

Opinion

— EDITORIAL —

One contentious County race

Back when the three candidates for County Commissioner initially filed to run, we had the reaction of shrugging and nodding, thinking at first that the race would be gracious and professional, and that the county wouldn't suffer for having any one of the three elected.

As the calendar months changed, so did our opinion.

Early on, the existing divide within Republicans in the county, which pretty much mirrors the one nationally, appeared. This divide, as in elections past, places on one side of any race, the old establishment RINOs (Republicans in Name Only) a.k.a. "Democrat Lite" alongside their supporters in the Democrat party, often including the local liberal Democrat Precinct Committee People. On the other side exists the majority of the local GOP starting in the middle of the conservative political spectrum and ranging over to the right.

Just to give some political perspective, the Democrat Lite side supported Fred Warner, Jr. for Commissioner. The conservative side as a general rule supported Bill Harvey. The Democrat Lite side pushed changing commissioner seats to nonpartisan, which would have resulted in less candidate transparency and less local control. The conservative side opposed the change for those reasons.

At present, the Lites have adopted Bruce Nichols as their candidate. The conservatives have rallied around Kody Justus. And ne'er the twain shall meet.

The interesting dynamic we see unfolding is that due to Nichols' business and church friendships, a section of conservatives who have normally voted away from the Dark (err... Lite) side, have shifted away from political ideologies simply to support that friendship. We anticipate this shift will create a tighter election than what we saw in the case of the nonpartisan issue or the Warner/Harvey race.

This dynamic also leaves the third candidate, Jeff Nelson, in a political No Man's Land, drawing a few votes away from both the Justus and Nichols camps, we suspect. We don't believe the Nelson campaign has been aggressive enough in getting its word out to voters, and thus, barring a major change between now and election day, we predict Nelson will come in third.

This is not to say we dislike Nelson. We like him quite a bit. In fact, we have watched him treat his opponents with respect. We agree with his stances. We've seen him perform well at forums, and watched the results show in his responses as he's taken the time to really study local issues. We've come away liking Nelson as a candidate even more than when he filed. Considering his quick ability to learn, we hope he treats this campaign as a starting point, and continues to become more involved in local politics if he isn't victorious this time around.

We've had the opposite response to Nichols' candidacy, and have steadily found ourselves at odds with both his attitude and his take on many issues. Here are the reasons, based on the issues, why we won't endorse him:

- Nichols has stated in nearly every appearance that he will not fight Federal overreach, not with his time and not financially, to protect the interests of the people of Baker County. Within the audiences at multiple forums, we've heard citizens murmur, "He just wants us to shut up and take it?" "He'd rather roll over and give up?" We heard that same message. We want a fighter in office. Nichols has stated a softer, gentler approach to Federal agencies is the answer. We disagree. The County needs someone who will not cower in the face of agency pressure—if we don't have this attitude on our Board of Commissioners, we can kiss multi-use

access to our forests goodbye.

- Nichols has expressed a lack of interest in supporting County Coordination efforts, which by law, exist to give local elected bodies an equal place at the table with Federal agencies. Why would anyone not want that?

- We are dismayed by the campaign team Nichols brought on board. When he filed, he expressed how disturbed he was that Jan Kerns, wife of exiting Commissioner Tim Kerns yet now Nichols' campaign manager, had called and asked him for reasons that escaped him to resign from the race. Two weeks later, she became his manager. This same team and those surrounding it were behind the Fred Warner, Jr. campaign and the press to move County Commissioners seats to nonpartisan status—in both instances, they lost when the voters of Baker County voted to the contrary. The power play is fascinating, and we're guessing this group is desperate for a win at this point, but why Nichols allowed himself to become part of it is beyond us. We have to assume there's truth in the old adage "birds of a feather..." Frankly, it is disturbing to see someone stand up and state he's conservative while at the same time seeing his signs in the yards of the most liberal of the Baker County Democrat PCs. This doesn't suggest some magical unity to us. It does suggest an alignment of goals and ideologies, however—and we don't believe the Baker County Democrat Central Committee has somehow been converted to conservative over the past two months.

- Nichols opposes the transfer of public lands to state or county control, as has been done successfully in numerous other states. Federal management of public lands is failing. The numbers and other results bear that out. Financially speaking, state agencies such as the Oregon Department of Forestry have a better track record than the USFS in terms of return on investment of tax dollars spent. We also believe that citizens have much better access to elected officials and policy-makers when they're just down the street or across the state rather than in Washington D.C.

- We have asked Nichols during this campaign for basic information. He quickly brushed us off and directed us to his web site. We later asked for a phone interview that would have taken roughly 10 minutes. He declined, stating he was too busy during tax season to spare the time. When he was on the City Budget Board, he skipped a year's worth of meetings and then some. How will he spare the time to execute the position of County Commissioner? How in the world will he interact with all media and promote transparency via that means as an elected official if he refuses to even before the election?

- Nichols stated during the AAUW forum that he believes political disagreement in the County is responsible for our economic problems. We believe political disagreement is healthy. We also completely disagree with his basic premise. The deterioration of our natural resources industry, regulatory overburden, an aging local population—those issues come to mind when we look at our economy. Joe down the street voting for John while Susie votes for Beth—yeah, probably not a job-killing situation.

Justus has expressed the opposite stance on just about all the above issues.

In the end, we're comfortable recommending Kody Justus for Baker County Commissioner, Position 1. When one looks past the false accusations and smear campaigns, and genuinely listens to Justus speak, the truth of him becomes clear.

Justus has demonstrated that fighting spirit we're seeking. However, he's no radical, fringe, right-wing extremist as so many of Nichols' supporters would paint him. Rather, his values represent those of most Baker County citizens very closely. He has handled mudslinging with grace and continued to focus on the issues.

In numerous public forums he has proven himself to be the most well-rounded candidate—understanding budget and financial issues, natural resource issues, laws that affect County operations, economy and local agriculture.

We endorse Kody Justus for Baker County. Now go turn in those ballots.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

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— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

Proud to be candidate's wife

To the Editor:

I am Kody Justus' wife and am writing in support of him for Baker County Commissioner.

I have watched him grow increasingly alarmed by the issues our county and country are facing. Rather than sitting idly back and watching, he has become involved in various organizations and committees to educate himself on local issues. And now, he wants to be involved in making decisions that are best for all the citizens of Baker County. He wants to be your voice.

Kody has gained knowledge from his own valuable life experiences, serving in the Army, living in and utilizing the local resources here in Baker County. I have seen his diligence to further educate himself on the basic rights our forefathers intended for us in the Constitution of the United States. He has educated himself on county issues, including the budget, use of natural resources, fire issues, etc. He has researched and understands that laws have been passed to have "coordination" between county and federal agencies. He is intelligent and thoughtful and will continue to educate himself as the need arises, in order to make informed decisions.

Kody is a man of integrity; he stands on his word and on the word of God. He is honest and will stand up for what he believes in. Kody has been labeled by some who don't know him as being "anti-government." That is the furthest from the truth; he believes in a federal government that operates as it was originally designed, "to regulate interstate commerce, the Federal Reserve and the Military." He is passionate that "We the People" are the foundation of government. He will stand up for your rights.

Kody understands there are different sides to every issue. He listens to both sides. He respects others who are openly honest about their different opinions. Kody is not afraid to publicly disagree; however, he also understands the process in place for making majority rule decisions.

Kody's past is what has made him the strong, Godly man he is today. I am proud to be his wife and stand beside him in our decision for him to run for County Commissioner. I'm asking you to vote for him as Baker County Commissioner.

Heidi Justus
Baker City

Justus will uphold rights

To the Editor:

I have had the pleasure of watching Kody Justus working for the past year and a half as a concerned citizen, without compensation, due to his dedication to the people of Baker County. Those who support this Constitution are not radicals, as those on the "Left" decry. It is they, those on the "Left" who are the true radicals as they ignore the Constitution in an attempt to enslave you and I. Just consider how effective Justus can be, as our next County Commissioner with the authority, power and desire to accomplish the real will of the people. I have witnessed his passion, for Baker County, and his dedication in dealing with abuses to both, when the Constitution has been ignored by the Federal Government and State Government, or his addressing/investigating issues which

do not seem to pass the "smell test" locally within the realm of politics.

With the election of Bill Harvey, as the Commission Chairman, the direction of the County has taken on a different tone, and the Feds have been asked to justify their demands upon the people of Baker County—and they do not appreciate being accountable to the people of Baker County. At this very moment, even after major input from Baker County voters supporting open public lands, the Forest Service is ignoring the peoples' will, and is about to close 1,300 miles of public roads on public lands.

Harvey needs the support of the newly elect Commissioner in order to represent, and protect the rights of the people of Baker County. Of the three candidates campaigning for this position, there is no doubt that the man you will want safeguarding your Constitutional rights, will be Justus. I have witnessed him talk the talk and walk the walk on numerous occasions. At the recent candidates meeting at the Sunridge Inn, it is alleged that Bruce Nichols said (at the Candidate Forum) that he couldn't go against the Forest Service and wants to cooperate with them, that the Commissioners need to be a lot nicer to them than what the Commissioners have been. This explains why the backers Nichols has are supporters of the Forest Service policies.

If true, unless you want our County government to follow the lead of Harney County, then you really need to vote for Justus for Baker County Commissioner. If true, then Nichols is willing to ignore the mandate of open public lands, so loudly demanded by the overwhelming majority of people of Baker County.

If you do not vote for the man who will defend your rights, then someone who will not, will likely be your new Commissioner.

Ron Edge
Baker City

Support the library levy

To the Editor:

Baker County is very fortunate to have the quality of library that we do. Not only is the local library open seven days a week, but they have five satellite branches that provide access to books for the most rural parts of the county open an additional 15 hours a week.

When my girls were little, they took part in the library reading program. It helped teach them that books could take them anywhere they wanted to go (and at their own pace). Over the years, we spent many evenings at the library getting books for the girls to read and movies to watch as a family.

Many of us take internet (and computer) access at home for granted. Statistics I have seen recently, indicate that approximately half of Baker County residents don't have internet access in their homes. The library provides access to computers and the internet for those visiting the library.

The property tax levy on the ballot is not for new additional taxes. It is providing continued funding for the library at the same level as in previous years. Pay it forward to the next generation just as someone else did for you. Join me in voting yes on the library levy.

Anthony Bailey
Baker City

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