

“Meet the Candidates” Informs Citizens

By Scott Laird

A political forum with candidates for Columbia County Commissioners was held in Vernonia on September 18. Hosted by Vernonia's Voice, the forum featured questions and answers from a panel of local citizens and then an open house opportunity for citizens to ask direct questions of individual candidates. Also on hand were Columbia County Circuit Court Judge Candidates for Position 3, David Herr and current Judge, Jenefer Grant. The judge candidates addressed the crowd at the end of the question and answer portion of the evening.

All four candidates for the two commissioner positions were in attendance- Republican Tony Hyde and Democrat Pat Zimmerman running for position 3, and Republican Glenn Dorschler and Democrat Earl Fisher, running for position 1. About fifty citizens attended the forum.

The panel included Dennis Nelson, a local business owner and long time resident of Columbia County, Helen Hudson, Chair of the Vernonia Public Works Committee, and Vernonia's Voice Publisher and Editor Scott Laird, who filled in for a third panelist who was unable to attend.

In response to a question concerning ballot measures 5-190 and 5-191 and how the candidates view these measures which concern undocumented workers in Columbia County, all four candidates agreed that the concerns raised by the measure are a federal issue, not a county issue. Fisher stated that the measure will be challenged because it is poorly written and will have a negative financial impact on the county, but he supports the intent. Zimmerman agreed the measure is sloppily written and opposes the measure, calling it “just plain a bad idea.” She added that there are ethical and moral issues involved in the issue that voters should consider. Hyde suggested that counties and cities should be proactive in addressing the issue and in insisting through a resolution process that federal government make the issue a priority in the 111th Congress.

A question was asked about how explosive growth can be managed through the land use planning process while sustaining small town, rural feel in our communities. Dorschler stated that Columbia County will grow and quality of life is an important issue which should be managed. “Our Leaders need to have a vision,” Zimmerman stated she believed the way we choose how communities will grow “... is largely dependent on who you elect to public office...,” and that having local control and local laws that reflect your values will help get what we want. Fisher stated that we can control growth and provide jobs and living wage opportunities by having people in place serving on committees “... who represent our view point on how law is put together...” and take responsibility for control. Hyde reminded the group that state law does not allow local laws to be less restrictive than state laws and that the 65% commute rate in Columbia County was having a destructive impact on our communities. “I came to this job with mud on my boots, and I know what the working man is looking at,” Hyde said.

When asked about the timber industry's effect on last December's flood and how to balance economic needs with healthy watersheds and protecting against future flooding, Hyde responded that the timber industry needs to be sustainable and has recently been more cognizant about protecting the environment. “I'm proud of the way Columbia County is balancing its resources,” Hyde said. He also mentioned the potential to get credit for growing trees as a way to absorb carbon in the atmosphere. “I believe we are inches away from finding fifty new ways of getting value from our forests...” Fisher advocated working together to solve issues, “...and not point fingers at each other...,” because Columbia County needs to manage forests wisely. Zimmerman suggested exploring up and coming technologies because “...there are other uses for forests, not just clear cutting.”

Asked about how they would communicate as commissioners with citizens in the county, especially those in Vernonia, Fisher suggested broadcasting meetings on the radio or internet and regular visitation in communities. “You can just sit down and talk to people, and that's how you can stay in

contact.” Zimmerman said she would start with local evening meetings so working people can be there. “It is ridiculous that we don't have evening meetings of our elected County Commissioners.” She also suggested use of the internet. Dorschler said it is important for commissioners to be accessible. “I would visit each town often.” He also noted, “...town hall meetings would be an important way to reach people,” and suggested that having more accessible commissioners would encourage more people to take an active role in government. Hyde told the audience that he is accessible by phone to anyone who wants to converse with him and would work to make meeting available by internet.

Herr, a prosecutor in the DA office and in private practice, and Judge Grant both mentioned local endorsements they have received: Herr from the Vernonia Police Association, as well as St. Helens Police, and circuit court Judge Wally Thompson; Grant has been endorsed by Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison, as well as State Attorney General Hardy Myers. Herr talked about working on children's and domestic cases in the county and about his belief that accountability, fairness, and efficiency are important issues. He has served on the Columbia County Legal Aid Board. Grant talked about her twelve years in private practice, and she mentioned her involvement in community service. She has served on the Commission on Children and Families, the Legal Aid Board, and the Domestic Violence Council, and she presided over Teen Court.

A “Meet the Candidates” forum with Vernonia City Council Candidates has been scheduled for October 9, at 7:00 PM at the Vernonia Scout Cabin.

Kitchen Table Conversations: Hyde vs. Zimmerman

By Randy Sanders

In this testy campaign season, “change” has been used by most candidates. Let's move over to the kitchen table and begin to break down the Columbia County Commissioner's race between incumbent Tony Hyde and challenger Pat Zimmerman by examining some key points. Side by side, both candidates are very bright and tough, but that's where their similarities seem to end.

CHANGE

Pat Zimmerman is presenting herself in this campaign as “your neighbor for change.” Change is great, provided you have the necessary leadership skills to follow through.

Zimmerman served as a Port Commissioner from 2000 to 2004, but chose not to run for reelection, admitting “...because of the inability to get the three votes on the five member board to change anything.”

A leader is someone with followers. If a candidate is proclaiming that they're an agent of change, one should have the basic ability to convince a board of your peers to vote with you. This is one way change can come about. If Zimmerman was unable to work within the Port Commission to bring about any effective changes, one wonders how effective she will be in changing the County Commission.

Tony Hyde is the incumbent Commissioner and has also had his share of challenges. In sharp contrast, Hyde isn't billing himself as a change agent.

“You have to be able to work with people,” Hyde acknowledges. “It's the only way to get things done. I'm also not interested in people who just agree with me on every issue. I'm not looking for ‘yes’ people, I'm looking for thinkers. Debate, when done in a respectable and appropriate atmosphere is a wonderful thing. That's how ideas become reality.”

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

One of Zimmerman's biggest accomplishments as a Port Commissioner was her support of development at the Scappoose Air Park which led to significant light-industrial growth.

“I made the motion to allow through-the-fence access for all adjacent firms and arranged for enough votes on a very divided board to pass it, without which...growth would not have happened.”

Clearly, in this case she was able to gather the votes on her side.

As County Commissioner, Republican Tony Hyde received written praise from Oregon Senator Ron Wyden (D) while working with him on Public Law 106-393, which amounts to a quarter of Columbia County's budget. This bill, which includes the Sheriff's patrol, expired this year. However, as Hyde puts it, “...by God, we'll get it reauthorized.”

VERNONIA'S JOB OUTLOOK

Pat Zimmerman consistently speaks of a balanced approach to job growth along with the many other issues that occur within a growing region.

“My first priority is improving the quality of life in the county,” Zimmerman said. “This involves new, good paying jobs, managing growth to deal with the negatives that could occur: traffic, pollution, etc...and supporting and improving county services.”

She clearly understands the differences between Vernonia and the other urban areas in the county.

“The towns of Columbia County cannot be treated equally when developing business plans. Specifics must be different for each area.

Trolling for jet repair businesses for the Vernonia Airport is silly.

Trying for heavily truck-dependent businesses probably is useless – we're not on the I-5 corridor. I believe business development will be time-consuming, organic, [and] focused on small and medium sized businesses and taking advantage of our resources.”

Zimmerman focusses in depth on other aspects of development such as cellulosic ethanol and the telecommuting surge on her website, www.patz4commissioner.com.

As a former Mayor of Vernonia, Tony Hyde also sees the problems with job growth in Vernonia.

“Creating industry here is a problem. There are severe transportation issues and expensive power because Western Oregon Electric doesn't have huge industrial users. Power here is some of the most expensive in the Northwest.”

Hyde concedes, “We need to have quality fiber line in Vernonia so that telecommuting can become a reality. Home-based businesses are another way to seed employment options. But understand, the bottom line is jobs. People need jobs. They must be able to make ends meet and support their families.”

UGLY CAMPAIGNING

In the end, how a candidate chooses to run their campaign, can reflect how they will govern if elected.

On Zimmerman's website, (patz4commissioner.com) she posts two YouTube videos of public commentary at a Commissioner's meeting. In two separate instances, female citizens seem to be unfamiliar with the appropriate procedure of making comments. Both women persistently attempt to have the 3-member board answer their questions. Both become visibly angry with one emphasizing her frustration, “...I'm angry, I'm outraged.” In the video, Hyde makes several attempts to steer the meeting back to it's designed format, assuring them the board will examine their questions and respond at a later time.

There is a malicious attempt by the Zimmerman team to spin these exchanges with such superimposed captions as: “A concerned citizen tries to ask Tony Hyde an easy question” and, “Tony Hyde doesn't like voter questions, especially from women.”

Accusations about a person being a racist, homophobe or sexist is very serious. Sadly, it's disappointing to see this type of campaigning in a small county among friends and neighbors.

“I keep hearing about my opponent's site, but I'm avoiding it,” admits Hyde. “I'm determined not to be part of the negative campaign camp.

SUMMARY

When it's all said and done, it comes down to this: which candidate shares the same values and vision for Vernonia and Columbia County? Which candidate demonstrates the ability to work across party lines and get the things done that our citizens expect? Which candidate has the personality, disposition and people skills needed to secure the trust and respect from their constituents and peers needed to bring about real change that's positive?

As citizens, we have the job to hire and fire the people that get up each day to represent our interests.

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