

Brown, Pierce discuss rural issues during first debate

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

BEND — In their first public sparring, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and Republican gubernatorial candidate Dr. William “Bud” Pierce went head to head on three topics: the economy, land use and the “urban-rural divide.”

The debate was intended to focus on rural Oregon.

Although the candidates agreed that rural communities needed a say in land use issues, better access to healthcare and more jobs, they disagreed on taxes and state expenditures.

“We cannot cut our way toward a better Oregon,” Brown said, summarizing a key difference in messaging between the two campaigns.

Brown reiterated her support for Ballot Measure 97, the proposed tax on certain corporate gross sales receipts, saying that additional investment was needed in basic services, while Pierce said more broadly that promoting prosperous rural economies would have ripple effects in areas such as education and healthcare.

In her opening statement, Brown said her vision for the state encompassed improving educational outcomes, investing in infrastructure and preserving “the beauty and bounty of Oregon.”

She touted her administration’s “progress” in the past year and a half in implementing automatic voter registration and passing legislation to convert Oregon from coal to clean sources of energy.

Pierce’s criticism of Brown began with his opening statement, in which he said Brown was “distant from the people” and seldom visited rural areas. He said he also wanted to address education, and also said improving mental healthcare, the state’s rural economies and homelessness were central to his platform.

The economy

The first third of the debate



Brown

Pierce

focused around the economy.

Brown, in response to a question about the effects of the increased minimum wage on rural business, defended the state’s mandated minimum wage increases, which will vary by area, saying she would not apologize for advocating for “working families.”

Pierce, asked about recreational marijuana, said the state’s law legalizing recreational marijuana was “well-crafted,” and that he supported local control over regulations. He also said he wished to bring the industry into mainstream banking, saying that a cash-only system was open to corruption.

Brown, in reiterating her support for Measure 97, said that state government needed sufficient revenue for basic services and that large corporations should pay a “fair share.”

Brown, in an interview with Oregon Public Broadcasting last month, acknowledged consumers in Oregon would bear some of the burden should the measure pass. But in Saturday’s debate she said the measure was the only viable option to remedy the state’s projected budget \$1.35 billion shortfall. Measure 97 is projected to pull in an additional \$6 billion in revenue per budget biennium.

In a rebuttal, Pierce disagreed, citing figures from the Legislative Revenue Office estimating that the average family would pay \$600 more annually in costs.

Brown said she sought to improve education and infrastructure in rural areas, and touted the state’s recent investment in “innovative technologies,”

citing cross-laminated timber and unmanned aerial vehicles.

In response to a question about shrinking rural economies and populations, Pierce said he wanted to renew natural resource industries in rural areas and support entrepreneurs through incentives such as tax credits or enterprise zones.

Land use

In the second part of the debate, which centered on land use, Brown was asked to clarify her stance on the proposed designation of the Owyhee Canyonlands in Eastern Oregon as a national monument.

The incumbent said she supported collaboration in coming to a decision.

Asked to expand on her answer, Brown maintained a “process” needed to be in place for taking public input. She would not say explicitly whether she was for or against the designation.

“I think there needs to be a collaborative approach and parties need to come to the table,” Brown said.

Pierce rebutted that the community around the proposed monument opposes the designation.

“The people who lived on the lands overwhelmingly said no,” Pierce said, and said he opposed what he characterized as an additional layer of bureaucracy.

Pierce and Brown also disagreed more broadly about the federal government’s management of public lands in Oregon. Pierce said that he supported a gradual transfer of federal public lands to state and local agencies, a move Brown called unrealistic.

“I think there’s a third way,” Brown said. She said the state was already cooperating with the federal government, and cited the state’s “good neighbor agreement” with the U.S. Forest Service regarding forest management.

She also attributed what she said was a 15 percent increase in timber harvest off federal public lands in Eastern Oregon in 2015 to such collaborations.

Brown, in a response to a question about easing tensions between various levels of government and the communities they serve, said that she fought on state and federal levels to reimburse Harney County and state law enforcement for costs incurred by the response to the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge earlier this year.

Urban-rural divide

While Pierce said that employment and basic healthcare can improve individual health, Brown said Pierce would “kick people off the Oregon Health Plan” and that she sought to remove barriers to healthcare.

“Every time we have a budget cut in this state, we cut people or we cut services,” Brown said.

Pierce objected, noting he was in favor of the recent Medicaid expansion in the state, but that rural communities suffered from a lack of affordable health insurance.

“All the great words in the world from the governor will not provide affordable insurance,” Pierce said.

He said that both health and educational outcomes could be bolstered by improved rural economies.

“If we have prosperity in rural areas, prosperous families can take care of their children,” Pierce said, arguing that rural areas have been neglected by Brown’s administration.

He also emphasized his background as a private citizen in contrast to Brown’s 25 years in state government and said her record was poor in those years.

But Brown said the state needed to continue investing in education to improve outcomes, citing the state’s comparatively short school years and large class sizes. She pointed to her appointment of an education innovation officer, whom she said would provide school districts sufficient resources to allow graduates to have a “plan.”

In response to a question about how far to go when making exceptions for rural communities

on state policies. Brown said there were a “number of circumstances” where exceptions were created for different communities based on need — including the tiering of the minimum wage increase and local discretion on recreational marijuana.

She criticized Republicans’ response to the state’s low-carbon fuel standard.

“We put on the table an exemption for rural Oregon, but Republican legislators chose to align with the petroleum industry” and did not heed the wishes of constituents, Brown said.

Asked about how she would balance healthy natural environments in rural communities while allowing rural communities to capitalize on their natural resources, Brown said that climate change was the most significant issue, and that it was “imperative” that the Oregon Department of Forestry and other state agencies have adequate resources to collect data.

Pierce called Brown’s response a “non-answer” and agreed that while climate change was an issue, he supported a “triple aim” of lower carbon emissions, reliable supply of energy and lower costs.

He said he wanted to help industries that rely on water thrive, but also encourage more “judicious use of water.”

Brown, in a counter-response, also called Pierce’s response a non-answer and said that she wanted to preserve the state for future generations.

“I don’t think we want to look like Idaho,” Brown said. “I want us to keep Oregon green.”

Saturday’s debate was moderated by the Oregon chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, with questions offered by representatives of the East Oregonian, KTVZ-TV, Jefferson Public Radio and the Bend Bulletin

Brown and Pierce are expected to debate again four more times before the Nov. 8 election: On Sept. 30, they will square off before the City Club of Portland.

FOOD: Became school’s culinary arts teacher in 2014

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Terry Becktold, who originally suggested she apply for a more modest \$2,500 grant.

But Swaggart was intrigued by the bigger fish and her goal was her higher aspiration was solidified over sleep.

“I literally had a dream that I would buy a food truck for the school,” she said.

Back in the waking world, Swaggart put together a proposal where students could use the food truck to cater events on contract as well as use it for their existing community service events like feeding the homeless at the Pendleton Warming Shelter.

She also involved business teacher Justin Adams, who could have his students work on business and marketing plans for the food truck.

Swaggart submitted the application at the end of June and promptly put it out of her mind.

“I just kind of forgot about it,” she said.

But Farmers Insurance didn’t

forget about it, sending a media crew to the high school Sept. 8 to film a documentary for the competition.

A surprised Becktold, unaware that Swaggart had applied for the larger grant, informed Swaggart that her idea was a national finalist early Monday morning.

Swaggart has taken an unlikely path to becoming a teacher in the national spotlight.

As recently as 15 years ago, Swaggart was a stay-at-home mom with a young son suffering from severe allergic reactions. In an attempt curb her son’s eczema and anaphylactic shocks, Swaggart started cooking all of her family’s meals from scratch, where she found in herself a passion for cooking.

Swaggart would go on to graduate from Walla Walla Community College’s Wine Country Culinary Institute and become head chef at John Bookwalter Winery in Richland.

Looking to slow down from the hectic pace of gourmet cooking, Swaggart became the high school’s culinary arts teacher in 2014 and

began elevating its competitive profile.

At the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America culinary competition, Swaggart’s girls team finished first in the state, second in the western region and 15th nationally.

Now the culinary team will have to compete for votes with other educational dreams from across the country.

Pendleton High School will kick off the campaign effort by holding an assembly Friday where Swaggart will encourage students to vote and spread the word.

As a way to remind people that they can vote once per day everyday in October, the school is using the hashtag “#voteforchefkeveryday,” which can be used on social media websites like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

Voting opens on www.thankamerica-teachers.com Oct. 1.

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SCHOOL: Sandstone proposals mainly deal with new parking lot

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would be demolished and replaced with a new parking lot off Northwest Seventh Street and playing fields.

The property could also get a dedicated bus loop in the northwest corner of the land while retaining its current southeastern parking lot with access from West Standard Avenue and three modular classrooms.

Board member Josh Goller asked what would happen the modulars located to the north of the current building.

Maiocco responded that they would be moved to a different school, most likely Sandstone Middle School.

Although it wasn’t discussed in depth at the work session, Maiocco said the design concepts for Highland Hills and Rocky Heights would be replicated for the new school at the Theater Lane property the district owns.

The proposals for Sandstone were less dramatic, mainly dealing with a new parking lot west of the school with access from Diagonal Road and making heating, the cooling and roofing upgrades to the facilities.

Maiocco called the Sandstone’s current parking situation an “absolute disaster,” and said the new parking lot would provide a specific space for school bus pick-up and drop-off away from the usual traffic. Sandstone’s conceptual drawing also included projects that could be addressed in a future bond campaign, including a track and field in the property’s southeastern corner, a new classroom wing on the north end of the school, a southern gym and kitchen addition and designated spaces for five more modulars.

While Sandstone doesn’t have same overcrowding issues other schools have, Maiocco said that will be a problem it will face 10 years from now, so it would be prudent to start considering these ideas now.

If the budget permits it, Maiocco said Sandstone could also receive security, window and door upgrades.

Maiocco said the conceptual drawings for an expansion to Hermiston High School, the other major component of the bond, would be presented to the board in November, the same month he plans to ask the board to put the bond on the May 2017 ballot.

FAMILIES: Program budget will be about \$35,000 a year

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the wheel, it’s ready to roll out,” he said.

He said a trainer from Salem will come to Hermiston “soon” to train potential mentors, drawing from Made to Thrive’s dozens of volunteers as well as new members of the community interested in mentoring a family. The first year will be a sort of pilot year, he said, with only a few families, but they expect things to grow quickly after that.

Lafollette said they estimate the Family Promise budget will be about \$35,000 a year — including about \$20,000 for Dammeyer’s salary — and are hoping in the future to pay for it with a combination of city money, grants and fundraising.

City councillor Rod Hardin, who represents the council on the Faith Based Advisory Committee, said he felt good about the arrangement with Made to Thrive.

“It’s been a long process, and

we’ve explored a lot of options, but I think this is it,” he said.

Dammeyer told the *East Oregonian* that Made to Thrive now serves 207 students in the community. Through that work, she said, she has formed relationships with “lots” of families who could benefit from mentorship through Family Promise, so it made sense for her to be the one pairing mentors and families together.

“Now we get to provide them with two resources,” she said.

Dammeyer said the goal of Family Promise is not just to have someone available to help walk families through the process of getting services they need. It’s also about giving them a “good, solid, faithful, loyal friend.”

“Family Promise is something exciting and I’m looking forward to it,” she said. “They (the committee) have been praying the right person will step forward and I’m just hoping I can be that person.”



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

United Grain Corporation has pledged to invest \$9 million in elevators and terminals it purchased this summer from Pacific Grain Growers. New holdings include all of PGG’s upcountry elevators, the McNary river terminal (pictured here) and the Alicel rail terminal.

“We got some saving rains, and we didn’t have a brutal winter either.”

— Jason Middleton, regional manager

elevator are now large semis lining up outside McNary along the Columbia River. Ideally, Middleton said they should be able to weight and unload trucks within 5-10 minutes.

“The terminals are farther along than our upcountry elevators,” he said. “That’s what we’re looking at now.”

This year’s harvest wasn’t without its struggles, Middleton said, as they were forced to hit the ground running. But overall, growers in Umatilla County had much better

spring and winter conditions and should be closer to their average yields, he said.

“We got some saving rains, and we didn’t have a brutal winter either,” Middleton said.

Already, the Pendleton area has received some good rains that will help farmers plant into better moisture for next year. According to the National Weather Service, Pendleton has received .68 inches of precipitation during September, more than the usual .45 inches.

Middleton said he is encouraged, but growers need more to continue reversing the damage from previous years of intense drought.

“We have some guys seeding now into better moisture this year,” Middleton said.

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