

# SEPTEMBER

## Riding the campaign trail

■ Jamie McLeod-Skinner attends rodeo, campaigns at Pendleton Round-Up over three days in September

By Max Denning  
The Observer, Sept. 21

The Pendleton Round-Up might not seem like an ideal place for a Democratic Congressional candidate to campaign. Umatilla County, where the lion's share of the population lives in Pendleton, had 6,000 more registered Republicans than Democrats in the 2018 primary election. In the 2018 primaries, incumbent Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) received 63,817 votes, while the seven Democrats running for the nomination received only 49,760 votes.

Yet, Jamie McLeod-Skinner, who challenged the 10-term incumbent in Oregon's Second Congressional District, spent three days at the Round-Up in September to meet and listen to as many constituents as possible.

Democrat McLeod-Skinner, who lives in Terrebonne, crisscrossed Oregon's Second Congressional District after declaring her candidacy in July 2017, driving more than 40,000 miles within the country's seventh-largest

congressional district to campaign. She held town halls, meet and greets, attended county fairs and flew solo at what was meant to be a debate, which Walden was invited to but did not attend.

To get an idea of what it's like to be on McLeod-Skinner's campaign journey, The Observer shadowed the candidate for two days during September's Round-Up. The rodeo event offered a chance to get her name and platform in front of an estimated 50,000 people flocking into Pendleton to attend the weeklong event. McLeod-Skinner did her fair share of campaigning — shaking hands, talking to voters and riding a horse in the Westward Ho! Parade. But McLeod-Skinner was also there to simply enjoy the famed rodeo. She ate barbecue, cheered on the contestants in bareback horse riding and calf roping and talked to her neighbors.

McLeod-Skinner and her team arrived at the stadium around noon wearing

various shades of pink. Cass McLeod-Skinner, Jamie's wife, and Jamie are somewhat matching, pink button-down shirts, dark sunglasses, silver earrings, matching campaign buttons and tan cowboy hats. Vicky Reed, Jamie's Umatilla County coordinator, is wearing a unique blush pink campaign shirt stating "McLeod-Skinner Tough Enough for Congress."

Jamie's first stop is the sponsor room to get lunch and shake some hands. There she finds Oregon Liquor Control Commissioner Michael Harper, a former Portland Trail Blazer who towers over the crowd.

Sitting just a few seats away is Don Sampson, executive director of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, dressed in traditional Native American regalia, with blue and brown feathers in his headdress.

Sampson and Jamie talk for about 10 minutes about renewable energy and opportunities for tribal members



Max Denning/The Observer

Jamie McLeod-Skinner, on horseback, in the Westward Ho! Parade at the Pendleton Round-Up. On the left, her wife, Cass McLeod-Skinner waves to the crowd.

in Oregon's second district. It ends with a photo-op of Jamie, Sampson and other members of the Confederated Tribes, with Harper standing behind them.

Jamie — who was born in Wisconsin and spent a portion of her childhood in East Africa, where her mother taught, and finished high school in Ashland — finds a table with her team and joins the line for barbecue. As she's served in the buffet line, two women tell Jamie they usually wear her buttons and she has their

vote in November.

This was one of Jamie's first interactions with prospective voters during the Round-Up, and when she gets back to the table she's clearly encouraged by the quick conversation.

Reed mentions to Jamie they want to be seated in the stadium by 1 p.m. to see the opening of the rodeo, giving Jamie about 10 minutes to eat. No qualms from Jamie though. She eats quickly, but before she leaves, Jamie takes the time to thank each of the servers in the buffet line.

Cass, whom Jamie married in May 2017 — just two months before she announced her Congressional campaign — said Jamie often starts conversations with people.

"She actually talks to everyone," Cass said. "For example, when we go to Albertsons, she'll talk to cashiers and stock folks, she'll talk to students in the parking lot. Often it's not campaign pitching — she'll ask them, 'What are the issues we can help with? What can the federal government do better?'"

## Boise Cascade sells three local locations

■ Woodgrain Millwork will be the new owner of three plants in NE Oregon

By Chense Kaechele  
The Observer, Sept. 12

Boise Cascade entered into a purchase agreement on Sept. 11 with Woodgrain Millwork to sell three of its facilities in Northeast Oregon.

According to a press release posted to the Nasdaq website, Woodgrain has agreed to take over the Boise Cascade lumber mills in La Grande and Pilot Rock and the particleboard plant in Island City. This transaction does not include the plywood mill or the powerhouse and log utilization center in Elgin.

"The sale to Woodgrain allows us to further focus on our veneer-based engineered wood products and plywood businesses," said Mike Brown, senior vice president of operations, Boise Cascade Wood Products division, in the release. "Woodgrain is a family-owned company with a solid reputation in the industry. The products manufactured at these Northeast Oregon facilities are a good fit with their business strategy."

Lisa Chapman, Boise Cascade media contact, told The Observer the sale will impact 109 employees in Union County. A total of 256 employees, including those in management, work in the three facilities.

The due diligence process, which looks at Boise Cascade's assets and liabilities,

took approximately 50 to 60 days, Chapman said. After that, the transaction was completed.

Chapman said she was not sure if Woodgrain intended to have layoffs.

"We're not privy to what Woodgrain would do once they take over," Chapman said. "Woodgrain will be meeting with existing managers and employees within that time frame."

Chapman added Woodgrain, which is based in Fruitland, Idaho, is a family-owned and -operated company that has served its community for 60 years.

In May, Boise Cascade announced it would begin the curtailment of its lumber operation in Elgin in 60 days. The phased shut-down included the sawmill, planer and shipping department, while the powerhouse and log utilization center remains operational. The curtailment impacted 90 employees in Elgin.

Chapman said the particleboard plant and the lumber mill were sold because the company was moving in a different direction.

"Being a fully integrated company in each step of our supply chain has become one of our core strengths as a company," said Kelly Dame, Woodgrain CEO, in the release. "Being able to grow the Woodgrain Lumber division is a key step in growing as a company. We are excited about the opportunity it offers."

## Oregon tourism up in smoke?

By Max Denning  
The Observer, Sept. 28

With smoke-filled skies becoming the norm throughout Oregon during the summer, members of the Oregon tourism industry are worried that wildfires will have an adverse effect on tourism in the state. Whether fires will have the same impact on Northeast Oregon remains unclear.

In 2017, Travel Oregon, the state's tourism commission, estimated the state lost \$51 million in tourism due to wildfires. In terms of proportional sales lost, the impact was greatest in Central Oregon and the Columbia River Gorge. The most impactful fires to businesses in 2017 were the Eagle Creek Fire in the Gorge and the Chetco Bar Fire in Southern Oregon. While major fires did not impact Northeast Oregon in 2017 the way they affected other areas in Oregon, Travel Oregon estimates Union and Wallowa counties lost \$170,000 and \$160,000, respectively, in tourism-related spending as a result of wildfires.

"Nearly half of the survey respondents believe the 2018 season may see a decline in visitation due to the possible perception that fire damage from 2017 has diminished their community's appeal to visitors," stated a study conducted by Travel Oregon after the 2017 wildfire season.

Wildfires have not been as prominent in Oregon this year, but they were enough to inspire Sen. Jeff Merkley and Sen. Ron Wyden to write a letter asking Travel Oregon to update its economic study on the impact of wildfires on tourism in 2018.

"Given the profound consequences of last year's fires, we request you analyze, in detail, the economic consequences and compounding effect of the 2018 wildfire season on Oregon communities," the Aug. 3 letter stated.

According to reports from the Associated Press, Julie Cortez, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's spokesperson, said the theater lost \$2 million over the summer because wildfire smoke forced the cancelation of more than



Associated Press file photo

The Eagle Creek wildfire burns in the Columbia River Gorge east of Portland on Sept. 2, 2017.

two dozen outdoor performances. The famed Oregon Shakespeare Festival is among the oldest and largest professional nonprofit theaters in the nation and attracts tourists from around the world to Ashland.

In Eastern Oregon, the impact of wildfires on tourism has not been nearly as prominent as in other parts of the state. Alice Trindle, regional destination manager for the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, said the smoke on the far western side of the country may have actually driven people to Eastern Oregon.

"We experienced a number of visitors who came out of California (who) actually came to Eastern Oregon because we had less smoke than they had in California," Trindle said.

Noting it doesn't make sense to compare tourism from August 2017 to this year because of the large number of visitors last year's eclipse brought to the region, Trindle instead referred to statistics comparing 2018 to 2016 that show occupancy rates in Eastern Oregon are up 3.9 percent.

Overall in 2017, tourism was a major industry in Northeast Oregon, with \$31.8 million being spent in Union County and \$29.9 million being spent

in Wallowa County. From 2010 to 2017, the average annual tourism spending increase in Union County was 2.6 percent — in Wallowa County it was 2.7 percent.

Bob Kavanaugh, executive director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, said he believes there has been an increase in tourism this year and he expects tourism to continue to grow in Northeast Oregon.

"We are (in) this beautiful, untouched landscape that people really long for," Kavanaugh said. "I think we're going to see a rise in tourism because people want to get outside and have some sort of adventure."

Trindle agreed that travelers to Eastern Oregon are attracted by the region's outdoor recreational opportunities, which would be affected by blazing forests and poor air quality.

Kavanaugh said a wildfire in the area would certainly have an impact on local tourism.

"If we suffer and incur a devastating fire in any one of our wilderness areas or a fire that blows thick smoke into our region, yes, that will impact us in a negative way. To what degree? It's going to depend on the severity of the fire and the smoke," he said.



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