

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Our choices for county commissioner

Two of the three seats on the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners are up for election — a voting majority.

So there is plenty at stake when registered voters get their ballots in the mail next week. Constituents have until May 15 to return those ballots.

George Murdock and Larry Givens are running for re-election. Murdock has two challengers for his seat, while Givens has one.

As we've noticed in many of the public forums and in our private conversations with each candidate, all five believe that county government is operating pretty well at the moment. Each candidate has their own prescription for improvement, but there seems a general agreement that the county is in a good place. In recent years it has achieved a sense of financial stability, shed costs and helped attract economic growth and increased business investment.

Both incumbents and challengers also agreed, for the most part, on the problem areas: A lack of housing. Poor mental health care. Always-rising PERS costs. Poor roads and other infrastructure. Water tables on the decline. An overcrowded jail.

So with much agreement over what the county is doing well and what needs improvement, here is who we think can best capitalize on the good and confront the bad.

Position #1

George Murdock was first elected to the board in 2013, and in five years has taken on a leadership role in guiding the county toward reworking upper management and the structure of important departments. He led negotiations that allowed the county to

hand the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center to the city of Hermiston, releasing the county of liability over that project and thereby simplifying its management. He has also pushed forward the county charter review, too long delayed, and pledged not to meddle in that committee's work.

His two competitors just do not offer compelling alternatives.

Tom Bailor has now run three times for county commissioner, but hasn't made much of a dent in the previous two elections. We think he has something to offer local government, but wish he would have taken previous advice to get involved in some part of the county machinery in the last six years. It would have made him a more credible candidate this time around.

There are myriad committees and subcommittees that could have used his expertise, and he would have benefited from the experience and increased recognition. If he hopes to win an election to this kind of position in the future, he still needs to take that step first.

The other challenger, Rick Pullen, hasn't made a compelling argument for his credentials or a plan of action. Atop his list of priorities is protecting county workers from losing their jobs. But reducing government salaries and removing employees who were underperforming is one of the best moves Murdock and current county government have made in recent years. And in this region of conservative thought and desire for slim and efficient government, Pullen's message doesn't resonate.

Murdock remains the choice, and if elected we expect him to put in another four good years of work — unless the

charter review committee decides to get rid of his seat.

Position #2

Incumbent Larry Givens has the bureaucrat role down pat. He is a member of many boards with all kinds of acronyms, which take him to Salem, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere.

He said the work he is proudest of is being a board member of the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) until 2016 — including time spent as board president — as well as his long, tedious work crafting the Blue Mountain Forest Plan.

The only problem: Those are not accomplishments to be proud of.

DOGAMI just recently emerged from deep financial problems, most pronounced in a 2015 budget shortfall that resulted from mismanagement of federal grants. It has recovered now, and Givens is no longer on the board.

And the Blue Mountains Forest Plan is decades behind schedule, and Givens' work creating the last proposal has gone for naught — the draft he worked on has since been pulled off the table. Perhaps Givens has been able to keep fringe voices from dominating the discussion, but in no way has he been able to bring about a needed consensus.

It's fair to say then, that Umatilla County taxpayers have gotten little benefit from the work Givens said he is proudest of.

Add Givens' confusing position on EOTEC, a project for which he was the county representative for many years. He said in back-to-back answers during his interview with our editorial board that

EOTEC would not attract large groups of visitors from out of the area, but then a few moments later — when reminded that he had made an opposite claim for many years — said that yes, actually, EOTEC could someday be the kind of project that does just that. It's that kind of unclear vision of what EOTEC is and should be that led to miscommunication and too many people pulling in different directions on that project for far too long.

We think John Shafer is the better choice.

He has government experience, albeit on a smaller level, working as Athena mayor and leading the East Umatilla County Health District. We also appreciate his advocacy for better mental health coverage in the county — he knows the problems there better than most, having been a longtime employee of the Umatilla County Sheriff's Department. He said he wants to hold Lifeways responsible for improving their performance and is willing to make changes to the contract, or cancel it entirely, if they don't measure up.

There can be concern that Shafer is too close to the sheriff's office, having spent 17 years as an employee there. But he argued strongly that he has the ability to be independent and open, and free to make up his own mind when it comes to important budget and personnel decisions there. He has some practice as both the mayor of a city that contracts with sheriff's office and as an employee there.

In general, we think Shafer would bring a new perspective and ideas to a board that may be in for a time of change. Givens, on the other hand, has been on that board since 2007. And after 11 years he should have more to show for it.

OTHER VIEWS

Voters need to send legislature another message against illegal immigration

By CYNTHIA KENDOLL
AND RICHARD F. LAMOUNTAIN
Oregonians for Immigration Reform

On the issue of illegal immigration, what will it take for the Legislature to heed Oregonians' will?

Just over three years ago, in the November 2014 general election, Oregon voters rejected Ballot Measure 88 and the illegal-immigrant driver cards the Legislature had approved in 2013. The statewide margin was almost two-to-one; more than 983,000 Oregonians — including a majority in 35 of 36 counties and 80 percent in Umatilla County — voted “no.” The magnitude of Ballot Measure 88's rejection made clear: The vote transcended the single issue of driver cards to constitute a broad mandate against all forms of state-government benefits for illegal immigrants.

Did lawmakers get the message? They did not. Ever since, they've legislated as though Ballot Measure 88's outcome had been the opposite.

In 2015, lawmakers credentialed many illegal-immigrant university students to compete against American citizens for taxpayer-funded Oregon Opportunity Grants. In 2017, they extended Oregon Health Plan coverage to 14,000 additional illegal immigrants and broadened existing “sanctuary” protections (more on which below).

And in the session that ended last month, via House Bill 4111, lawmakers granted illegal immigrants enrolled in former President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program the right to renew Oregon driver licenses — this despite the unequivocal outcome of Ballot Measure 88, via which Oregonians rejected driving privileges for all illegal immigrants without exception.

Earlier this month, Gov. Kate Brown signed HB 4111 into law.

Oregonians have every right to be angry. What, they may ask, can we do to make lawmakers hear and heed the mandate of Ballot Measure 88?

One way is to send the same message again. Activists affiliated with Oregonians for Immigration Reform are circulating petitions to qualify a measure for the November 2018 ballot to repeal Oregon Revised Statute 181A.820 — the “sanctuary” law which keeps Oregon's police and sheriffs from using their money, personnel and equipment to detect or apprehend reputedly “non-criminal” illegal immigrants. If, by early July, 88,000 registered Oregon voters sign OFIR's petition — Initiative Petition 22 — voters will be able to strike that law from the books.

If they did, that would be two citizen-initiated ballot measures in four years via which Oregonians gave a thumbs-down to laws that benefit illegal immigrants. Would lawmakers, then, finally get the message and stop introducing and voting for such legislation? Those with safe seats in liberal urban districts probably would not. But those in competitive “swing” districts — ever cognizant that the next election is just around the corner — may, perhaps in sufficient numbers to make the difference.

Ours is a government of, by and for the people. So send your elected representatives the message they need to hear. This spring, sign the IP 22 petition. And in November, vote to repeal the sanctuary law. By doing so, you'll take another step to force our lawmakers to listen to us — and to stop enacting policies that encourage illegal immigration to our state.

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Cynthia Kendall is president of Oregonians for Immigration Reform. Richard F. LaMountain is the group's former vice president. To sign Initiative Petition 22, go to www.StopOregonSanctuaries.org.



YOUR VIEWS

Help defend Pendleton from invasive weeds

Myrtle spurge, a bright green ground cover with yellow and red flowers, is a very visible weed showing up on hillsides around town. In the Willamette valley myrtle spurge is a garden ornamental. In arid Eastern Oregon it is a class B invasive weed. It crowds out native vegetation by preventing other plants from growing nearby. Invasive weeds are not just a problem for ranchers and farmers.

Warming temperatures are triggering dormant myrtle spurge seeds to sprout. Mature plants are flowering and developing seed pods which will soon spread more seeds. When disturbed the ripe seed pods can disperse seeds 15 feet. The small seeds are easily carried by our strong winds.

Now is the time to help defend Pendleton from new myrtle spurge plants getting established along with removing older plants before they can spread new seeds. There is no silver bullet to eradicate myrtle spurge. The best tactic involves digging up the plants. Four-inch trenching shovels work well. Digging up the plant stops seed production, but it may come back if the roots regenerate.

Try to get at least four inches of tap root. It may take more than one year to get this invasive weed under control. Year two should have fewer plants

returning.

Now is the time to act! Enlist neighbors, grab shovels and clear myrtle spurge from your neighborhood. If you join the battle, protect your skin as the milky sap is a skin/eye irritant for humans and animals. Pants, long sleeves and gloves are recommended.

Dispose of the plants as garbage. Do not compost or recycle as yard debris. The seeds will contaminate the compost. Attacking with power equipment like mowers and tillers are counterproductive as mowers only clip the top off the plant while the roots continues to grow. Tillers chop up the tuberous roots and spread them like seed potatoes.

Chemicals like 2,4-D can be effective when applied in the fall. However, that is after the plants have set seed for the next year. The seeds can remain dormant for years resulting in the need of repeated applications.

Myrtle spurge is not the only invasive weeds in our area. You can also use your shovels to remove numerous types of thistle plants and puncturevine (aka goat heads).

Pictures and info for noxious weeds can be found in “Field Guide to Weeds of Eastern Oregon”
Ron Fongere
Pendleton

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