

Jack Ohman (1960-)

By Lori Erickson

A widely syndicated political cartoonist, Jack Ohman has played an important role in influencing political thought in Oregon. He was on the editorial board of the Portland *Oregonian*, where he was the editorial cartoonist for twenty-nine years, and has been associate editor at the *Sacramento Bee* since 2013. From his experience as a teenaged intern at a local newspaper in Minnesota to winning a Pulitzer Prize in 2016, the longtime *Oregonian* has made his mark on national journalism and politics.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on September 1, 1960, Jack Ohman plunged into the world of politics at an early age. Although raised by Republican parents in what he termed “a culturally conservative state,” Ohman leaned politically to the left as a young adult. While attending high school in a Minneapolis suburb, he worked as a political aide for the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. At seventeen, he began drawing political cartoons for the University of Minnesota student newspaper, the *Minnesota Daily*, a pursuit that paired his love of drawing with his interest in politics. Two years later, he became the youngest American cartoonist in history to be nationally syndicated. Ohman left the university in 1981 to accept his first daily newspaper job at the *Columbus Dispatch* in Ohio. The next year, he moved to Detroit to work for the *Detroit Free Press*.

He married Janice Dunham in 1982; they have three children. He and Jan, who grew up in Oregon, moved to Portland in 1983 when Ohman accepted a position as political cartoonist for the *Oregonian*. In the 1990s, Ohman returned to college, completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the Honors Program at Portland State University in 1999. After graduating, he taught at PSU’s Mark O. Hatfield School of Government as an adjunct associate professor of Political Science. His artistic style as a cartoonist developed as he became a stronger liberal voice and gained more editorial independence, although his political point of view was sometimes at odds with the moderately conservative *Oregonian*.

Ohman left his longtime position at the *Oregonian* in 2013 and was named editorial cartoonist at the *Sacramento Bee*, filling a position left vacant after the death of his friend and fellow cartoonist Rex Babin. He is also an associate editor at the paper, where he writes editorials and a weekly column. He divorced before his move to California and married again in 2016.

In his cartoons, Ohman incorporates striking lines with subtle coloration, typically mixed with one or two thoughtfully placed bold tones for maximum effect. Known for their wit and candor, his cartoons have covered local, national, and international topics. While his commentary frequently focuses on politicians and the workings of government, he also has tackled climate change, gun violence, terrorism, and big business. He documented the end of his father’s life and his role as caretaker in a series called “The Care Package” for PBS News Hour. In addition to his syndicated cartoons, Ohman has compiled more than ten books, including several focused on fly fishing.

Ohman received the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for Editorial Cartoons and the Society of Professional Journalists Award in 2009 and was president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists in 2015. He earned the Scripps Howard Foundation Journalism Award in 2011 and was a finalist for the Herblock Prize in 2013. In 2016, he was honored with the Pulitzer Prize in Journalism for Editorial Cartooning. His work was syndicated by the Tribune Content Agency for twenty-five years, beginning in 1993, and distributed to over two hundred newspapers. In 2018, he joined the Washington Post News Service & Syndicate.

Sources

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The Oregon Encyclopedia

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