

FORUM

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the congressional seat that opened when Republican U.S. Rep. Greg Walden decided not to seek reelection. Walden has served the district since 1998.

Each party’s top vote-getter in the May 19 primary election will advance to the general election in November. The candidates represent all corners of Oregon’s 2nd Congressional District, which covers all of Eastern Oregon and the Medford area.

At the forum Saturday — hosted by EO Media Group and livestreamed without an audience due to the COVID-19 pandemic — the seven candidates shared their views on a range of topics such as health care, the economy and the country’s response to the pandemic.

Each candidate agreed rebuilding America’s economy from the COVID-19 crisis is a top priority.

Atkinson, 49, a business consultant from Central Point who served in the Oregon Legislature for 14

SEE THE FORUMS HERE

- See all three candidate forums by EO Media Group, the parent company of The Observer, here:
- https://www.facebook.com/lagrandeobserver/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel&eid=ARAXgcTjmlRy1stbCCleSI7Wx-2wQ01zn-PSvSsusbc2q0GxRrdlHKCdhL8Pyi6y1stdfigWC-MmaDtB9

years, said local communities should be able to decide when to reopen businesses and lift social distancing guidelines.

“I believe the decisions should be made locally, and the governor should allow us to do that, and people should be allowed to go back outside,” Atkinson said.

Atkinson also took time at the forum to highlight issues facing military veterans, whom he said are an overlooked population. He said he’s dedicated to making sure veterans have the services they need.

“It’s an issue that is constant and for me that will be a priority,” Atkinson said.

Bentz, 68, an Ontario farmer, attorney and former state representative, said it is important not to open businesses too soon during the pandemic, or people won’t feel safe visiting them.

He described the state’s plan to reopen businesses as a one-size fits all approach that doesn’t account for the rural counties with minimal cases of the virus.

“They need to be allowed to go forward more quickly,” Bentz said.

The candidate who wins will need to travel through the district to find out exactly how the virus affected residents, Bentz said.

“Let’s go out and find out what people need,” he said.

Buehler, 55, an orthopedic surgeon who represented Bend in the state House until an unsuccessful run for governor, said he has a set plan to address the district’s recovery from the virus.

He calls it the five Ts: Trim the data to find any areas with a cluster of cases. Have the capability to test people and to treat people.

Trace people who may have contacted someone with the virus. And toggle back and forth between more and less social distancing.

“I would love to go to Washington, D.C., and help implement that kind of plan,” Buehler said.

Buehler said he is suspicious of the virus’s origins in the Chinese wet markets and would support Congress calling for an investigation.

“We need to hold China and the World Health Organization accountable for what happened here,” Buehler said. “We need a full scale international investigation to determine exactly how this virus started.”

Crumpacker, 41, a commodities trader from Tumalo, said his main goal is to reopen an economy shut down by the pandemic.

“We need to get people back to work,” Crumpacker said. “That is critical.”

An important part of supporting the U.S. economy is making sure medical supplies are made domestically and not overseas, Crumpacker said.

“We are seeing the impact of the last few

decades of outsourcing,” he said. “We need to bring them back.”

Fager, 48, a La Grande resident and manager of a commercial radio station, was the 11th and last candidate to file for the election. Fager wanted to join the race to support people in the middle class who he personally relates to, especially through the pandemic, he said.

“We want candidates that are fluent in middle class reality,” Fager said.

As a former wildland firefighter, Fager said he would like to see better forest management practices that help prevent wildfires.

“I was a firefighter,” Fager said. “I know what it’s like to stand on the fire line and stand between the fire and the resources.”

Livingston, 42, a real estate broker and Bend City Councilor, said he is already working on ways to reopen the local economy in his position as a city councilor.

“I’m the only person that actually is an elected official and who is making decisions on how we are opening our area,” Living-

ston said.

One way to support the economy through the pandemic is to reduce federal regulations that affect businesses and banks, Livingston said.

“We need to support business,” he said. “We need to look at reducing regulations to get business back up and open.”

Smith, 57, a computer programmer from the small Union County town of Elgin, said the main issue he is focused on is reducing the cost of health care. Smith said there are too few doctors and nurses in hospitals. If more are trained and hired, then people have more opportunities to access health care, he said.

“The reason why our health care costs keep going up and up is there are too few providers and too much demand for their services,” Smith said.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, Smith described the government’s response as a complete overreach that caused unnecessary strain on the economy.

“We have trampled upon people’s civil liberties in the process,” Smith said.

HOSPITAL

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He and other members of the department work around the clock to clean rooms between patients. Mathews said that reduces the likelihood of infection.

The laundry and sanitation team works Monday-Friday from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. with someone on call from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. to deal with issues that may arise, including increased laundry loads or tool sterilization. The hospital does the work for care facilities across the county.

The laundry department has seen a difference in its operation, but not in its policy and level of cleanliness, according to Rachel Warren, the hospital’s

laundry coordinator. Patient loads have decreased due to a lower number of hospital visits. However, loads for gowns and personal protective equipment have gone up, as doctors are frequently changing into sterile gear.

The hospital does all its laundry in house.

Warren said the products the hospital uses are 12 times stronger than commercial cleaning materials. Everything the hospital uses is inspected for integrity to ensure no bacteria or germs can be spread by faulty equipment. This includes pillows and chairs, and if something is wrong, the item is thrown out.

“Everything at the hospital can be disinfected,” Warren said.

While all of these pol-

icies and procedures are nothing new for the hospital, awareness and refreshing education has increased among all employees and staff, not just those involved with sanitation. And interaction between departments has increased in response to the pandemic as doctors, nurses and staff help one another out.

“It gives a whole different level of respect for what each of us does,” Henderson said.

Grande Ronde spokeswoman Mardi Ford said the hospital has an adequate supply of personal protection and other equipment and there are plans in place if the hospital needs more. Although assessment and monitoring of supplies is

always the case, during COVID-19 the hospital has implemented a task force that daily monitors and evaluates supplies.

Grande Ronde also has explored options to make N95 masks last longer.

The local joint information center recently researched processes and retrofitted an existing room into a decontamination room for N95 masks. The decontamination room can process multiple masks at a time.

“Each N95 mask may be processed up to five times,” according to the press release. “The hospital has a secure and safe method in place for collecting, sterilizing and redistributing the masks.”

TESTING

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Authority Director Pat Allen said, depends on whether the global supply chain can provide the swabs other test supplies necessary to implement them. The problem is national and even global, with authorities in places such as France, California and elsewhere blaming insufficient testing on the lack of swabs to collect samples, as well as other test supply shortages.

“These supply chain glitches are going to be the biggest barrier to our being able to scale testing up further than we already have,” Allen said.

And Oregon, with

a small population and fewer people reported killed by COVID-19 than many states, faces particular challenges.

“What we’ve been led to believe is that, because we just don’t have very much disease in Oregon, we’re very low priority for receiving any of those supplies,” Allen said of the state’s difficulties. He added that it “almost feels punitive. ... We think we’ve been doing a good job managing our resources and reactions so we don’t have very much disease. And that means we can’t get supplies.”

For the full version of this story, go to www.lagrandeobserver.com

WOLF

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GPS collar.

The Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan allows ranchers in Eastern Oregon to kill wolves on private property if caught in the act of biting, wounding or chasing livestock and working dogs.

Gray wolves are still listed as a federally endangered species west of highways 395, 78 and 95.

Steen said he determined Bigsby shot the wolf lawfully, and OSP agreed in its report.

Derek Broman, state carnivore biologist with

ODFW, said Bigsby had been out checking his cattle at dawn and dusk to try and keep wolves from entering the pasture.

“Considering all his non-lethal and lethal actions, I’m optimistic these wolves will stay away,” Broman said in an email. “We just need the native prey to flood the market with young to further separate wolves and livestock. The drop-off in conflict this time of year usually coincides with the presence of the new elk calves and deer fawns on the landscape.”

ODFW staff recovered the wolf carcass, and it remains in their possession.

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RE-ELECT

BOYD RASMUSSEN

for

SHERIFF

RESULTS MATTER!

- Created School Resource Deputy Program (La Grande, Island City, Union, Cove, North Powder)
- Restarted K9 Program (Molly)
- Instituted Deputy Field Training Program
- Increased Narcotics Enforcement
- Increased Volunteer Search and Rescue Funding
- Yearly Leadership Training for Deputies
- Updated all Deputy Equipment and Vehicles
- Enhanced Patrols in Elgin and Island City
- Improved Security Systems for Union County Jail

BOYD'S EXPERIENCE MATTERS!

Successfully Manages A Multi-Million Dollar Budget
Proven Record Of Protecting Local Citizens
Raised With Farm Values
College Educated
Dedicated Husband And Family Man
Volunteers With Church & Local Organizations.

As Sheriff, I oversee over 30 employees. As you can imagine, I have had to exercise judgment and make personnel decisions. Over a year ago a couple of disgruntled employees along with one of my political opponents leveled accusations against me to the Oregon Department of Justice who conducted a thorough investigation of their complaints.

On April 28, 2020, the DOJ told me that they were not moving forward with any of the complaints. The next day the DOJ chose to release all of the documents to our local press on the day ballots were being delivered. They did not have the courtesy to forward a copy to me. The first time I saw the document was when I read it on social media. Realizing they did not have a case against me they decided to try me in the press. This is not how a fair system works and was obviously done for political reasons.

The contract we had with Elgin was public and signed by the Elgin City

unaware that the contract needed written commission approval. It was simply an oversight.

The bottom line is this: I have worked hard to improve the Sheriff's Office and protect this community. From providing staffing to the Drug Task Force, to creating partnerships with local schools and communities, to bringing back the canine unit, and providing ongoing education to our staff, I have taken the lead to protect the county I was born and raised in.

Community leaders who know me best, people like Elgin Mayor Allen Duffy, State Representative Greg Barreto, Educators Verl Miller, Doug Hislop, John Lamoreau, Bruce Kevan, Farmers Sonny Johnson, Guy and Peggy Weishaar, Carrie and Ross Bingaman and Brett Rudd, business owners Julie Bodfish, Lanny Hildebrandt, Michael and Tracy Partney, along with hundreds of others stand behind me. I hope you will too.

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