

# Recall campaign bombs

The clumsily run campaign to recall Coquille City Councilor Matt Rowe has failed to turn in the required 250 valid signatures to put the matter before the voters. Comprised of what amounted to little more than a Matt Rowe enemies list which included Coquille Mayor Kathi Simonetti, Councilor Ann Parker, newsprint publisher Jean Ivey-Gurney and even, it appears, Commissioner Bob Main, well known for holding a grudge in perpetuity, whose wife Deb Main, acted as treasurer for the committee.

Voters can still look forward to some choices in the upcoming city council races. Councilor Julie Nighswonger is running for reelection and John Cooper and Jay Westrum are hoping to join the council in January. Paul Recanzone, son of Jean Ivey-Gurney, has also thrown his hat in the ring.

In a surprise move, Mayor Kathi Simonetti also failed to turn in the required paperwork and necessary signatures to be considered for reelection. Rowe has entered the mayoral race along with Sam Flaherty a local pastor and volunteer fireman. If Rowe prevails and wins the mayoral race his council seat will become vacant and will be filled by a vote of the council just as Dave Chappelle recently filled the seat vacated by Mike Latham.

The Coquillian will be researching the candidates and providing information to help our readers make informed decisions this November.

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# Double, double toil and trouble

Time is running out for the Committee to Recall Rowe to turn in 250 valid signatures of registered Coquille voters by September 1, in order to put the matter on the ballot. The committee is being run out of Jean Ivey-Gurney's office on the corner of Central Avenue & First St in Coquille and the building is festooned with Recall Matt Rowe campaign signs.

Ivey-Gurney produces a weekly publication and was recently sent a cease and desist notice ordering her to stop using the name "The Sentinel" or be subject to litigation. Frazier Media, LLC, publisher of The Coquillian and The Coquille Valley Sentinel owns the assumed business name, The Sentinel.

Ninety days to obtain 250 signatures amounts to less than 3 signatures per day but the campaign appears to be loosely run. Reviewing the campaign's finances, no cash or in-kind contributions to the recall campaign nor the cost of the campaign signs have been reported to OreStar, Oregon's campaign finance tracking system. In-kind contributions could include services in lieu of cash, free advertising or publicity provided by local news publications. The committee treasurer is Deb Main, wife of Bob Main, Coos County Commissioner.

The campaign filed its original paperwork on June 1, 2020 naming Danette Foord, Jo Teel and Thomas Konomos as

petitioners and who all have ties to Ivey-Gurney. Foord is Ivey-Gurney's step-daughter. None of the petitioners have made themselves available to media including The World newspaper and The Coquillian. In fact, the real movers and shakers behind the recall appear to be Ivey-Gurney, Mayor Kathi Simonetti and Councilor Ann Parker who along with Ivey-Gurney is attempting to collect signatures from her office. All three benefited by the distribution of \$8,000 in urban renewal funds to make sidewalk repairs in front of their businesses that according to city ordinance should have been paid by the property owners or tenants and not Coquille taxpayers.

"Double, double toil and trouble;

Fire burn and caldron bubble." Witches song from MacBeth

In keeping with The Coquillian's earlier theme that this running saga would make for a great oleo-melodrama at the Sawduster Theater, the trio have been likened by some to the three sisters in Shakespeare's MacBeth. The recall petition which appears to have been filled out by someone who's handwriting strongly resembles that of Ivey-Gurney claims Rowe is disruptive at council meetings. No one on the committee, or anyone else for that matter has provided examples or substantiated this claim and Ivey-Gurney, who does not reside in Coquille, hasn't been seen at a council meeting in years.

The other claim is that Rowe has abused his office. Like the first claim there have been no examples or evidence to support this allegation.

"Fillet of a fenny snake,

In the caldron boil and bake;"

Ivey-Gurney pulled some ingredients off the shelf to add to the sisters' cauldron and published an anonymous letter to the editor in the guise of anonymous article making many potentially libelous claims and allegations against Rowe and even his family in her August 19 paper.

"Eye of newt and toe of frog,

Wool of bat and tongue of dog,"

Ivey-Gurney has refused to name the author of the anonymous letter or who authored the article alleging Rowe directed city timber contract's to the benefit of his father's employer. She then said because of the reporting by The Coquillian has she would not be commenting further and hung up.

There are five cardinal rules of journalism to which The Coquillian endeavors to adhere. In particular truth and accuracy, getting the facts right is the cardinal principle of journalism. When we cannot corroborate information The Coquillian will tell you. We also believe in accountability. A sure sign of [professionalism and responsible journalism](#) is the ability to hold ourselves accountable. When we commit errors, we must correct them.

The Coquillian has reviewed the minutes of the city council meetings related to allegations printed in Ivey-Gurney's publication. These records dating from 2014 to 2015 while Rowe was mayor prove that the claims published as fact in her paper

are completely false. Rowe recused himself from voting on matters related to a Rink Creek Timber sale in question, citing specifically that his father was an administrator of one of the companies involved. Ultimately, the contract went to Scott Timber, a company Rowe's father has no association with.

The timber sale produced a profit for the city and Rowe and the council voted to transfer one-third of the \$1.2 million in timber revenue into the city street improvement fund and not the other way around as alleged in the anonymous and unsourced article.

Ivey-Gurney's paper even took a shot at Rowe's mother, a former city financial director, implying that she "could not account for a portion of the funds" from the harvest. The Coquillian has not reviewed city audits dating from this period but any discrepancies would have been divulged by external auditors at that time.

A further allegation dating from 2018 occurred while Rowe was not even a member of the city council.

The article is accompanied by an image of a service dog forced to wear Recall Matt Rowe campaign signs in the recent heat. The dog belongs to the husband of Daniece Day, another step-daughter of Ivey-Gurney.

Via email, The Coquillian asked Ivey-Gurney if she vetted the information in the anonymous letter to the editor, prior to publishing and if so how. We asked if she would name the author of the letter, or who wrote the article. Harkening back

to accountability in journalism, we also asked if she plans to print a retraction. She has not replied to our queries.

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## **Coquille councilors violate ethics laws?**

Coquille Mayor Kathy Simonetti acknowledges downtown business owners failed to meet their fiscal responsibility to fix sidewalks that caused multiple serious falls.

In a letter to the editor of a local newspaper meant to disparage City Councilor Matt Rowe, Mayor Kathi Simonetti admits that Coquille City funds Urban Renewal funds were misdirected toward sidewalk repairs for private business owners on 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Simonetti's letter admits the city could have "...forced these businesses make the repairs, with an abatement letter and enforcement..." This would have been the lawful response to the sidewalk problem. But then she asks, "...how hard do we push?"

Rather than push or for that matter even ask these businesses to repair their sidewalks Simonetti lobbied the council to appropriate urban renewal funds and city funds, adding up to \$8,000, to make these repairs on their behalf. She shames Rowe, in her letter, for voting NO.

According to Coquille City ordinance "12.12.020 – Duty to

repair and clear sidewalks," it is the responsibility of the building "owner or occupant" to maintain the sidewalks. Simonetti argued in her letter she didn't own the building where she maintained a business, Kathi's Unique Gifts, and wrongly claimed therefore she wasn't responsible for sidewalk maintenance.

"It is the duty of an owner or occupant of land adjoining a street to maintain in good repair, and remove obstructions from, the adjacent sidewalk."

Further, city ordinances also require the building owner to bear all liability.

"The owner of real property responsible for maintaining the adjacent sidewalk shall be primarily liable to any person injured because of any negligence of such owner in failing to maintain the sidewalk in good condition."

Not only does it appear that the use of both city and URA funds to improve the sidewalks of businesses belonging to city council members violated city ordinances it also appears to have violated Oregon ethics laws.

[ORS 244.040(1)] Oregon's ethics laws prohibit each public official from gaining a financial benefit or avoiding a financial cost as a result of his or her position.

Clearly, business owners and city councilors Julie Nighswonger, owner of Denny's Pizza, and Ann Parker, owner of River Cities Realty, along with Mayor Simonetti benefitted

from their vote to have the city cover costs of sidewalk maintenance by “avoiding a financial cost” as per Oregon statute.

Parker and Simonetti are both actively trying to have Rowe recalled and they along with their fellow recall committee member, Jean Ivey Gurney all had businesses that benefited from their vote to misuse city funds for sidewalk repairs.

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## **Will recall make the ballot?**

The recall of Matt Rowe may make it to the ballot... or will it?

Jean Ivey Gurney has claimed to have in her possession “about 300” signatures toward putting the recall of Councilor Matt Rowe on the ballot. Ivey Gurney, who runs a local newspaper and has invited people to stop in and sign petitions, indicated that she did not know how many signatures had been gathered by the other committee members as the committee “hasn’t met since the first meeting”. Each petition sheet holds ten signatures so Ivey Gurney should have approximately 30 full signature sheets if her estimate is accurate.

Attempts to reach River Cities Realty, Councilor Ann Parker’s business where she offers petitions available to sign in order to confirm actual numbers were unsuccessful.



Only 250 signatures by September 1 are required to put the recall on the ballot. This will require a special election with a cost well in excess of \$5,000 to the city taxpayers. Ivey Gurney did not know when the committee would be submitting their signatures to the clerk's office for verification.

Rowe doubts the accuracy of the numbers offered by Ivey Gurney.

"It seems unlikely that 300 people have walked into Ivey's office to sign a petition," Rowe said via phone. "However, we'll find out soon enough if and when they submit the signatures."

Rowe has invited the members of the recall committee to publicly debate him through media ads and newspaper interviews but to date there has been no acceptance from the committee members.

"Personally, I would encourage the recall committee to turn in the signatures as quickly as possible," said Rowe, "as I am eager to exonerate myself with the voters."

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## **Melodrama at Coquille City**

# Hall

The Sawdust Theatre may be closed for the season due to COVID-19 but there is still plenty of melodrama emanating from Coquille City Hall to provide entertainment through the rest of the summer. We are talking about the recall effort to oust City Councilman Matt Rowe apparently driven by a handful of business owners on 1<sup>st</sup> Street, some of whom sit on the city council. Namely, City Councilwoman Ann Parker of River Cities Realty and Mayor Kathy Simonetti along with their ally, Jean Ivey Gurney who operates a weekly newspaper she still calls The Sentinel, even though she does not own that assumed business name.

Ivey Gurney handwrote and personally delivered the paperwork for the recall to the city clerk on June 1. The three chief petitioners Danette Foord, Jo Teel and Thomas Konomos continue to be unavailable for comment, however, the recall "committee" appear to have enlisted Simonetti as their spokesperson. They are alleging that Rowe has abused his office while Rowe denies this and has asserted that Parker, Simonetti who also had a business on 1<sup>st</sup> Street along with Councilwoman Julie Nighswonger, owner of Denny's Pizza, have all had conflicts of interest when voting on city business.

"The only block in all of Coquille," according to Rowe, "that got a special favor of sidewalk resurfacing, costing approximately \$8,000..." was on East 1<sup>st</sup> Street benefiting the businesses of Nighswonger, Parker and Simonetti as well as Ivey Gurney.

"If they had recused themselves," said Rowe in a text message, "the motion would have failed due to a lack of four votes in the affirmative." Rowe was the only dissenting vote.

In other city council news, six people applied for a city council seat left vacant by Mike Layton. The applicants are Dave Chapelle, Tia DeMent, Paul Recanzone, Shanley Geddry, John Cooper and Maria Haskette. During the most recent regular city council meeting a vote was cast to try and choose an interim councilor. Parker, Simonetti and Nighswonger all cast their votes for Recanzone who, coincidentally happens to be the son of Ivey Gurney. No candidate was chosen however as the requisite four votes could not be reached.

It was noted by several witnesses that Parker, Simonetti and Nighswonger all appeared to be texting during the council meeting and possibly while the vote was going on. This paper has submitted a public records request for all text communications between the city councilors relating to city business and to the selection of the new interim counselor. Deleting any text messages relating to city business would be a violation of ORS 162.305.

Additionally, a special meeting was held for candidate interviews, however Shanley Geddry, a twenty-two-year-old college student, was not properly notified of the meeting and has requested proof of the notification and an interview prior to any vote.

To add even further to the drama on 1<sup>st</sup> Street previous employees of Ivey Gurney have recently filed complaints with the IRS and the State of Oregon for her alleged failure to

properly file state and federal wage statements and pay payroll taxes withheld from paychecks.