

Oregon candidate, once a Trump critic, now embraces him

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
Associated Press

BEND — In 2018, the Republican Party’s candidate for governor of Oregon painted himself as a centrist, criticized President Donald Trump’s environmental stance and said he didn’t want to be linked to divisive national figures.

Knute Buehler lost to incumbent Gov. Kate Brown by almost 120,000 votes. Now, Buehler is running for a seat in Congress in a district covering a conservative swath of Oregon, and has taken Trump into a tight embrace. Buehler’s campaign video features Trump at a rally and touring a border wall, with Buehler declaring he opposed impeachment.

Buehler’s turnaround underscores how Republican candidates across the country have been wrestling with diametrically opposing strategies: Cozy up to Trump, or distance themselves to woo moderates — and risk losing not only Trump’s base but an election.

“I’ve certainly disagreed with President Trump on occasion, specifically around his tweets and sometimes his behavior, but his policies have been good for America, good for Oregon, good for this district,” Buehler said in a recent interview with The Associated Press in his hometown of Bend.

The president this week declared that the Republican Party has never been more united and predicted momentum from his acquittal would carry him to



Knute Buehler, a Republican candidate for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, poses for a photo during an interview with The Associated Press in Bend.

re-election in November.

Many GOP candidates have already made the choice to go all in with Trump after having learned painfully that not aligning with him can be costly at the ballot box.

Arizona Sen. Martha McSally used to keep her distance from Trump. But as she campaigned in 2018 for a Senate seat, she embraced him and won the Republican primary. She lost the election but was appointed to Ari-

zona’s second Senate seat, filling John McCain’s remaining term.

Since then, she’s adopted Trump’s attacks on the press, calling a CNN reporter on camera a “liberal hack.” In a newspaper column, she accused the “liberal media” of being dishonest. The Trump campaign praised her attack in a tweet that included a link to a fundraising page for McSally’s campaign.

Just two years ago, Buehler, a former state legislator, painted

himself as a centrist as he ran for governor of Oregon, which last had a Republican governor 33 years ago. Buehler was one of the few GOP lawmakers to vote for a bill that banned people convicted of stalking and domestic violence from owning guns. In a debate against Brown, Buehler said climate change is an “issue of vital concern,” and noted he was one of the few Republicans to vote to transition Oregon from coal to renewable energy. He criticized

Trump for withdrawing from the Paris climate accord.

This time, Buehler is in a tough fight to win the Republican primary to succeed Rep. Greg Walden, who is not seeking re-election to a 12th term representing Oregon’s 2nd District. Geographically one of America’s largest congressional districts, it encompasses sparsely populated Eastern Oregon and the central part of the state and is the only one of Oregon’s five congressional districts to routinely vote Republican.

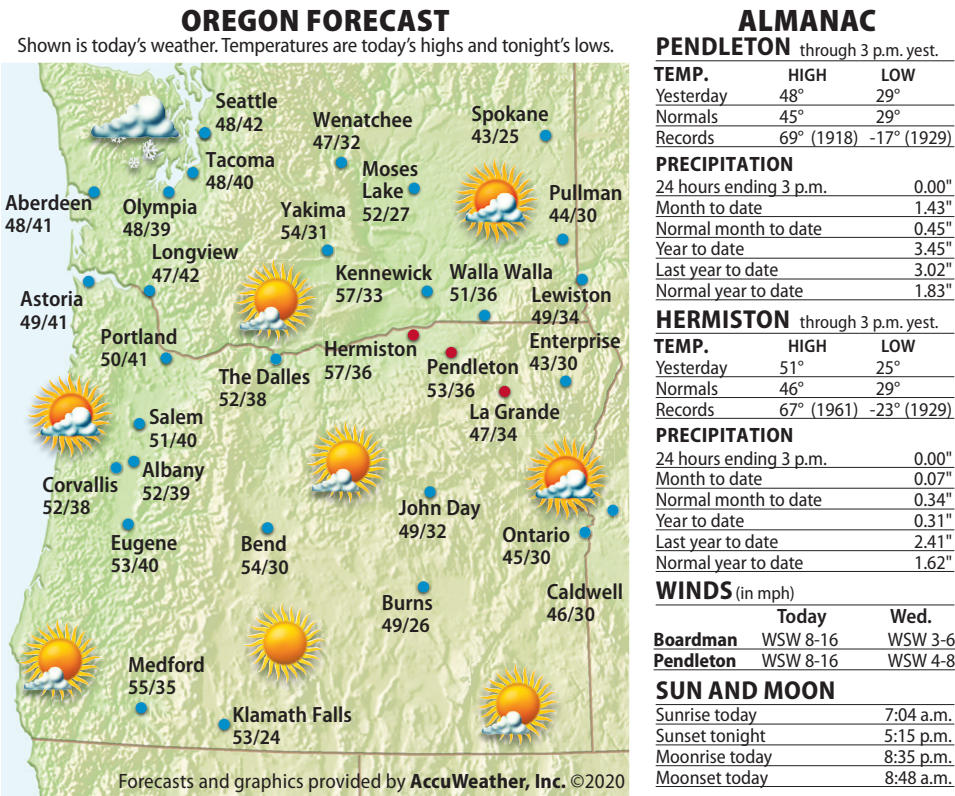
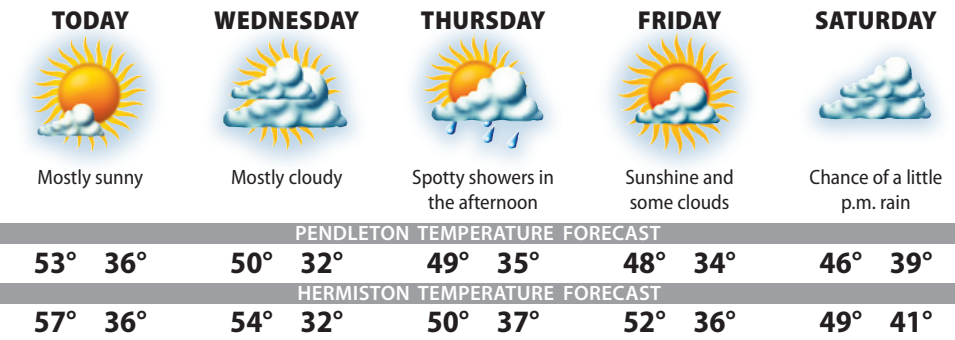
Buehler’s rivals are also proclaiming their fondness for Trump. “Thank God that we have President Trump,” Cliff Bentz, a former state senator, said in a podcast.

Another Republican candidate, Kenneth Medenbach, participated in the 2016 armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, though he has no realistic chance of winning. A flag emblazoned with Trump’s name and his “Make America Great Again” slogan stands on Medenbach’s property.

The district includes Bend and surrounding Deschutes County, which have been growing more centrist with an influx of newcomers from California, Portland and Seattle.

A few Democrats have filed as candidates, though none is widely recognized in political circles. More candidates may jump in before the March 10 filing deadline, K.C. Hanson, state Democratic Party chairwoman, said in an email.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

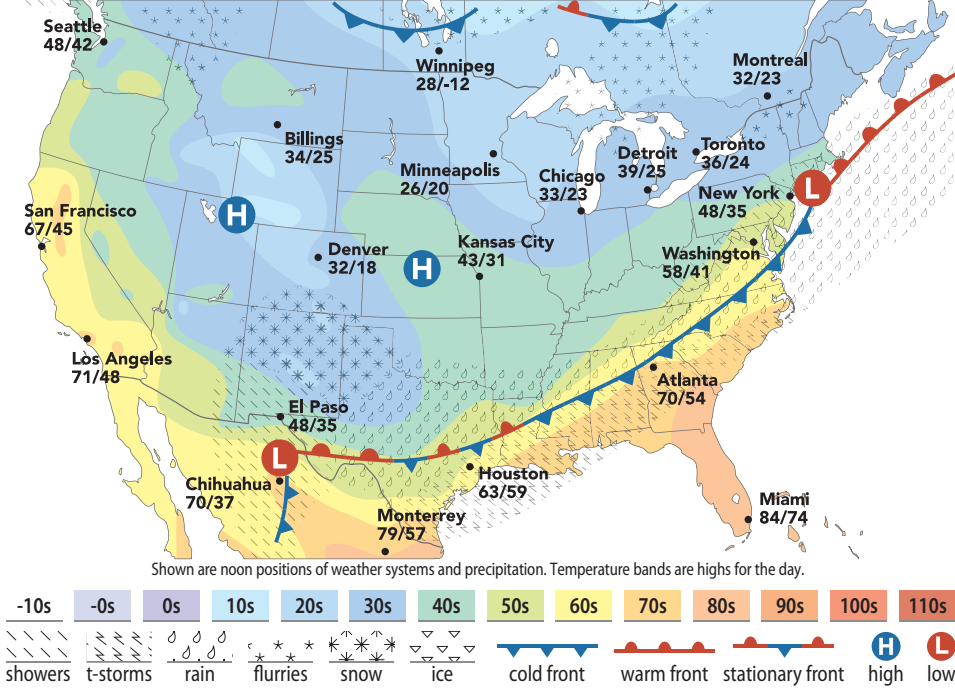


NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 93° in Zapata, Texas Low -20° in Tomahawk, Wis.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Balloon Stampede sails back to May

Annual Walla Walla event moves from October

By **VICKI HILLHOUSE**
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — Locals can add the Walla Walla Balloon Stampede back on their calendars for Mother’s Day weekend.

Operators of the hot air balloon festival made the move from October to May official with an announcement Saturday.

The 46th annual event that draws hot air balloonists from all over the country will run May 6-10. Lighter Than Air America will continue to organize the event. The company had been operated by the late Scott Spencer, who died Jan. 31 at 65 after a battle with colon cancer.

His wife, Laurie Spencer, a commercial pilot and the company’s vice president, will lead event organization for 2020. Walla Walla balloonist Jerry

Cummins, longtime balloonmeister, will also assist.

The date is the only change, said Scott Peters, chief executive officer of title sponsor Columbia Rural Electric Association.

The event will continue with a projected 30 to 35 balloons at Howard-Tietan Park. Peters said Nite Glow is expected to return as a Saturday night event, rather than Friday, when it had taken place the last several years.

Rescheduling Nite Glow, the after dusk presentation of tethered baskets lighting the night sky with inflated balloons from the ground, is possible with the return to May, Peters said. In the October time frame, the traditional Saturday date conflicted with at least one other major community event.

The event has taken place in the fall for the last several years, starting with a trial run in 2014 with a smaller number of balloons. In 2015, the switch to October was made permanent.

That year — a test period — was a success, Peters said. But since then, only 2018 had favorable weather conditions and allowed balloons consistently off the ground for the morning launches.

“The math is the easy part,” Peters said Saturday. “We had the test year and one other good October.

“And it sure seems like the odds are better to me” for a spring event.

Peters acknowledged there are better weather months for hot air balloons than May or October. But those months typically have crops growing in fields where the pilots often land, making it impossible to navigate.

“You can’t land the balloons,” he said.

While numerous other details are in planning stages, the date change was important to release in order for community members and visitors to plan.

“We want balloons up in the sky for the community and for the kids,” Peters said.

BRIEFLY

Concordia University in Oregon to close this year

PORTLAND — Concordia University, an institution since the early 1900s in Portland, has announced it will close.

The private, nonprofit Lutheran university’s Board of Regents voted Friday to cease operations at the end of its spring semester, *The Oregonian*/OregonLive reported. The university’s 24-acre campus is expected to eventually go up for sale.

“The Board made this decision to prioritize the well-being of students, faculty,

and staff and fulfill its fiduciary obligations,” Concordia said in a statement. “In the Board’s best judgment, a thoughtful and orderly closure process offers the best possible outcome for all affected parties.”

The university said the closure comes “after years of mounting financial challenges, and a challenging and changing educational landscape.”

Nearly 5,900 students attended Concordia in 2018, according to its website. The university said it’s in talks to provide students the chance to continue their education elsewhere.

— Associated Press

CORRECTION: In the Page A1 story “Pendleton struggles with scale of flood,” published Saturday, Feb. 8, the story misstated the times associated with the flooding in the *East Oregonian*’s parking lot. Staff started noticing flooding around 8 p.m. and flagged down a police officer for assistance around 9 p.m.

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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