

SENATE DISTRICT 9

Candidates focus on fire recovery

Capi Lynn
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Wildfire recovery has superseded the reelection campaign for Oregon State Sen. Fred Girod, who is being challenged in District 9 by Green Party candidate Jim Hinsvark and Libertarian Patrick Marnell.

"I owe it to the people of every district to really do everything I can to work on the wildfire recovery part, and I've really not campaigned much," Girod said. "I will continue to do that. I just think that's where my efforts should be."

The heart of Senate District 9 runs through the Santiam Canyon, which was decimated by the wind-fueled Beachie Creek Fire on Labor Day. Nearly 500 homes were destroyed, including Girod's on the North Santiam River about two miles downstream from Fishermen's Bend.

His father built the house in 1968, a year before Girod graduated from Stayton High School. He's lived there with his wife, Lori, since 2005.

"For me, this is my home," said Girod, a retired dentist whose practice was in Stayton. "There's a nickname for people from the canyon. It's canyon rats, and I'm proud of that."

Advocating for rural interests

Through three full terms in the Oregon Senate — and before that in the House — he's been an advocate for rural interests. His fiscal and social conservatism is in line with a district of mostly small towns and a natural resource-based economy.

"People know how I'm going to vote," said Girod, who is currently the Senate Minority Leader. "In my district, the economic engines are timber and agriculture and small towns. I will do everything I can to help those three entities."

Girod has been criticized, along with other Republicans, for staging a walkout in the last Legislative session over a proposed state carbon tax. The GOP wants a climate bill without a cap-and-trade system and wants it to be referred to voters.

He was verbally attacked on social media in the wake of his home burning down, and it didn't sit well with Hinsvark, one his challengers.

"I have seen posts of people attacking Fred — some are brutal, all are wrong," Hinsvark wrote in a letter to the editor published in the Statesman Journal. "Go after his policies. Work against him. Vote to remove him from office. And right now, let him and all the others work through their loss."

Bringing respectful conversation back

Hinsvark, an organic berry farmer, is running for public office for the first time, inspired by the GOP walkouts. He half-jokingly told his son before the most recent walkout that he "might jump in" if the Republicans did it again.

"The quorum part of the Legislature was meant so that the minority wouldn't be run over by the majority,"

Hinsvark said. "It's not set up to be a power play by the minority, and that's how they're using it. In the past, Democrats have used it, too."

"We have to be able to talk things through, work things out and then vote. That's what democracy is."

Hinsvark's campaign slogan is "Grow together."

"We have to be able to grow back together just like we grew apart," he said. "We have to bring respectful conversation back into politics."

Hinsvark said climate change should be on everybody's mind.

"I'll admit it was my generation and the ones right above me and below me. We dropped the ball," he said. "Climate change is a society-wide issue. That's how it needs to be fought and addressed. We need to make changes in what we're doing, but do it in a way that is rational for rural folks."

Hinsvark's 35-acre farm is between Woodburn and Mt. Angel. His parents bought it in 1962 when he was 8. They grow primarily marionberries and chesters, a variety of blackberries. He's proud that, for the past 20 years, everything they've grown has been sold within 100 miles of the farm.

Hinsvark looked across the board at party interests and charted eight issues that most people, no matter what their political affiliation, want to work on. Among those are a living wage, campaign finance reform, schools and health care.

"That's the only way I see a way forward, to find those things, work on them and create some trust, and then work from there," Hinsvark said.

Marnell, the other challenger for the District 9 seat, declined an interview request from the Statesman Journal.

"I'm running on my reputation and name recognition alone," he said.

Marnell is a traffic engineer who lives in Hubbard. He ran unsuccessfully for House District 18 in 2016, a race the late Vic Gilliam won by a large margin.

Focusing on recovery

Girod has faced little challenge the past two elections, but that's not why he's put campaigning on the backburner.

He's one of six elected public officials on the Wildfire Economic Recovery Council, which is co-chaired by Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle and State Treasurer Tobias Read. The council, which includes community leaders, federal delegates and state advisory agencies, will work to help counties implement economic recovery solutions.

"Coordinating with FEMA and the state is a little bit slower than we wanted," Girod said. "We're trying to expedite that a little bit. We're working very closely with county commissioners, trying to streamline the process so people don't have to jump through quite as many hoops as they normally do to rebuild."

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State senators square off

Secretary of state contest also features candidates from two other parties

Connor Radnovich

Salem Statesman Journal
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Four years ago, a Republican won the race for Oregon's secretary of state — the first to do so since 1980.

Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, is hoping to repeat that success this election, but also vying for the spot are Democratic Sen. Shemia Fagan of Portland and minor party candidates Nathalie Paravicini and Kyle Markley.

For Democrats, winning back control of the Secretary of State's office — paired with Democratic incumbents winning re-election in the other two statewide races — would once again give them control of every top elected position in the state.

For Republicans, winning a statewide seat during an era where Democrats are the dominant party in Oregon would be seen as a huge victory.

Among the secretary of state's responsibilities are overseeing Oregon's elections and auditing state agencies.



Fagan



Thatcher



Paravicini

They are first in line to replace the governor and are a member of the State Land Board.

As calls for greater election security and voter participation continue to grow louder, major agency failings capture headlines and a redistricting fight looms on the horizon in 2021, Oregon's secretary of state will play a pivotal role in the coming years.

"There's a lot at stake in this secretary of state race," said state political analyst Jim Moore, professor at Pacific University.

Republican Bev Clarno currently serves as secretary of state, having been appointed to the position after former Secretary of State Dennis Richardson died of brain cancer in February 2019. She pledged to not run for the seat.

Moore said Fagan is favored in this race, in large part due to the fact that

See SENATORS, Page 4A

Maps

Continued from Page 1A

but the soil could recovery quickly.

The maps also show burn severity of the Holiday Farm Fire (McKenzie River east of Eugene), the Archie Creek Fire (North Umpqua River, northeast of Roseburg) and the Thielsen Fire near Diamond Lake.

The maps, created with satellite data, prioritizes analyzing how burned the soil is so meteorologists and others can determine areas of concern for landslides, debris flows and flash flooding. It also provides a detailed understanding of how severely the forest was burned by assigning it four different categories: unburned, low, moderate and high.

Burn severity categories

In looking at the maps, green indicates very little or no burn impact, while light green denotes low severity — the ground might be charred but the forest canopy is intact.

Meanwhile, yellow and red indicates more impacted forest.

"Moderate severity, which is the yellow on the maps, means that when you drive or walk through there, a lot of the trees are scorched and probably dead, and the needles are brown. A lot of the vegetation is gone and it doesn't look great, but the nice thing is that the needles provide some ground cover to slow down erosion so that the soil can start regenerating a little quicker, especially in a moist place like Western Oregon," said Jess Clark, a communications specialist for the BEAR teams (Burned Area Emergency Response) that created the maps.

The red areas indicate the worst burn.

"In the red areas, all of the needles were consumed and all we're seeing is black sticks and snags," he said. "Those are where the soil cooked pretty hot and it's hard to grow vegetation back for a while because there's nothing to intercept the rain that hits the ground."

The map makes clear that the Little North Santiam is likely to see some significant risk for flooding, landslides and debris flows that could impact Salem's drinking water given the river's proximity to the Geren Island Water Treatment Facility in Stayton.

Clark stressed that the maps were best at showing the burn severity in a larger area, and not down to a relatively small pinpoint.

"It's not a tool to zoom into your backyard," he said. "They're not perfect and because of a lack of access and COVID-19 limits, we haven't seen literally everything on the ground and in person. But it's a pretty good snapshot of an area."

Beachie Creek (192,631 acres)

Burn severity breakdown: Unburned: 8,462 acres (4%) | Low: 63,280 (33%) | Moderate: 100,920 (52%) | High: 19,968 (10%)

Lionshead (204,179 acres)

Burn severity breakdown: Unburned: 29,313 acres (14%); Low: 78,679 (39%); Moderate: 78,547 (38%); High: 17,639 (9%)

Riverside (137,792 acres)

Burn severity breakdown: Unburned: 18,192 (13%) | Low: 47,548 (35%) | Moderate: 55,118 (40%) | High: 16,934 (12%)

Holiday Farm (173,050 acres)

Burn severity breakdown: Unburned: 7,479 (4%) | Low: 42,233 (24%) | Moderate: 107,234 (62%) | High: 16,104 (9%)

Archie Creek (131,419 acres)

Burn severity breakdown: Unburned: 11,682 (9%) | Low: 18,666 (14%) | Moderate: 57,855 (44%) | High: 43,216 (33%)

Thielsen (9,921 acres)

Burn severity breakdown: Unburned: 914 (9%) | Low: 4,171 (42%) | Moderate: 4,295 (43%) | High: 542 (5%)

Note: For a full-sized PDF of any of the maps below, email Zach Urness at zurness@statesmanjournal.com.

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