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OCA member heats up board race

By Rebecca Merritt
Emerald Reporter

Efforts to stop a member of the Oregon Citizens' Alliance from winning a seat on the Eugene School Board have heated the March 23 race, narrowing the field of active, campaigning candidates from seven to four.



Within the past two weeks, political activist Stefan Stent and retired Bethel school teacher Marjorie Harris announced their withdrawal from the race in order to keep OCA member and local accountant Jeff Hoyt from being elected to Position 2 on the District 4-J School Board.

A third candidate, Martin Acker, University emeritus professor and psychologist, said he will no longer run an active campaign for the position and is encouraging people not to vote for him to keep from splitting the vote among candidates opposing Hoyt.

The names of all seven candidates will still appear on the mail-in ballot for the election because they missed the Jan. 21 deadline to withdraw. All three candidates have offered their support to Chris Pryor, marketing director of the Willamalane Parks and Recreation District, but Harris and Acker hope to keep involved in the race so that they may run for the next available position.

Thursday night, the four active candidates, along with Acker, participated in a public forum sponsored by the Lane County Democratic Party at the County Courthouse Building. Acker said he participated in the forum as a running candidate so that his views regarding school issues



Photo by Michael Shindler
Several candidates have dropped out of the Eugene School Board race to support one candidate against OCA member Jeff Hoyt.

could still be heard for upcoming school board elections.

Candidates each gave a three-minute opening statement and answered questions from parents and members of the community regarding pertinent school issues and their involvement with the school system. Key issues that were raised included budget problems, alternative and international schools and the schools' relationship with commercial businesses.

Despite rumors that community leaders had pressured candidates to step down from the race, both Acker and Harris said their decision to drop out was based on their own fear of an OCA member serving on the school board. Stent also dropped out of the race on his own will, Pryor said. Stent was not available for comment.

"Nobody put any pressure on me to withdraw," Acker said. "The opinions I got from people were very respectful and well thought-out. What is critical is that the school board and school

system is not disrupted by a radical, fanatic position."

Harris said she pressured herself to drop out of the race because she believed she was not strong enough to defeat Hoyt. She expressed a concern of Hoyt bringing to the school board a planned agenda attacking homosexuality.

"I think the school needs to be ever-vigilant about people bringing in their own personal agendas into the schools," Harris said.

Hoyt said he believes he is being attacked personally for his ties to the OCA. He said he is running for the school board as a father of four small children and was not recruited by the OCA to enter the race.

"I think that this displays the hypocrisy of that group," Hoyt said. "They talk a lot about tolerance and diversity and they really don't want tolerance and diversity on the school board. I'm really not a radical person."

Hoyt has not asked for any

Turn to SCHOOL, Page 6

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