

Governor's race gets crowded

Five candidates from "third parties" compete for Kitzhaber's seat

By David Ryan
Oregon Daily Emerald

"If I won, that would have meant hell froze over."

Trey Smith, Socialist Party candidate for governor, certainly has no fantasies about winning his campaign.

But like other so-called third parties, he does have a different way of thinking than the Republicans and Democrats do. The governor's race has five "third parties" competing for the job.

Two of the candidates, Smith and Libertarian Richard Burke, talked about their plans and their chances of winning the race with incumbent Democrat John Kitzhaber and Republican candidate Bill Sizemore.

Also running for governor are Blair Bobier with the Pacific Party, Patti Steurer with the Natural Law Party and Roger Weidner with the Reform Party. The Emerald could not reach them by phone.

According to the Oregon Voter's Pamphlet, Bobier supports the protection of Oregon forests and the decriminalization of marijuana, Steurer supports reducing chemical pesticide use and implementing homeopathic health care options, and Weidner supports making government more accountable to the public by placing public service agencies under the control of county commissioners.

"We live in a world where corporations dominate political life," said Smith, who is a disc jockey. "In the courts, corporations have been bestowed the rights of a person."

Smith said if corporations are to be granted the basic human rights of an individual, they should be held accountable to the public. To do this, Smith said he would change the way Oregon corporations would receive and keep their corporate charters from the state.

"They would have to pay living wages," he said. "They would have to follow strict environmental guidelines. If they decided to just up and leave in the middle of the night, they would have their assets frozen by the state."

Under Smith's plan, corporations would have to renew their charters every 10 years, when their civic actions would be reviewed.

"People tell me we don't have that right," he said. "People do have that right."

But one of the most central ideas of the socialist party, Smith said, is to implement a progressive tax system.

"The more you earn, the more you pay," Smith said. "Right now, for every dollar we pay in income tax, corporations pay 8.77 cents."

Smith believes this will solve many problems, such as education funding problems.

"Look, if everybody was chucking in their fair share, we wouldn't be having this problem [in funding education]."

Libertarian gubernatorial candidate Richard Burke said reforming the Oregon tax system was central to his campaign.

"First of all, property taxes have been shown to be inherently unstable," he said. "Property taxes hurt vulnerable people like the elderly who many times have to sell their house in order to pay their property taxes."

Burke believes a sales tax would solve property tax unfairness.

"What I envision in its place is a sales tax, a portion of which would be assessed by the county, to give local government control of more funds," Burke said.

A sales tax would also lower taxes for everyone because it has a larger tax base, Burke said. It would encompass areas that the current income tax can't, such as wages paid "under the table."

On higher education issues, both candidates said they support ways to reduce the costs of Oregon's university system.

Smith proposed that every person who decided to go beyond high school would be given a monetary voucher to support them.

"If you were poor or came from a family with a single mother, obviously the voucher would be a little more," he said.

Burke supported a tuition freeze and an audit of every university and university department.

"I'm sure we would find fat," he said.

Burke also wanted to end student incidental fees and wanted the athletic department to find a different funding source than incidental fees.

"Let them put an ad for McDonald's on their shoulder pads," he said.

Like Smith, Burke said he has no dreams of actually becoming governor.

"Lightning would have to strike in the same place 300 times for me to win," he said.

David Ryan covers the Eugene City Council, community groups and politics for the Emerald.


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