

# The Only Woman in the Room: The Norma Paulus Story

Starting in 1970 and continuing through the 1990s, Norma Paulus was a high profile and successful politician in Oregon. She held many positions including Legislator, Secretary of State and Superintendent of Public Instruction. As a member of that vanishing breed – a Liberal Republican in the line of Governor Tom McCall and Senator Mark Hatfield – her name has receded from public view in recent years. Lucky for us, Paulus and writers Gail Wells and Pat McCord Amacher, as well as Oregon State University Press – have produced this well-researched memoir of Paulus's career.

As an added benefit, most of her career was based in Salem, so there is a good deal of local color that comes with the story.

Beginning with Norma Petersen's birth in rural Nebraska, the book follows her family's journey west and her early years in Burns, in Harney County, Oregon, and her trip over the mountains to a starring role in state government.

Along the way we observe how Paulus's energy, intelligence and ambition led from a secretarial position at the Supreme Court to



Oregon's Norma Paulus

## WORDS

Review by  
Karen Runkel &  
Don Upjohn

**Willamette Law School where she was the first woman to graduate without an undergraduate degree.** This achievement is the start of a long list of "Firsts" highlighted in the book.

Notable as her law success was, it was just

the beginning of a successful career, not in law, but in politics, where her trajectory of public service was rare for anyone, but especially for a woman in the 60s and 70s.

Taken as a big picture view of Oregon in those years, the book points the reader to three historic pathways: First, her everyday life as the wife of Bill Paulus, a prominent Salem attorney and as the mother of a son and daughter, involved with friends and family and community service work.

Second, we follow Paulus' professional life, beginning with her election as a State Representative, going on to serve two terms as Secretary of State, appointment to the Northwest Power Planning Council followed by her last elective office as Superintendent of Public Instruction. Interspersed with these positions are the dramatic stories of deciding to forgo a US Senate run and losing the governorship to Neil Goldschmidt in 1986.

Within these two pathways we learn not only Paulus' personal joys and sorrows, but also the wide-ranging scope of her involvement and accomplishments. The authors present the full picture – which includes the Rajneeshee drama, discoveries of lost state property, collecting Governor's portraits, the ERA, environmental goals, growth of tourism, job sharing, vote-by-mail, updating audits and the Oregon Historical Society.

As one shares the journey of Norma Paulus, it becomes clear that the third pathway in this very readable biography may be the most valuable in today's political climate. Readers will experience a fascinating chapter in Oregon history, leading through changes both prominent and subtle, to today's more partisan times reflected in current headlines and possibly in their own lives.

Even though Norma Paulus may have begun as "the only woman in the room," this hard-working Oregonian broadened that imaginary room to include all of those who care about the state's past and future. To appreciate the journey, it would be hard to find a better guide than "The Only Woman in the Room: The Norma Paulus Story."

Finally, a tip of the cap to the OSU Press; this is the fourth volume in its series, "Women in Politics in the Pacific Northwest." Other books include Governor Barbara Robert's memoir "Up the Capital Steps," and works featuring Avel Louise Gordley, the first black woman elected to the Oregon Senate, and Betty Roberts, a distinguished Oregon legislator and Supreme Court Justice.

*Karen Runkel is a retired environmental activist, calligrapher and employee of Travel Oregon and Oregon Film.  
Don Upjohn enjoys Oregon History; he writes occasionally for Salem Weekly.*



Photo by Lonnie and Kim Thurston

# 1984 by George Orwell, Wilton E.

by Jade Rosina McCutcheon & Barbara Sellers-Young

**1984:**  
**Directed by Jenni Bertel**  
**Dates: July - July 28, 2018**

Location: Pentacle Theatre,  
324 52nd Avenue, NW Salem.  
(Salem-Dallas Hwy 22)

Price: \$25  
Box Office phone: (503) 485-4300

and provides a respite from the eyes of Big Brother. The sound design by Galen Brownson is a cross between heavy metal and machine-like rhythmic pulsing, almost like the sound of a frantic heartbeat. Watching the play, one is reminded of how much the phrases of Orwell's novel has become part of contemporary language as the term 'Orwellian' references an entire matrix of concepts such as double think, newspeak, telescreen and memory hole. If you take time out of your lives to see this play you will certainly experience the raw power of a 'cautionary tale!'