

Secretary of state candidates lay out positions in forum

Avakian, Richardson joined by other candidates

By CLAIRE WITTHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

ALOHA — In a race that's become largely a heated back-and-forth between the Democrat and Republican candidates, the frontrunners in the race for secretary of state were joined Monday by two candidates from other parties at a meeting hosted by the Washington County Public Affairs Forum.

Democrat Brad Avakian, the state's labor commissioner, and Republican Dennis Richardson, a former state legislator, are competing to be the state's top auditor and elections officer, as are Pacific Green Party candidate Alan Zundel, of Eugene, and Libertarian candidate Sharon Durbin, a former Forest Grove planning commissioner.

In an opening statement, Avakian said that, as labor commissioner, a position he has held since 2008, he had turned "values into action," laying out plans to close the wage disparity between men and women and to promote workforce development through modern shop classes for high schoolers.

As secretary of state, Avakian said, he'd promote same-day voter registration, inspire Oregonians to participate in elections, "break down barriers" for potential voters to register and vote, and cause Oregon to be a "global leader in the fight against climate change" through the secretary of state's position on the State Land Board. The board oversees state land managed for the financial benefit of Oregon's public schools through the Common School Fund.

Richardson, the Republican,

touted his willingness to work across the aisle in the Legislature in 2011, when he was selected to be co-chair of the Ways and Means Committee.

"We worked together, in a very difficult time, and passed the education budget first, instead of making it a political football at the very end of the session," Richardson said.

Richardson, a 2014 gubernatorial candidate who lost to John Kitzhaber, a four-term Democrat who later resigned after allegations of influence-peddling surfaced, also claimed that he brought forward evidence of corruption.

"I brought forward the corruption I felt was rampant in the Governor's Office," Richardson said. "It ultimately led to investigations that led to (Kitzhaber's) resignation after the election."

He criticized the state for not auditing the failed health insurance exchange, Cover Oregon, and the Columbia River Crossing, the never-realized bridge project across the Columbia River and the state's millions of dollars in "suspicious" Business Energy Tax Credits.

Libertarian view

Durbin, the Libertarian candidate and an attorney, is running because the job of secretary of state has become too "politicized," saying the office should be "ministerial."

She said the main priorities of the office should include running elections, assisting corporations, auditing state agencies and providing records to the public. She said Oregon has "too many rules" for corporations, citing her experience working for the Arizona Department of Revenue.

"The entire purpose of the secretary of state is to keep government moving forward on a fair and even scale," Durbin said.

She also said the office

should be run by someone who will not favor "pet projects" or party loyalties. She railed against the Columbia River Crossing and the abuse and neglect of children in Oregon's foster care system.

Pacific Green Party

Zundel, the Pacific Green Party candidate and a counselor and former political scientist, said he is running to advocate for a rank-choice voting system, which allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference rather than choosing a single candidate.

Responding to questions, all candidates said they were in favor of "fair" legislative redistricting according to population. Richardson suggested a neutral commission to evaluate districts, and all said they were against voter fraud, in response to two other questions.

Avakian, saying there was little voter fraud in Oregon, emphasized breaking down barriers to participating in elections and criticized Richardson for proposing laws as a state legislator that would require people to present "burdensome" documents to be able to cast a vote.

Zundel said he wondered how secure the state's vote tabulators are.

Richardson said that a decade ago the Legislature fixed the "underlying problem" by requiring proof of legal residency to obtain a state driver's license. The Republican said he wanted to restore trust in the state's election system.

Renewable energy

In a question regarding Ava-

kian's support of renewable energy on state lands, an audience member said that alternative energy programs "historically have been risky investments," and wondered how supporting renewable energy development met the fiduciary responsibility the state has for the Common School Fund.

Avakian claimed that the "clean energy economy is a booming economy" but that the state hasn't encouraged it to thrive as other nations have.

Avakian said he aimed to free up state lands for renewable energy development and encourage innovative use of state land. He opposes selling the Elliott State Forest to private timber companies and wanted to preserve it for "public good."

The state plans to sell the forest, appraised at \$220.8 million, because it has been a net loss to the Common School Fund since 2013. No buyer has been selected — acquisition proposals are due in mid-November and the final purchase agreement is estimated to be executed at the end of February.

Zundel said that in the long term, public lands such as forests were more valuable as protected natural resources because of their ability to store carbon in the context of global climate change.

"I think we undervalue those lands when we don't think about them in the context of what's going on in the larger world," Zundel said.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Doug Dougherty addresses the Seaside City Council.

Seaside City Council endorses school bond

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE —The Seaside City Council gave a thumbs-up to the Seaside School District's November bond to move tsunami-endangered schools to safer ground.

"I have to commend you and the board for putting the package together that shows us what's going on," Mayor Don Larson said at a meeting Monday. "This thing is just fantastic."

"So much time and effort has been put into this by so many people," Councilor Dana Phillips said. "It's something for the good of our community as well as the safety of our students."

Seaside School District Superintendent-emeritus Doug Dougherty provided a presentation that stressed not so much the benefits of the new campus but the defects of current schools, which are

well beyond their projected life span. He called the bond an opportunity to make a difference to the community for generations. "It's one of those things that we are very excited about," he said. "This is an outstanding chance."

After the defeat of the district's 2013 bond, the city went back to voters to find out why. "We trimmed this plan to its bare bones," Dougherty said.

The new campus, to be located on 80 acres donated by Weyerhaeuser Co., is near Seaside Heights Elementary School in the East Hills.

The \$99.7 million plan scales back from the \$128.8 million 2013 proposal, eliminating an auditorium, covered bleachers, long-term emergency shelters and a varsity playing field.

If the bond passes, the school district would approach the City Council for an urban growth boundary expansion.



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