a couple of years, that's great," Kitzhaber said, "but we have to be realistic about answering questions about replacement power and the impact particularly on low-income citizens. It's not just an energy issue, it's a social justice issue."

Similarly, Bradbury reiterated his call to take all steps to block a liquefied natural gas terminal in Oregon, saying it was a dirtier source of energy than domestic natural gas. Kitzhaber said he agreed that domestic natural gas supplies were preferable but said he wasn't willing to totally shut the door on LNG.

"I'm not willing to say we will never have a need for LNG in the future," said Kitzhaber, adding he wanted to be sure there would be adequate supplies without it.

Lastly, the two differed on the Columbia River Crossing, with Bradbury saying he wanted to strengthen the current I-5 spans over the Columbia while building a much smaller new bridge to carry transit, cyclists and pedestrians. Kitzhaber said the proposed \$4 billion bridge is much too large and expensive, but he was less specific on what kind of design he wanted to see.

Bradbury specifically talked about using variable tolls to control traffic flows on the bridge while Kitzhaber talked more broadly about vigorously managing use of the bridge.

Alley, meanwhile, dissented in all three cases. He said the current bridge has been "vetted thoroughly" and be built, although he offered no specifics on how it would be paid for. He said PGE

should decide when to shut down Boardman and he said the state should see the proposals for the LNG terminals as an economic asset the state should use to its best advantage.

Alley also said he didn't get why Kitzhaber and Bradbury kept talking about putting more resources into mass transit.

"I don't know we talk about reducing vehicles, reducing vehicles, reducing vehicles when in 15 or 20 years we're going to have CO2-free vehicles...that are powered by electricity or a diesel-electric hybrids that gets extraordinary gas mileage," he said. Alley added that alternatives would have to be found to the gas tax.

Bradbury injected a tough tone into the debate toward the end when he charged that Kitzhaber should not have taken a \$10,000 contribution from Frank Foti, president of the Cascade General ship repair company in Portland, because the firm has been fined for polluting the Willamette River.

"Why would you take \$10,000 from such an egregious polluter when as governor you are responsible for enforcing violations?" Bradbury asked.

Kitzhaber called Foti an "upstanding Oregonian" and said that "if you are somehow implying that a campaign contribution to me means that I am in somebody's pocket, I am insulted, incensed and extraordinarily disappointed in you."

The anger continued after the debate. The Bradbury campaign said that viewers of a live webcast could hear Kitzhaber say as he was leaving the stage, "If that is how its going to be Bill, then the gloves have come off."

Bradbury's campaign manager Jeremy Wright said that if Kitzhaber "cannot handle a relatively innocuous question about a campaign contributor, what is going to happen when the Republican Governors Association runs a \$2 million negative campaign against the former governor?"

Kitzhaber's campaign manager, Derek Humphrey, said later that he did not hear what Kitzhaber said to Bradbury after the debate ended. But he found that Foti had contributed \$1,500 to Bradbury's U.S. Senate campaign in 2002. Clips from The Oregonian show Cascade General had been fined by environmental regulators as far back as 1997.

The debate was sponsored by the Oregon Environmental Council, Oregon Wild, Environment Oregon, the Sierra Club and the Oregon League of Conservation Voters. The latter two groups say they will take the debate into account when deciding whom to endorse.

The groups had also invited another Republican candidate, ex-Trail Blazer Chris Dudley, to participate, but he said he had other commitments. Oregon Republican candidates have not generally looked to support from environmental groups in recent decades.

UPDATE: Wright, Bradbury's campaign manager, said that Cascade General was a much smaller operation in 2002 with "no fines to our knowledge." He also said that Bradbury would had "little interaction with enforcement activities" if he had been elected to the Senate.

There's one other aspect of the flap not mentioned in this initial report. Kitzhaber, in his response to Bradbury's charge, said that the former secretary of state seemed to think he should return all of his large contributions - leading Kitzhaber to respond that if that is the case, Bradbury should return any money he will get from the Oregon Education Association (which endorsed Bradbury).

That led the Bradbury to respond that he wasn't claiming that Kitzhaber should return large contributions - just from this one individual. And then Wright argued that Kitzhaber was trying to compare a large polluter to teachers.