

POLITICS

... A union-backed challenger to Greg Walden

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no viable alternative,” Burnette told the Labor Press, “and he wasn’t coming home to hear what people had to say.... He wasn’t in touch with his constituents.”

Burnette decided to run, and take early retirement from his job as executive director of Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots to be able to campaign full-time.

Winning a race against Walden would seem to be a long shot. Oregon’s Second Congressional District hasn’t elected a Democrat since 1978. The district covers all of Oregon east of the Cascades, two-thirds of the state, and includes some of Oregon’s most Republican areas. Republicans hold a 36 percent to 27 percent voter registration edge over Democrats in the Second Congressional District, and 57 percent of the District’s voters went for Trump last year, compared to only 39 percent statewide.

More to the point, Walden has won election in the District 10 times in a row, garnering more than 70 percent of the vote against the last two Democratic challengers.

How could a Democrat win in that landscape?

“This election is different,” Burnette says. “The stakes are high and immediate.”

Burnette says Walden’s constituents know he was willing to do them a disservice on health care, and now that hangs like an

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— Kevin Billman, UFCW Local 555



albatross around his neck.

Moreover, Burnette points out, the District’s voters *do* vote for Democrats: Majorities in the District have voted for incumbent U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, and he’s a Democrat.

Burnette isn’t the only one to think Walden may be vulnerable. As many as seven other candidates are running in the May Democratic primary for the chance to run against Walden this November. Two years ago, there was only one: Attorney and former oil executive Jim Cray ran unopposed in the Democratic primary, and lost to Walden by more than two to one.

But Burnette says he wants to campaign differently than the District’s past Democratic candidates. He thinks the Democratic Party has pursued the wrong strategy in rural America — fielding candidates who are ‘Republican lite.’

“I think ‘red’ America’s already got a Republican party,” Burnette said. “They like it. So if we want them to do something different, we’re going to have to offer them something different.”

It’s stances like that that make

Burnette a good match for Oregon’s largest private sector labor union. United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 has pursued a political strategy that takes the fight to overtly anti-union Republican incumbents even in districts where they’re considered safe. Because it represents grocery store workers, Local 555 has members all over the state.

Local 555 is backing Burnette because he alone among the contenders calls for re-unionizing America’s workforce as a central part of his campaign. He also wants health care for all, more federal investment in rural areas, and policies to promote renewable energy and a sustainable environment.

As a third mate in the merchant marine from 1989 to 1994, Burnette was a member of the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots union. After that career was brought to a close with what later proved to be a faulty diagnosis of asthma, he worked for the Port of Portland as a waterway planner, responsible for making sure channels were dredged.

“Eric is highly energized,” says Local 555 Legislative Director Kevin Billman. “He’s dedicated and committed, and he very much understands and cares about labor.”

Kallie Kurtz, Burnette’s campaign manager, thinks President Trump has made Walden vulnerable in a way he’s never been vulnerable before — creating division among Republicans, while motivating a lot of non-Republicans to get active who’ve never been politically involved before.

Kurtz, a school counselor and member of Service Employees International Union Local 503, ran Mark Reynolds’ 2016 state House campaign against Hood River incumbent Republican Mark Johnson. Reynolds lost by several thousand votes, but a year later, Johnson decided not to run again, instead leaving to head up the state’s business lobby.

“For a long time these districts have been considered like there’s no chance, so [Democrats] aren’t even trying in them,” Kurtz says. “But as we’re running real campaigns, and as unions like the UFCW are mobilizing and making infrastructure available to run campaigns, you’re seeing a huge shift. There’s a lot more to be gained.”

MORE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN
More about why Eric Burnette is running at burnette4congress.org

GREG WALDEN’S LABOR RECORD



Overall: In 20 years, he has voted in accord with AFL-CIO recommendations just 22 percent of the time.

Prevailing wage: He’s not a total union foe: He voted against several attempts to repeal Davis-Bacon prevailing wage requirements. He also voted against a measure to defund the NLRB. Last year he spoke at the Oregon State Building Trades convention.

Free-trade: He wasn’t in Congress when NAFTA passed, but he voted for every NAFTA-style trade deal since taking office, including permanent normal trade with China, deals with Korea, Colombia, and Central America (CAFTA), and the “fast track” procedure that helps deals like this pass.

Weakening labor: Last year he voted to undermine state-sponsored retirement savings plans like one that’s launching in Oregon. And last month he voted for a bill that exempts tribal casinos from the requirement to recognize unions.

Affordable Care Act: He voted dozens of times to repeal Obamacare, and led a failed effort to replace it.

Northwest Oregon Labor Council backs Loretta Smith, Lynne Peterson, and incumbents in local races

Delegates to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council (NOLC) voted without debate Jan. 22 to approve the Executive Board’s endorsement recommendations for local races in the May 2018 primary. Endorsed candidates included incumbents:

- **Nick Fish** for Portland City Council
- **Deborah Kafoury** for a final term as Multnomah County chair
- **Paul Savas** and **Sonya Fischer** for Clackamas County Commission
- **Shirley Craddick** for Metro Councilor



Loretta Smith

- **Greg Malinowski** for Washington County Commission.
- They also voted to endorse:
 - **Lynn Peterson** for Metro President
 - **Kathryn Harrington** for Washington County Chair

- **Pamela White** for Clackamas County Clerk
- **Loretta Smith** for Portland City Council

Not all votes were unanimous, and delegates from several unions abstained from endorsement votes because their unions haven’t yet deliberated on who to endorse.

NOLC, which covers Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, and Columbia counties, will vote on other local endorsements at its Feb. 26 meeting.

AFSCME Local 88 makes endorsements in Multnomah County races

Members of AFSCME Local 88 got a chance to ask questions of candidates for County and City races at their Jan. 17 meeting, and afterward, voted on endorsements. The local represents about 3,400 employees of Multnomah County.

Two first-time candidates got the local’s endorsement:

- **Jennifer McGuirk** for Multnomah County Auditor (she’s in a crowded race to succeed Steve March, who’s term-limited)
- **Susheela Jayapal** for Multnomah County District 2 (the seat is currently occupied by Loretta Smith, who is term-limited and seeking a position on Portland City Council.)

Members also endorsed two incumbents up for re-election:

- **Deb Kafoury** for Multnomah County Chair
- **Mike Reese** for Multnomah County sheriff

Backed by Oregon labor, Measure 101 passes overwhelmingly

Oregon voters passed Ballot Measure 101 by a strong margin in a Jan. 23 special election, with over 60 percent of voters ratifying a package of taxes on hospitals and insurance companies that was approved by the Legislature last year. Those revenues will attract federal Medicaid matching funds to pay for the Oregon Health Plan. The taxes — 6 percent on hospital net revenue, and 1.5 percent on health insurance premiums — are forecast to raise \$670 mil-

lion in the next two years, maintaining access to health care for one out of four Oregonians, including children, seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals.

The measure was endorsed by multiple labor organizations, including Oregon AFL-CIO, American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, Oregon AFSCME, IATSE Local 488, IBEW Local 48, Oregon Education Association, Oregon Federation of Nurses and Healthcare Professionals, Oregon Nurses Association, Oregon School Employees Association, Professional and Technical Employees Local 17, National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 82, Service Employees Locals 49 and 503; United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555.