

BERNEY, LEIKEN DEBATE FOR COMMISSION SEAT

Leiken turns up for Springfield City Club

Joe Berney and current Lane County Commissioner Sid Leiken finally had their debate — since Leiken was a no-show at the Springfield Latinx Forum in March — before the May 15 election at Springfield City Club. The two of them disagreed on issues the county faces but shared the idea that Leiken represents how Lane County government works.

For Leiken, this means it's the government that improved its credit rating according to Moody's, balanced a budget without layoffs and worked to establish affordable housing.

On the other hand, Berney says he believes business as usual on the county board is just not enough, especially when Leiken struggles to take a stand on bigger issues. Instead, Berney said, he can offer a change in direction that can reinvent the county, which has inspired his list of endorsements.

When asked about a timber harvest tax, the two had split opinions.

Berney gave it a simple "yes" but added a caveat.

One tax on an industry — timber harvest tax — shouldn't have to carry the weight of the county, he said. To diversify tax revenue, Berney said he would hold public forums with local industries to solve Lane County's funding issue.

Leiken said that as of right now, he wouldn't advocate for a timber harvest tax.

"Lane County could only advocate but the Association of Oregon Counties doesn't have an appetite to advocate for this," he said. "They're not harvesting off public land. It's all private timber that are feeding mills, creating significant wealth in this community."

Leiken's campaign finance supporters include Silver Butte Timber Company of Douglas County, Seneca Jones Timber Company and Giustina Resources. Ed King of King Estate, who backs the Old Hazeldell mine, also supports Leiken's campaign, according to the Oregon Secretary of State webpage on campaign finance.

When questioned about donations from resource extractors, Leiken said, "Except for Comcast, the only donations are from community-based family owned businesses," before terminating a post-debate interview with *Eugene Weekly*.

When asked about aerial spray, Berney said a bigger issue has emerged: a lack of guidance with citizen initiatives and that aerial spray should have been on the May 15 ballot.

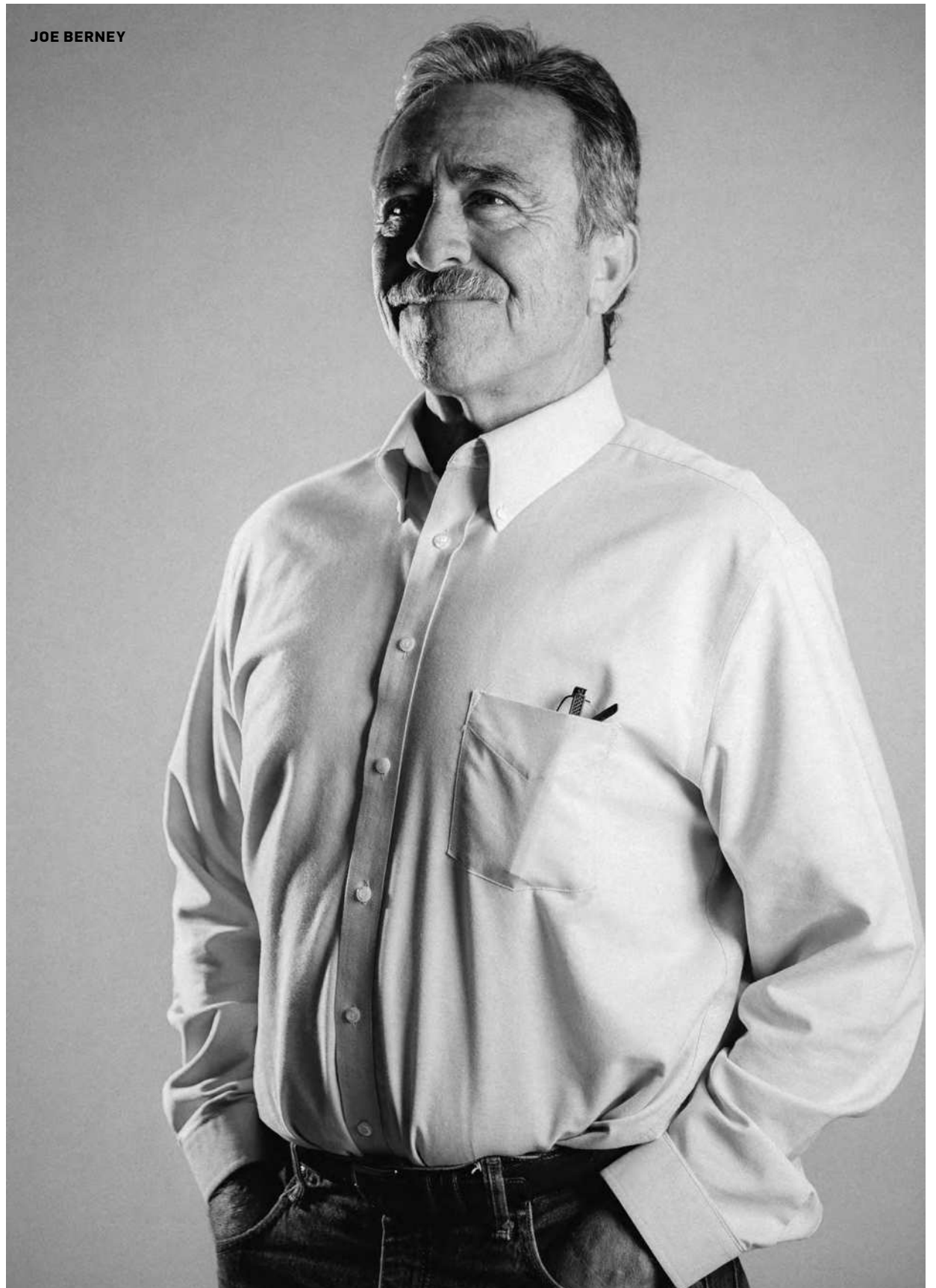
"Can citizen initiatives efficiently be brought to a vote so citizens can determine their destiny?" Berney asked. "I would direct staff to not create obstacles for initiatives and move them to ballot."

Leiken took this as a chance to show that Berney could unknowingly open a door to an influx of citizen initiatives, highlighting divisive groups.

"He just basically opened the door for Oregon for Immigration Reform, Oregon Firearms Federation to come in here and say, 'You know what, we want that, too. We would like to have an initiative then put out to Lane County residents as well,'" he said. "We have to be extremely careful with how we approach this and make sure it's within the guidelines set forth by state law and Lane County charter."

Berney said he does think more things should be taken to citizens. He added, for example, he wouldn't accept the \$4,000 pay raise the Lane County Commission passed in 2016 — with dissenting votes from Pete Sorenson and Jay Bozievich — unless voters approved it.

Leiken talked about his private meetings with Springfield Mayor Christine Lundberg in which they collaborate on development projects. One thing they've been discussing, he said, was revitalizing the riverfront in the Glenwood district by attracting start-ups that might come be-



JOE BERNEY

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

cause of the planned Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact.

Leiken added that the Board of Commissioners is in the process of closing the Glenwood Transfer Station, which they say will streamline the waste process as well as allow the possibility of building an indoor running track in the district.

If either Leiken or Berney had a line to compete with former Democratic vice-presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen's "Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy," it would have been Berney.

"I will have town halls, community listening sessions, Springfield office hours ... Have you had any?" Berney

asked Leiken.

Leiken shook his head.

"I will make myself far more accessible to service constituents than our community of Springfield has had in a long time," Berney added.

Residents in Springfield will decide in the May 15 election who will represent them. Leiken has served 20 years in public office, starting as a city councilor, mayor and now county commissioner. This is the first time that Berney has run for public office. He has worked as a teacher and more recently the owner of ReNewAll, where he secured more than \$120 million in clean energy construction projects. ■