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Idaho

Idaho Supreme Court candidates tout ag experience

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — The four candidates running for an open seat on the Idaho Supreme Court all tout their strong backgrounds in agricultural issues.

The election to replace retiring Chief Justice Jim Jones will be May 17.

Two of the candidates — Twin Falls attorney Robyn Brody and Idaho Deputy Attorney General and Natural Resources Division Chief Clive Strong — have played roles in some of the state's landmark water decisions.

Attorney Curt McKenzie, a Republican state legislator from Nampa, has the endorsement of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation for a voting record the organization considers strong on private property rights. The only sitting judge of the group, Idaho Court of Appeals Judge Sergio Gutierrez, has been an advocate of farm worker rights.

Though candidates are lim-



Photo submitted

From left to right, Idaho Supreme Court candidates Clive Strong, Curt McKenzie, Robyn Brody, Sergio Gutierrez and moderator Mark Johnson participate in an April 19 panel discussion at the University of Idaho Law School building in Boise.

ited in discussing issues in detail that could potentially come before the Supreme Court, both Brody and Strong spoke on their backgrounds before the Committee of Nine — a powerful group of state water managers.

From a water perspective, Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Inc. Executive Director Lynn Tominaga believes the election is vital for farmers and the future of the state's econ-

omy. "You need somebody who understands that water is a limited resource and needs to be managed," Tominaga said.

He noted that Jones authored the majority opinion on a recent 3-2 ruling in the Rangen Inc. water call, which reaffirmed the validity of using a so-called trim line to confine water calls only to areas where a significant amount of water stands to reach a senior user

from curtailment of a junior user. The minority opinion emphasized the importance of the Idaho water law provision "first in time, first in right."

For the past five years, Brody has represented Rangen, a Hagerman trout farm that prevailed in its call against junior well users, arguing their consumption contributed to declines of Rangen's spring.

"I completely understand the importance of water to Southern Idaho and what it means to our community and state," Brody said.

Brody, who obtained her law degree from the University of Denver, has litigated several agricultural cases. Her first case before the Idaho Supreme Court was a water case involving two trout farms.

Strong has worked in the Attorney General's Office for 33 years and helped water users reach the monumental Swan Falls Agreement in 1984, establishing minimum flows for Idaho Power hydroelectric production and setting the stage

for the Snake River Basin Adjudication. Strong also helped members of the Surface Water Coalition reach a settlement last summer with IGWA to stabilize the aquifer, and his campaign has been endorsed by both IGWA attorney Randy Budge and the coalition's attorney, John Simpson.

"My career has been trying to find settlements that resolve some of these complex problems," Strong said.

Steve Howser, general manager of Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co., has also endorsed Strong, believing the state needs a water law expert who has "pretty much been involved in every major water decision" to replace Jones.

McKenzie said he's aided farmers in the Legislature by carrying various bills, including one requiring state agencies to carefully analyze how regulations may detract from the economic value of private property. McKenzie, whose law degree is from Georgetown University, has support from Treasure

Valley canal companies. Idaho Farm Bureau spokesman Russ Hendricks said his organization was comfortable endorsing McKenzie based on his voting record.

"He's been a strong supporter of private property rights, the Second Amendment, the Priority Doctrine for state water rights and the state maintaining sovereignty of Idaho water," Hendricks said.

Gutierrez initially planned to be a bilingual teacher but pursued a career in the law based on his experiences working with farm laborers through an Idaho Legal Aid Services program.

He obtained a law degree from University of California, believing he could better help farm workers access their rights, and returned to work as a staff attorney for Legal Aid's farm worker division.

"It was a turning point in my life," Gutierrez said.

As a judge, Gutierrez said he's aimed to help youths and families.

Parma research station gets new state-of-the-art cold storage unit

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — Researchers at the University of Idaho's Parma experiment station now have access to a state-of-the-art cold storage facility.

The \$500,000 facility, which recently became operational, will greatly increase the research capacity of scientists here, university officials said.

"It allows us to do more and better research on the impacts storage has on fruits and vegetables," said entomologist Jim Barbour, superintendent of the Parma station. "It opens up a whole new world for us here."

Researchers at the Parma station study vegetables commonly grown in the area such as onions and potatoes and fruit crops such as apples, peaches and grapes.

The station's old cold storage facility had limited space and it was decrepit and constantly breaking down, said fruit researcher Essie Fallahi, who heads the university's pomology program.

"This increases our capacity in a huge way. It's extremely exciting," he said. "This is something that has been strongly welcomed by fruit growers and potato and onion growers."

The new facility is 5,000 square feet and has 12 walk-in units that are environmentally controlled. The operator can control temperature and hu-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Fruit researcher Essie Fallahi stands inside a new cold storage facility at the University of Idaho's Parma experiment station on May 3. Fallahi said the 5,000-square-foot facility will greatly enhance research efforts.

midity as well as carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide, which can prolong the storage life of certain crops.

Before, crops studied at the station had to be stored together, which could affect or even invalidate the results of some storage trials, Fallahi said.

As an example of how the new facility will help, Fallahi pointed to a federal grant that will enable him to study the effects that storage has on peaches.

"The immediate question from growers is, 'How long can I store them?'" he said. "In the past, I didn't have the capacity to store them and test them for bruising to see how long. Now I can do that."

Commercial fruit grower Jerry Hengeler, who worked

on behalf of the local fruit industry to help convince university leaders to build the facility, said it will greatly enhance the station's ability to study the effects of long-term storage on fruits and vegetables.

He said the fruit industry works closely with Fallahi and adopts a lot of the research results his program develops.

"This will be a great asset to the program out there, and when it's an asset to the program, it's an asset for the industry," he said. "I'm very excited."

The Legislature this year approved Gov. Butch Otter's budget request to provide \$26,000 to cover the facility's operating costs.

A grand opening for the facility will be June 2.

Kuna FFA helps thousands of children learn about farming

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

KUNA, Idaho — About 4,000 first- and second-graders from throughout the Treasure Valley received a hands-on farming experience May 2-5 during Kuna High School's annual agricultural expo.

The school's FFA students organize the event and guide the children through a series of farm-related experiences, teaching them simple facts about farming.

"We try to educate them about what the agricultural industry does and give them an idea of what true production agriculture is," said event co-chairman Eric Ball, an FFA student. "We want them to have a good experience with farming while they're at that impressionable age."

The kids get to see a wide variety of farm animals, including longhorn steers, dairy calves, horses, cow-calf pairs, baby chickens, sheep, pigs, goats, fish and bunnies.

They also watch videos and view displays that explain agriculture at a simple level and highlight its importance to Idaho and the nation.

They get to climb aboard large pieces of new farm equipment that local dealers loan the expo for four days. Those companies also donate the tractors that pull the students around on a hay ride and local farmers provide the trailers.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Elementary school students from southwestern Idaho learn about a swather and other farm equipment May 4 during Kuna High School's annual agricultural expo. The school's FFA students organize and run the four-day event, which teaches first- and second-graders the basics about farming.

"We get a lot of industry support for this event," said Shawn Dygert, who teaches ag education classes at Kuna High School. "All it takes is a phone call and there is no hesitation."

Kuna is surrounded by farm land but many of the youngsters are from other parts of the valley that aren't, said ag expo co-chair and FFA student Makayla Berheim.

"A lot of these kids are from subdivisions or cities, so they never experience this before and have no idea about agriculture," she said. "We want to help them ... have a good knowledge of agriculture and know the good sides of it and how it impacts our whole world."

Dygert said the event is a valuable experience for FFA students as well.

"These high school kids have to learn agriculture well enough to teach these little kids," he said. "It takes everything we talk about doing in the classroom and it forces them to actually do it."

He said the expo brings out the best in some students.

"Some of the students that have been possibly a little less than motivated in the classroom, they get in this environment and they become really good at these different activities," he said. "It provides a way for them to show talents they may not otherwise have a chance to show."



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