

REDESIGNING THE OREGON STATE FLAG: A Case Study



Ted Kaye

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INTRODUCTION

The recent contest to redesign the state flag of Oregon and its subsequent political failure provide an excellent case study for any attempt to replace a long-flying flag.

After the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) published the results of its 2001 survey of U.S. and Canadian state, provincial, and territorial flags, I asserted a theory of flag adoption:¹

...the steps to actually getting a state flag changed to a successful design [are]:

- 1) *Stir up public discontent with the flag (this requires an external event).*
- 2) *Get state government buy-in that a change is necessary.*
- 3) *Create a process to take in designs.*
- 4) *Name a proper committee to judge them.*
- 5) *Have the legislature vote yes/no.*

I have since confirmed this theory through experience with other state and local flag-design efforts.² In this presentation I will show how my own state served as a test case, which despite success with steps 3 and 4, failed on steps 1 and 2. ***It never reached step 5.***

OREGON'S FLAG



Oregon is a Pacific Coast state, with a strong natural beauty—from its beaches, rivers, and forests to its mountains and high desert. It has an urban-rural divide—the Cascade Mountains separate the wet western third, with most of the cities, from the dry eastern two-thirds. Its population is nearly 4,000,000. While it has a modern electronics industry and is home to the sportswear giant Nike, its roots are in forestry and agriculture. The first major Euro-American settlement began with pioneers coming across the Oregon Trail in the 1840s.

In anticipation of Oregon's 150th birthday in February 2009, the state's largest newspaper, *The Oregonian*, sponsored an effort to redesign the state's flag. Oregon became a state in 1859, but only in 1925 did it adopt a state flag—the last among the then-48 states to do so—based on a flag used by the Oregon Military Department. The state's legislature authorized an official flag after the Portland postmaster asked for a flag to present for display with those

¹ "Good Flag, Bad Flag and the Great NAVA Survey of 2001", Edward B. Kaye, *Raven*, vol. 8, 2001, pp. 26-27

² "The Salt Lake Tribune Utah Flag Design Contest", NAVA, March 2002, and other case studies, retrieved from <http://www.nava.org/Flag%20Design/CaseStudies.htm>

of other states in the nation's capital, and a flag was requested to fly at the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Lexington.³ Governor Walter M. Pierce signed the legislation adopting the flag. He had been elected with the strong support of the resurgent Ku Klux Klan, which powerfully influenced state politics at the time.



That flag, which has remained unchanged since 1925, is now unique among U.S. state flags—it has a different design on the reverse, a beaver (the state animal). Oregon is known as “The Beaver State”, recalling the fur trade which first brought Euro-American exploration to the area. Its obverse displays the escutcheon from the state seal, the year of admission “1859”, and—in case the symbolism were not adequate—the words “STATE OF OREGON”.

THE CONTEST

As Oregon approached its sesquicentennial, two *Oregonian* staffers—reporter Michael Milstein and editor Joan Carlin—launched the idea of redesigning the state flag. They sensed that the landmark anniversary might be a reasonable “external event” to drive public acceptance of such a change. They approached me for help on the project.

I wrote a case for changing the flag, with these main points:

- Oregon’s flag is a poor design, indistinguishable from other state flags at a distance.
- Oregon’s flag received a grade of D+ in NAVA’s 2001 survey of state flag design (the score was 3.3 on a scale of 10; it ranked 40th out of 50 states).⁴
- Oregon’s flag displays a seal on a blue background, the same as 23 other states.
- Oregon’s unique double-sided flag costs taxpayers and citizens 50% to 100% more than the average state flag. It also flies poorly due to its double-sized construction.

I predicted arguments in opposition from citizens who resisted change, legislators reluctant to engage conflict, and teachers/historians who cherished the current flag for its history:

- The current flag is part of our heritage.
- It will cost government a lot to change out the flags.
- Our current flag is unique (double-sided).
- No other design would better represent the state.
- We have higher priorities/challenges facing the state.
- Why not just take the beaver off the back (to lower cost)?

³ Culmer, Carita M. “The Oregon State Flag”, *Raven*, vol. 15, 2008, p. 33

⁴ When Georgia adopted its new flag in 2004, Oregon’s rank likely slipped to 41st out of 50, into the bottom 10

I counseled *The Oregonian* that political and public support would be vital to the project's success, and suggested it begin with Oregon 150, the sesquicentennial planning group, and make sure the governor's office was on board and that key legislators were recruited. I believed that the flag contest would be a tremendous opportunity for Oregon 150 to promote its statewide agenda and publicize its efforts, which were not otherwise receiving wide public awareness.

However, the Oregon 150 group, amid leadership change, chose to pass the issue to staff in the governor's office, who—understandably—declined to support it without seeing strong political benefit from engaging a potentially controversial subject. An approach to the legislature's leadership was also unsuccessful. Without a public group or state office sponsoring the effort, *The Oregonian* staff proceeded alone.

Carlin chose the theme of a "people's flag", noting that the current 1925 design was chosen by politicians without public participation. "We wondered if Oregon's flag doesn't deserve more than just an accidental design. We thought we'd ask ordinary Oregonians", she wrote.⁵

She set a timetable in which the contest would start in October 2008 to allow participation by schoolchildren, offer designs for a vote during holidays, and have a final design ready for the legislature in January, in time to adopt a new flag for Oregon's 150th birthday, 14 February 2009.

Perhaps in order to deal with the prospective objections of those who favored no change at all, *The Oregonian* unilaterally declared that "The current flag remains a legal flag and entitled to all the honors it currently has, and agencies can continue to fly it. The current flag never goes away."⁶ (This was clearly either a premature and perhaps wishful-thinking reference to the potential legislation, or a foreshadowing of the eventual failure of the flag redesign effort.)



In October, the contest began with a short invitation: "It's been 150 years. Who wouldn't need a facelift?"⁷ followed by a front-page headline: "A new state flag for Oregon? Sounds like a banner idea".⁸ The article quoted Mike Hale (NAVA member and president of Elmer's Flag & Banner in Portland, the largest flag store in the country), Carita Culmer (a former NAVA officer and author of an article on the Oregon flag just published in *Raven*)⁹—although it misspelled her name, and me. It provided a good history of the flag and the case for a change.

But it also quoted Oregon's governor, Ted Kulongoski (left), saying that he loves the present flag, has heard no one complain about it, will not consider a new design, and has more important priorities. That wasn't a good start!

⁵ "Old state flag needs TLC, school agrees", *The Oregonian*, 2 Nov. 2008

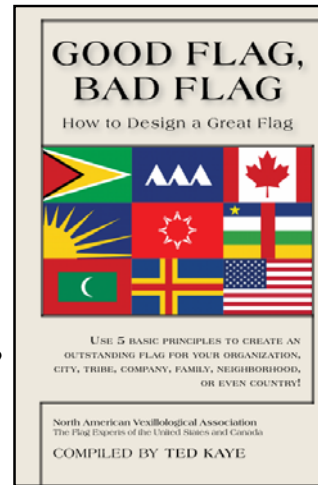
⁶ OregonLive.com website, downloaded 19 Jan. 2009

⁷ "It's been 150 years. Who wouldn't need a facelift?", *The Oregonian*, 14 Oct. 2008

⁸ "A new state flag for Oregon? Sounds like a banner idea", *The Oregonian*, 19 Oct. 2008

⁹ Culmer, Carita M., "The Oregon State Flag", *Raven*, vol. 15, 2008, pp. 23-42

In explaining what made a good flag, the article laid out the principles of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, NAVA's guide to flag design,¹⁰ and referenced NAVA's website. The contest rules were ambiguous about whether non-Oregonians could participate—although most entries did come from Oregon. The contest required entries on 3"x5" cards (nearly all designers would comply with this requirement, although none of the non-compliant designs were rejected). The contest offered as a prize a full-size 3'x5' flag of the winning design.



Of course, there were complaints. “A new state flag for Oregon? Somebody has too much time on their hands.” (Virginia, Portland) “I am a fourth generation Oregonian, proud of my heritage and I love our Oregon Flag as is and for what it represents. Needless to say, I vote to keep the current Oregon Flag. Long may it wave!” (Leona Smith, The Dalles) “Given the economic situation, the Legislature has better things to do than worry about the flag.” (Dan Hortsch)¹¹ A rival newspaper wrote “Wrong answer, *Oregonian*, you lose!”¹² But most of the dialog was thoughtful, respectful, and insightful.

In an unanticipated outcome of the contest, the original 1925 flag, sewn for Governor Pierce by seamstresses at the state's largest department store, Meier & Frank, was identified on display hanging in a library stairwell at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, Pierce's home town. School officials immediately launched an effort to research, authenticate, and conserve the artifact.¹³

THE ENTRIES

The contest gave designers a month to submit their entries, with several articles in *The Oregonian* along the way. Carlin also maintained a blog on the newspaper's website, in which she commented on the contest and responded to the inevitable criticism of the project.

Around 2,500 entries came in by the deadline (Carlin did not keep a precise count). The contest calendar had been timed to allow schoolchildren to participate—several class groups did so, submitting large batches of entries. Many more were submitted by individual children. However, the majority came from adults, with some submitting multiple designs (dozens in one case).

About 15% of the entries were submitted in electronic form. A few were submitted as verbal descriptions; despite an offer by a graphic artist to draw them up, Carlin declined to include those in the contest.

The quality of the entries was stunning—hundreds of them would have made a successful state flag. While professional graphic artists participated and submitted spectacular designs, so did amateurs and schoolchildren.

¹⁰ *Good Flag, Bad Flag—How to Design a Great Flag*. Compiled by Ted Kaye, published by NAVA, 2006

¹¹ Editor's Blog, *The Oregonian*, 24 Oct. 2008

¹² “Salute This!!!”, *Willamette Week*, 31 Dec. 2008

¹³ “Old state flag needs TLC, school agrees”, *The Oregonian*, 2 Nov. 2008



Mike Hale & Joan Carlin cull entries.

Carlin recruited her local “experts”, Mike Hale and me, to help her with an initial culling process. In two weekend sessions of 2-3 hours each, we selected about 240 entries for further consideration. We found it helpful to sort and consider designs based on their basic motifs:

- **Beaver** (the state animal and the mascot of one of the two rival major state universities)
- **Mountain** (the Cascade Range runs north-south through the state; the most prominent peak is Mt. Hood, 11, 245 feet high and 50 miles from Portland)
- **Tree** (for the state’s natural beauty and its dominant forest-products industry—the state tree is the Douglas Fir)
- **Fish** (for endangered salmon and its role in the state’s history)
- **Wagon** (honoring the Oregon Trail and the pioneers who settled the state)
- **“O”** (for Oregon)
- **Geographic** (depicting in some way the geography of the state—the wet western side and the dry eastern side, separated by the Cascades and bordered by the Pacific)
- **Field-Division** (dividing the flag’s field in some manner, usually in stripes)
- **Other** (some combination of the other motifs, or another motif altogether)



The most common motifs were Tree and Mountain; the least common were Fish and Wagon (examples at left). Very few designs showed the state bird—the Western Meadowlark, the other major university mascot—the duck, or Crater Lake—the state’s only national park, which appears on the state quarter and was included as an example in the contest instructions.

We clipped together any entries that were substantially duplicates, so credit could be shared if they were eventually chosen. Not surprisingly, the most common colors were the official state colors of blue and yellow/gold, and—representing the state’s forests—green. Red and black were very uncommon.

We culled without looking at the backs of the entries—we chose independent of any knowledge of the designers. When multiple variants were submitted by the same designer, we chose one or a few from among them. We selected without considering the technical quality of the rendition—many children’s designs, lopsided and in crayon, were kept. We rejected nearly all designs with writing on them (hardly any used the state seal). And we retained any design about which we were uncertain, so the culling probably did not eliminate any potential “winners”.

After the culling, *The Oregonian* ran another piece depicting 114 of the rejected designs, around a headline “An Oregon quilt”.¹⁴



THE JUDGING

Carlin recruited a panel of six judges to select 10 final designs from the 240 semi-finalists. They included Tony Johnson, cultural resources director for the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde (and the designer of the beautiful Chinook tribal flag); Diane Chonette, a graphic arts student; Mike Hale; and me. Two were unable to attend (Gert Boyle, chairwoman of Columbia Sportswear and Ted Ferrioli, a state senator from Eastern Oregon) so Carlin and *Oregonian* visuals and production editor Randy Cox (her husband) substituted.

To start the 4-hour session, I gave a 10-minute briefing on flag design (one that usually takes me more than an hour) and Mike Hale shared actual flags. I brought 3”x5” images of the best and worst 10 state flags from the 2001 NAVA survey, as a comparison or inspiration—so that

¹⁴ “An Oregon Quilt”, *The Oregonian*, 7 Dec. 2008

judges could see “the club our flag is trying to join”, and used flag catalogs and flag books as references. I brought colored pens, paper, and scissors if needed to help mock up ideas.

The hardworking Carlin had prepared our session by pinning all 240 semifinalists, grouped by motif, on the wall of a large conference room at *The Oregonian*’s headquarters in downtown Portland. In our initial discussions, judges thought the distribution of design motifs could be a good proxy for what’s important to the average Oregonian, so we decided that at least one “finalist” had to come from each motif. That organized our process.



As a first pass, each judge selected favorites within each motif, one to three, depending on the number of entries in that category. That step assured that no favored flag would be left out of the first pass. That yielded about 70 remaining designs. We discussed the merits of each of them, by motif, and narrowed the number down to 24 designs.



With more discussion, and surprising consensus in many cases, we culled those down to 10, with at least one from each motif, plus some backups.

Interestingly, the average age of the designers of the finalists was 60 years. The youngest was 42; the most senior was 95-year-old Doug Lynch, the dean of the Portland graphic design community and the creator of the flag of the city of Portland in 1969. No children’s designs were among the

finalists, although one came close (judges rejected the design after determining that the central charge was not a beaver but a beaver-duck—a composite of the mascots of rivals Oregon State University and the University of Oregon—looking something like a duck-billed platypus).

Carlin contacted each designer for quotes about their process and their design’s meaning. She published the final 10 designs in *The Oregonian* and on its website in December, giving readers until mid-January to vote. They were allowed one on-line vote (the receiving computer tracked the ISP address of the source and excluded additional votes from the same PC) or could mail in their vote. She wrote:

It’s come down to these 10. Out of a couple thousand entries to our state flag redesign contest, judges narrowed the field to 10 finalists.

Now it’s your turn to vote. We’ll tally the numbers through January 12.

So, Oregonians one and all—VOTE—schoolkids and retirees. You need not be 18, but do keep it to one vote per person.

What then? We'll ask politicians in Salem to adopt the new flag. We don't know if they will.

But whether they do or not, it will be an illuminating civics lesson. All you anti-new-flag people, remember this. The current state flag always remains an official flag even if a new one is adopted.¹⁵

Then she watched the votes—and the comments—pour in.



The judges.

Back: Diane Chonette, Mike Hale, Tony Johnson;
Front: Randy Cox, Ted Kaye, Joan Carlin.¹⁶

¹⁵ OregonLive.com, downloaded 19 Jan. 2009

¹⁶ Previous three images courtesy Randy Cox

THE FINALISTS

The ten final designs, as posted on *The Oregonian*'s website:¹⁷



A. Gerald H. Black, 74, Warrenton, retired

The process: When Black thought about what best said "Oregon", he imagined snow-capped peaks of the Cascades, the golden hills of wheat, and the painted hills. He wanted a simple design to reproduce easily.

What it means: Mount Hood dominates against a blue sky. The horizontal green stripe represents the forests and agricultural areas; the gold stripe represents the wheat fields and high deserts.



B. Eddy Lyons, 42, Southwest Portland, manager for a clinical research program

The process: He chose the iconic wagon to connect to our roots, as well as the current flag.

What it means: Stylized wagon for pioneers. Star for the location of the state. Red connects to the red, white, and blue of the U.S. flag.



C. Douglas Lynch, 95, Northwest Portland, professional designer

The process: Commissioned to design the city of Portland's flag, he also noodled around with one for the state, and came up with this. Lynch still draws by hand and calls himself "B.C. Before computer. I'm computer illiterate."

What it means: Green is for the agriculture. Gold is for the desert or wheat. And the two parts of the state are separated by the snow-capped mountains.



D. Jaymes Walker, 55, Northeast Portland, a landscape designer

The process: "I purposefully kept this flag simple in order for it to represent all of Oregon."

What it means: The "O" stands for Oregon, and is doubled. The incoming stripes frame the letter and strengthen the image to show the strength and solidarity. Blue and gold, the state colors, represent the Pacific Ocean and western Oregon, and the high desert and wheat fields of eastern Oregon. Note that the colors could be reversed.

¹⁷ OregonLive.com, downloaded 19 Jan. 2009; images provided courtesy of *The Oregonian*



E. John Mothershead, 50, Milwaukie

The process: “I’ve always had an interest in flags, doodling flags here and there and I saw the contest and said, ‘Oooh, that’s for me’.”

What it means: The green and gold quarters symbolize agriculture and the land. The wavy blue and white quarters symbolize the ocean and rivers.

I wanted to make it flashy where it would stand out.



F. T. J. Borzner, 56, Southwest Portland, electronics technician

The process: “I worked evenings about four weeks and probably made over 100 variations on the flag. After a lot of effort with the beaver I decided to go with the more timely salmon, which is an indicator of efforts to restore the ecosystem.”

What it means: Green represents growth and productivity of the land, the forests, farms, and vineyards. A gold salmon icon, inspired by Native American rock art, is for great value and quality of life. The bars represent hydroelectric and geothermal energy, the energy of workers, ranchers, and immigrants. In their vertical positions, they both block and impel the salmon.



G. Randall Gray, 42, West Linn, mapmaker for Clackamas County

The process: Always interested in flags and design, Gray was unimpressed with the front of the Oregon flag. But the back, with the beaver, was another matter. “The backside is the start of something good.”

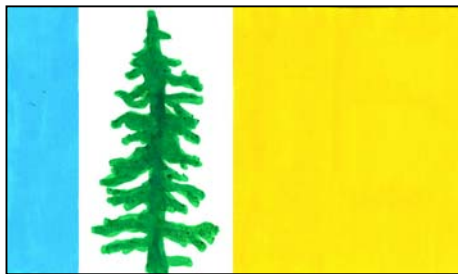
What it means: Blue and gold for the state colors with green to represent trees and wilderness Oregon was blessed with. White contrasts between the dark blue and green. The beaver from the current flag links us with the past. The star represents Oregon’s place in the Union.



H. Lorraine Bushek, 60, Southwest Portland, retired

The process: The simplicity of the design came to Bushek quickly. She looked outside her home, surrounded by Douglas fir trees.

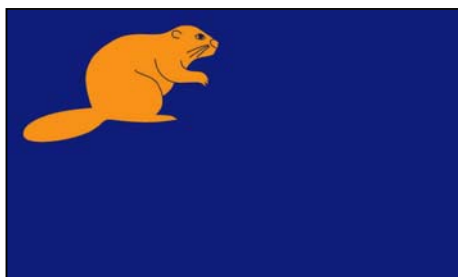
What it means: She wanted to symbolize all the state, not just the lush green valley, so she paired emerald with a brilliant blue to suggest the clear skies of eastern Oregon. (The tree is a very light tan.)



I. Karen L. Azinger, 51, Northwest Portland, writer/business consultant

The process: Such a cool state, she says, deserves a cool flag. The tree comes from the Oregon license plate and she chose green for the beautiful outdoors and for Oregon's environmental awareness. Yellow, to be inclusive: "I didn't want eastern Oregon left out."

What it means: The Douglas fir, the state tree, on a field of blue, white, and gold. Blue for our Pacific Coast, white for our snow-capped mountains, green for our forests, and gold for the grassy plains of eastern Oregon.



J. Thomas Lincoln, 69, Springfield, semi-retired graphic designer

The process: "I was going for continuity because a radical change in the flag will be a hard sell."

What it means: Beaver would be singular to Oregon and make our flag distinctive. The colors tie to the blue and gold of the current flag. He wanted to

evolve and upgrade it, not totally change it.

Partway through the voting, in response to over 100 people who favored keeping the current flag, Carlin added a "None of the Above" option to the poll.

THE RESULTS

When voting closed in January, 8,982 votes had been tallied. "None", with 1,846 (21%), received the most votes, although that may be inconclusive, as the question was not framed correctly—it was not clear if voting for "None" meant "keep the old flag" or "another new design would be better than these". Arguably 79% of voters favored a new design, but of course they were drawn from the pool of people interested in a new design. On the other hand, *The Oregonian* did not poll the general public on the question "should we change the flag?"—if it had, I suspect a majority would vote "no" out of topovexillolatriy (Peter Orenski's neologism for favoring a known, local flag).¹⁸

The "winner", as Mike Hale and I had predicted during the judging, was perhaps the most conventional of the designs: a beaver and star on blue, white, and green stripes.¹⁹ Ironically, at least two judges had argued strongly against it, seeing in it slight echoes of the flags of the neighboring states of California and Washington.

A close second was one of the two "Tree" designs, one that also had a "Geographic" motif. In fact, the two "Tree" flags combined outpolled the two "Beaver" flags, 29% to 24%. And

¹⁸ Dr. Peter J. Orenski, "Controversial Indian Symbols on U.S. State Flags", paper presented at 23 ICV in Yokohama, Japan in July 2009

¹⁹ "The Winner: State banner voted the best retains the beaver", *The Oregonian*, 7 Feb. 2009

the two “Geographic” flags combined were closely behind the “Tree” flags and ahead of the “Beaver” flags, with 26% of the votes.

RESULTS²⁰

None - 21% (1,846 votes)
Flag G - Beaver with star 20% (1,778 votes)
Flag I - Douglas Fir, blue and yellow 17% (1,565 votes)
Flag H - Douglas Fir, blue and green 11% (1,018 votes)
Flag C - Snow-capped mountains 9% (776 votes)
Flag A - Mount Hood 7% (661 votes)
Flag B - Wagon 5% (452 votes)
Flag J - Beaver 4% (376 votes)
Flag D - O for Oregon 3% (238 votes)
Flag F - Gold salmon 2% (157 votes)
Flag E - Wavy lines 1% (115 votes)
Total Votes: 8,982

THE LEGISLATURE

The winner was announced a week before Oregon’s birthday. At the judges’ suggestion, *The Oregonian* announced that it would reverse the orientation of the beaver and have its artists upgrade the design on the “winning” flag, in anticipation of taking the proposal to lawmakers.



However, the Oregon Legislature meets for about six months every two years. The 2009 session started in January and ran until June. Most legislative activity is planned well in advance, and legislators are limited in the number of bills each can submit.

By the time *The Oregonian* proposed a bill to adopt the new flag, it could not find a legislator to sponsor it. Without that step, the flag redesign effort died, at least for the current biennium.

²⁰OregonLive.com, downloaded 19 Jan. 2009

²¹ *The Oregonian* did not redesign the flag, but an approximation is depicted using an alternative beaver designed by Thomas Lincoln (designer of “J”).

LESSONS LEARNED

As the contest and the culling and voting process were designed and implemented, decisions made by *The Oregonian* affected the contest's structure and outcome positively and negatively. For example:

Positive

- 1) The contest required entries on 3"x5" cards. This practical move had several benefits: a) it made the size and proportions of entries consistent and comparable, b) it forced most designers to "think smaller" and thus perhaps simpler, and c) it helped with the physical management of the entries.
- 2) Providing the guidelines from *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, and a link to NAVA's site, helped direct flag designers. As evidence for this, the field of entries was remarkably free of flags with words and seals. Providing examples of highly rated state flags also helped.
- 3) The contest called for solid colors and no graduated colors. This was important in an age when many designers use computers, and could easily have created difficult-to-manufacture designs.
- 4) The initial culling step was very important. Not only did it make the subsequent judging more productive, it filtered out the worst designs and concentrated focus on the best 10%.
- 5) *The Oregonian* characterized the state flag effort with words such as "redesign", "facelift", and "upgrade" rather than "change" or "replace". This may have helped to reduce prospective opposition.
- 6) *The Oregonian* was careful to state "By entering this contest, you release all rights to the design and agree to let us submit it to the Legislature for consideration as an updated flag." That avoided potential copyright and legal issues.

Negative

- 7) Carlin, accustomed to photo contests, was not amenable to judges altering designs, combining them, or making decisions such as "this would be a finalist if the color were changed or if the mountain were stylized". (However, she did accede to removing the log under the beaver on the design that ultimately received the most votes.) She also resisted making all entries consistent in their graphics quality—leaving good designs that might be poorly-executed to stand on their own, without, for example, color correction. In fact, my experience has shown that better designs result when the judges are empowered to make minor changes to designs, including combining elements of different designs, and that possibility is communicated in the contest rules.
- 8) Mike Hale and I proposed that *The Oregonian* use a rating scheme rather than voting. We had suggested that instead of simply having people vote for their favorite, they be

asked to give a score to each design (e.g. from 0 to 10). That way they would rate the relative value of *each* design, rather than not hearing from them at all on the nine designs they didn't vote for. The overall ranking of the designs, after the ratings were in, would be based on the average rating of each design (total rating scores divided by total number of scores given that design). This could have led to a runoff, and it would have avoided the problem of "splitting votes among good designs" (for example, if a majority preferred a tree flag, but split their votes among two of them, another, less-worthy flag might get more votes). However, on-line technical impediments apparently were not overcome—perhaps due to lack of adequate advance planning.

- 9) The final 10 designs were published in a Sunday newspaper and on-line, not only with an explanation of the design's process and meaning, but with information about the designer as well. There may well be a bias inherent in choosing a flag when the voter knows the designer's name, gender, age, or city.
- 10) When *The Oregonian* put the final 10 designs on-line for electronic voting, it allowed people who had voted to see the results so far. Assuming that people tend to favor a "winner", that could easily have skewed the voting.
- 11) The contest was not a truly statewide effort. Although *The Oregonian* does have a statewide circulation, it is only the dominant paper in the main urban center, the Portland metropolitan area. The designs and the voting therefore likely favored Portlanders.
- 12) Most importantly, the flag redesign effort proceeded without laying adequate initial political groundwork, dooming the project to failure. Even the attempt to have at least one legislator serve as a judge was unsuccessful.

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, the effort to update the Oregon state flag ran into what I would call "The Ugly Baby Phenomenon". Every mother loves her baby, no matter how ugly—because she is accustomed to it and it is her very own. That comfortable and proprietary relationship can cloud aesthetic judgment. Citizens of a state can feel the same way about their flags. But unlike mothers, states can change their flags. And that is what was attempted in Oregon.

However, inadequate work went into educating and convincing the public about the design drawbacks of the current flag and virtually no success was achieved in securing government agreement to consider or enact any change. The contest process produced an excellent array of prospective designs, and the culling and judging proved successful. Although the voting procedure could have been improved (by using a rating system and/or a runoff, and by making it a truly statewide event), it received significant public participation. **But in the ultimate test, enacting a new state flag into law, the effort failed.**

APPENDIX 1—THE CONTEST²²

Oregon Flag Contest

On the occasion of the state's 150th anniversary, *The Oregonian* plans to seize upon your creative vision and innovative spirit to update Oregon's flag with a new design as distinctive as the state itself. The people of Oregon will create and choose the design, a people's flag. We invite Oregonians of all ages and backgrounds—from grade-schoolers to professional artists, from across the state—to submit flag designs. A panel will select 10 finalists and then the public will vote on the winner in December.

Here's the current flag... [images depicted]

View flags from all 50 states [link to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags_of_the_U.S._states]

RULES

- Entries must be on a 3 x 5 card or paper of that proportion
- Designs must be one-sided and rectangular
- Flags can be any solid color or combination of colors. But gradated colors, where one shade passes in small degrees to a lighter shade or another tint entirely, can't be used. Designs must be original.
- By entering this contest, you agree to release all rights to the design and agree to let us submit it to the Legislature for consideration as an updated flag design.

TO SUBMIT ENTRIES

Deadline: 5 p.m. Nov. 21

- Finalists will be notified by Dec. 10.
- Ten final designs get voted on by the public.
- The winner will be notified by mid-January and will receive a 3-foot by 5-foot cloth flag of their design.
- On the back of your entry, print your name, address, and daytime telephone number. And feel free to include an explanation of the design.

Mail: Joan Carlin 1320 S.W. Broadway Portland, OR 97201

Email: Send as a JPEG to jcarlin@news.oregonian.com

All entries are non returnable. Because of the volume of entries expected, we cannot notify people that their entry has been received.

TIPS

From Ted Kaye, North American Vexillological Association

1. KEEP IT SIMPLE

The flag should be so simple that a child can draw it from memory. Flags flap, drape, and must be seen from a distance. So simple designs make the most effective flags. Furthermore, complicated flags cost more. Focus on a single symbol, a few colors, large shapes, and no letters.

2. USE SYMBOLISM

Usually a single primary symbol is best, and consider Oregon icons such as Doug firs, mountains, Haystack Rock, Crater Lake, pioneer wagons, etc.... Colors often carry meanings: red for blood or sacrifice, white for purity, blue for water or sky.

3. LIMIT COLORS

Pick no more than three. The basic flag colors are red, blue, green, black, yellow, and white. Choose colors that create effective contrast.

²² *The Oregonian*, 16 Oct. 2008

4. NO LETTERING OR SEALS

Words defeat the purpose. A flag is a graphic symbol. Letters are hard to read from a distance, hard to sew and difficult to reduce to lapel-pin size. Seals such as what is on the current Oregon flag were designed to be read up close such as on paper. Few are effective flags—too much detail. Better to use one element from the seal as a symbol.

5. BE DISTINCTIVE BUT BE SIMILAR

Sometimes the good designs are already taken. However, a flag's symbols, colors, and shapes can recall other flags—a powerful way to show heritage, solidarity, or connectedness. This requires knowledge of other flags. Often the best way to start by looking to one's roots, and studying other flags.

REMEMBER

All rules have exceptions.

[Note: *The Oregonian* made changes to these points when deriving them from *Good Flag, Bad Flag*—at times making them contradictory, as in the title of #5.]

APPENDIX 2—EXPERT OPINIONS

After hearing this paper at the 23rd International Congress of Vexillology in Yokohama, Japan (July 2009) and the 43rd Annual Meeting of the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) in Charleston, South Carolina (October 2009), flag experts and enthusiasts in the audiences rated the flags on a scale of 0 to 10, and voted for their favorites. At each meeting 30 participants responded

At the international meeting, the highest-rated flags were G (7.0), B (6.4), and C (6.4); the favorite flags were B (7.5 votes), G (7 votes), and D (6 votes).

At the North American meeting, the highest-rated flags were H (7.8), B (7.3), and G (7.2); the favorite flags were H (8 votes), B (5 votes), and G (5 votes).

About the author:



Ted Kaye compiled and published *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, NAVA's guide to flag design, and has led NAVA's Internet surveys of public perceptions of US and Canadian state/provincial/territorial flags and of US city flags. He has been editor of *Raven, a Journal of Vexillology* since 1996. A member of NAVA since 1985 and an organizer of the 12th International Congress of Vexillology in 1987, Ted has served as the chief financial officer of a small technology company and as NAVA's treasurer. His articles have appeared in *Raven*, *The Flag Bulletin*, *NAVA News*, the *Vexilloid Tabloid*, and *Flagmaster*, as well as the proceedings of several international congresses.

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Contact information:

2235 N.W. Aspen, Portland, OR 97210 USA
kandsons@aol.com

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²³ Photo courtesy Mike Hale