

Dorchester Conference aims beyond GOP

Republicans take on the tough issues at annual gathering

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

The 52nd annual Dorchester Conference in two weeks is a tradition-rich, Republican gathering, started by U.S. Sen. Bob Packwood in 1965 “as a vehicle to get the senator elected,” Dorchester’s 2016 President Tom Simpson said recently. For most of the years, the conference has convened in Seaside, except for a few when the group met in central Oregon.

While traditionally associated with the GOP, Simpson said the conference is aimed at the “moderate-middle, especially the moderate side of the Oregon electorate.”

“It is ‘Participatory Democracy 101,’ a way for people to come together and chat with people they just met, (be) challenged on the beliefs they have, and go away hopefully smarter and having met some people they might not normally have met,” Simpson said. “That’s what we set out to do.”

Opening ceremonies begin March 11. Tucker Carlson of Fox News appears as keynote speaker Saturday morning, followed by a Q&A. State Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, and Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, share the dais Saturday. After lunch, state treasurer candidates from the Democratic, Republican and Independent parties debate. Breakout sessions, a social hour and a tent show follow. For \$40, guests can have



Tucker Carlson



Tom Simpson

their photo taken with Carlson, with proceeds going to the nonprofit Returning Veterans Project.

A presidential straw poll Sunday will provide a glimpse at the state’s November leanings, although they do not serve as an endorsement, Simpson said.

While associated with the Republican Party, Simpson encouraged Oregonians of all political affiliations to attend.

“We like to think we’re allowing conversations that aren’t taking place,” Simpson said. “There were certain conversations that weren’t taking place in the Republican Party. If you’re a one-party state, what’s not being talked about? We try to set it up in such a way that we can have that conversation.”



EO Media Group/File Photo

Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., was the keynote speaker for last year’s Dorchester Conference in Seaside.

Simpson said he hoped to challenge the beliefs of those attending the conference.

What does it mean, for example, if Oregon’s ranchers are fighting to privatize some public lands?

“We want people to consider what it means to have a public land,” Simpson said. “Could

beaches be privatized as an unintended consequence?”

Gun control was an issue originally considered “off the table” for the conference, he said.

Simpson fought to bring it back in. “We were told that it’s not an issue open to debate. Which says to me that’s why we

should be debating it. If you’re closing off argument on a topic because you believe it’s settled, I can guarantee in Oregon, it’s not settled.

“We shouldn’t be throwing bombs at each other,” he added. “It needs to be talked about. Reasonable people can disagree.”

When he’s not involved with the Dorchester Conference, Simpson, 53, works as director of government affairs for Standard Insurance.

The conference is an event, the Lake Oswego resident said, he’s been involved with all his life.

“I have pictures of my mother Josephine running the forums,” Simpson said. “A lot of my peers would go skiing or play golf — I would go to Dorchester.”

Those interested in signing up for the Dorchester Conference may do so through March 12.

Obama’s sacrificial lamb: High-court pick to face long odds

By JOSH LEDERMAN and KATHLEEN HENNESSEY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Wanted: Top legal mind with Supreme Court aspirations, to serve as a national political football. Candidate must be camera-ready and prepared for disappointment. Contact Barack Obama.

Republicans refusing to hold a vote or hearings on any candidate nominated by Obama have complicated his sales job as he seeks a replacement for Antonin Scalia. Though Obama insists he’ll put forward an “outstanding candidate” no matter what the GOP says, the White House is hard-pressed to offer a convincing scenario in which that person gets confirmed.

Overnight, Obama’s nominee will become the face of well-financed, high-intensity, election-year campaigns both for and against that will rage across the country. Though guaranteed at least a footnote in the history books, the nominee will have little ability to influence the debate and even less control over how the chapter plays out.

For a Supreme Court hopeful, the scenario is less than ideal. High-ranking judges and others fit for consideration tend to be loath to throw themselves into the middle of public controversy.

“As much as you tell them it’s not really about them, judges don’t engage in politics and take pride in their impartiality,” said Christopher Kang, who prepared lower-court nominees for confirmation as former deputy White House counsel. “It can be hard for them not to take it personally.”

To be sure, a Supreme Court

seat is most jurists’ dream job. Anyone asked to serve in the coveted, lifelong post would find it hard to turn down.

And there could be some hope. Despite the GOP’s hard line, Republicans could relent and confirm Obama’s nominee — especially if he picks a so-called consensus nominee — someone so well-regarded that Republicans lack a compelling rationale to reject him or her. Among those Obama is considering is Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval of Nevada, said two people familiar with the process, who weren’t authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity.

Obama waxed hopeful on Wednesday that GOP opposition would fizzle once the “abstraction” is replaced with a living, breathing person.

“Let’s see how the public responds to the nominee that we put forward,” he said in the Oval Office.

But unlike most Supreme Court nominations battles, which typically run a few months, this one is likely to turn into a circus that just won’t end. If Republicans hold their ground on refusing a vote, Obama will ostensibly keep pushing his nominee until his presidency ends in January 2017.

If a Democrat wins the White House in November after an unsuccessful Supreme Court push, Obama could renew his efforts during a lame-duck session of Congress or his successor could take up the baton. Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton’s campaign wouldn’t say whether she’d consider re-nominating Obama’s pick if elected, but in a statement she called the



J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid of Nev., right, takes the arm of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Ky., left, to steady himself as he rises to pay tribute to civil rights leaders Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., during a ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday. The two leaders have been at an ideological and political standoff since McConnell, the Senate’s top Republican, announced the Senate will take no action on anyone President Barack Obama nominates to fill the Supreme Court vacancy left by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia. House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wis. is at left.

GOP position “an offense to the president and to the American people who elected him.”

Already, two politicians whose names were floated as

possible contenders took themselves out of the running. California Attorney General Kamala Harris, who is running for U.S. Senate, said she wasn’t inter-

ested, and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar has said she doesn’t want to be considered.

Influential groups are poised to jump into action once Obama announces a nominee, digging through old yearbooks, scouring writings and speeches. Party campaign committees, legal groups, electoral super PACs and even the presidential candidates are expected to join the public fight for or against Obama’s nominee.

Senate Republicans, fighting to preserve their delicate majority in November, will all make a similar argument: Elect us, or a Democratic-run Senate will allow Obama’s nominee thru, said a senior Republican official, who requested anonymity to discuss the party’s internal campaign strategy.

History shows just how rough the process can be.

In 2005, George W. Bush nominee Harriet Miers was slammed as ill-prepared, suffered the indignity of having to redo parts of her Senate questionnaire, and forced to admit

her bar license was once suspended. She eventually withdrew. Justice Clarence Thomas famously described his own televised confirmation spectacle, with its allegations of past sexual harassment, as “a national disgrace” and “a high-tech lynching for uppity blacks.”

Dim prospects for confirmation could give an edge to candidates who already enjoy lifetime appointments to a federal bench, as opposed to current bureaucrats or elected officials. Attorney General Loretta Lynch and Homeland Security chief Jeh Johnson have both been floated as possibilities, but keeping their day jobs would be complicated.

Current federal judges wouldn’t have that problem, and as an added benefit, they’ve already undergone a thorough public examination. Several of those under considerations — including Sri Srinivasan, of the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, and Jane Kelly, of the Eight Circuit — were unanimously approved by the Senate.

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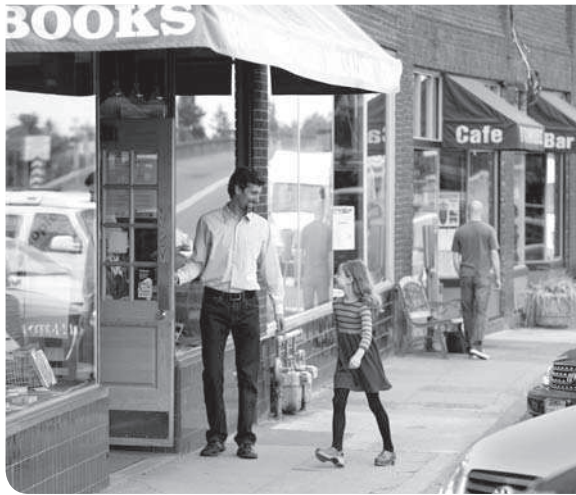
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