

# Local

## Candidates forum

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The forum was moderated by Baker County Republican Chair Suzan Ellis Jones. The group's corresponding secretary Carole Dyke carried the microphone throughout the room. Precinct Committee Woman Laurie Hoopes controlled the timer. Each candidate had one minute per question. Sgt. Mike Regan was present to "keep the peace."

Candidates warmed up by introducing themselves before questions began.

**A heated question.** Though there were a couple heated questions directed to all three candidates from audience members, one question for Bruce Nichols, a two-part question—and its response—perhaps raised the most eyebrows.

Jake Brown of Halfway asked first if Nichols understood how vital grazing and ranching are to Baker County.

Nichols responded that he did.

Brown continued, "Is it true that while you were CEO of Clark's Creek Holdings or Twin Lake Ranch, LLC, your operation destroyed grazing land and alfalfa fields owned by Elliot Ranches in Bridgeport and Elliot Ranches were never compensated for that loss?"

A murmur passed through the audience.

Nichols asked for a repeat of the question then said, "Okay, so in the first place I was never CEO of Clark's—whatever you called it. Anyway, there was a mining operation out there and all I did is handle the money. That's all. I was not involved in the mining at all."

Brown asked, "No decisions then?"

Nichols answered, "No decisions."

One of the co-owners of the ranch in question said they had indeed never received compensation for the lost grazing or alfalfa. The owner indicated they had spoken with Nichols in the past but he had never mentioned his connection with Twin Lake Ranch, LLC or Clark Creek Holdings, LLC.

Deeds filed with the County, one shown at the right, do indeed list Nichols as the CEO.

**More questions.**

Local placer miner Ed Hardt launched the questions by asking if the candidates would make the Department of Geology "toe the line" since they had raised fees on small mines without coordinating with the County in spite of the county's Coordination Ordinance.

Nichols commiserated and said, "However, unfortunately the Federal laws are a problem. All I can do is argue the point. Coordinating doesn't mean you can change the Federal government's position on that." He went on to say "all a Commissioner could do" was "disagree."

Nichols also commiserated with Hardt and said, "I'd like to see more advocacy." He referred to a mining summit to be held locally next week. "I will take a strong approach on the land use," he said, and concluded that a large enough group of concerned citizens can change things.

Justus said, "I will do ev-

erything in my power as a Commissioner to make the agencies follow the law of Coordination... Coordination actually is the law."

Carla Inman of Halfway asked how the candidates would create jobs.

Nichols said, "I don't know that we can create jobs. We can create an atmosphere that can help various agencies help create jobs." He recommended partnering with community colleges in various areas to help create jobs.

Nelson said, "Creating jobs is my whole campaign!" He said he would talk to industries and find out what they need, and he had already done at companies like Behlen and Natural Structures to target people like CDL holders and welders for them.

Justus said that government doesn't actually create jobs and typically stands in the way, particularly with natural resources. He stated commissioners could be a buffer between all the regulations and local business owners.

Ramona Creighton asked if the candidates had the ability to represent those with different political beliefs or just those who helped put them into office.

Nichols and Nelson answered affirmatively.

Justus added that by adhering to the Oregon Constitution everyone's rights would be protected.

Wayne Dyke asked the candidates about their desire to combine local law enforcement agencies.

Nichols responded haltingly, saying he wanted to study the law enforcement issue and look at various things.

Nelson said, "I don't see the feasibility in that. I would look for ways to cut costs, but not in public safety." Nelson suggested tackling PERS issues instead.

Justus said he was not for losing any elected position, such as Sheriff, in the county through consolidation, because any elected board can Coordinate with Federal agencies, giving the county a more powerful position.

Lorrie Harvey asked about the candidates' views on continued minimum wage hikes, and none supported it. Justus suggested a county ordinance in opposition of the increase as an unfunded mandate.

Ken Hackett asked Nelson to clarify his stance on PERS.

Nelson said, "We can't go back on promises, but for future budgeting, we have to get PERS under control."

Betsy Crawford asked the candidates to outline their leadership roles in the community, and each listed several.

Gary Dielman directed a question only to Justus, asking him his definition of the "rule of law," and Justus responded it meant following the laws that have been written—including Coordination.

Kasey Wright asked Nichols only how he would juggle his CPA business.

Nichols said, "As a CPA I've learned to juggle time." He said he's already begun restructuring his business in anticipation of being elected.

Rob Crawford asked if the commissioners had total control over local resources, how would they

assure the financial benefits stayed in Baker County.

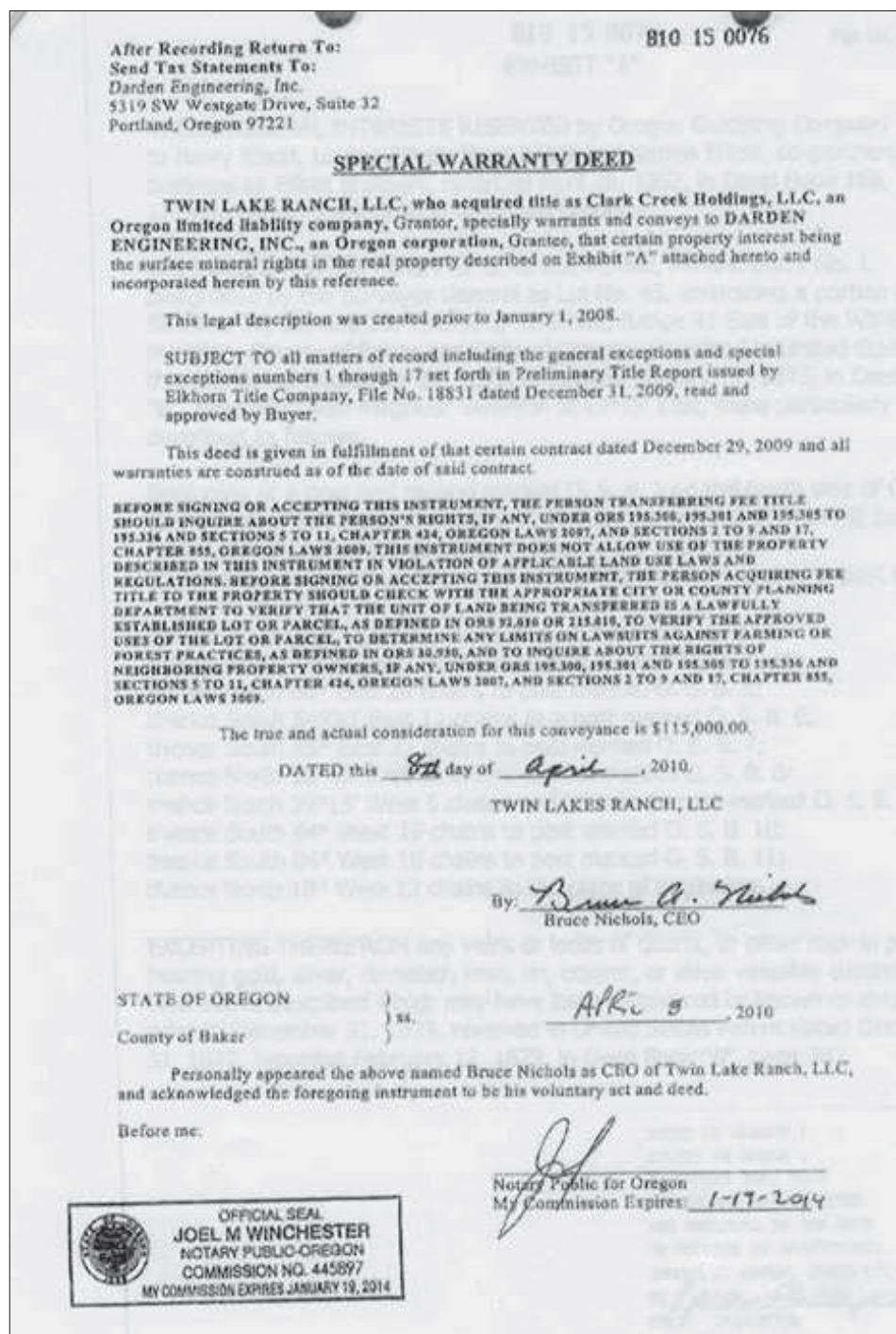
Both Nelson and Justus answered similarly, talking about the chain effect of creating natural resources jobs in that all the equipment, supplies, etc. wind up being purchased through other local companies, thus building the local economy.

Nichols had a slightly different take. He said, "Well that's a good hypothetical question... but we're not in total control. We have to follow the laws of the Federal government and the State of Oregon." He talked about how work has to be put out for bid elsewhere.

Spring Bartlett asked about the budget experience of the three. Nelson had worked with budgets up to \$3 million for businesses. Justus had worked with business budgets in the \$1-2 million range. Nichols stressed his auditing experience and said he'd worked with nonprofit budgets up to \$12 million.

Janet Terry of Richland asked the candidates if they'd read the job description of commissioner and were they aware of the committees assigned to each.

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Scanned Photo.

This deed from Twin Lake Ranch shows Nichols listed as the CEO of Twin Lake Ranch, LLC / Clark Creek Holdings, LLC, contrary to the statement made by the candidate Tuesday evening. A second deed also shows the same.

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Baker County Legacy Woman of the Year 2006



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**Alvin Ward**



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**George and Janet Chandler**



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**Chelsea Blatchford**



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SUppOrT R libRaRy (i DU)"....  
**Whit Deschner**

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