

ELECTION

Election heats up as ballots go out

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Many Oregonians will have a possible attention grabber in the mailbox within days: their ballot.

Wednesday, April 27, is when the first ballots go in the mail for the May 17 primary election, a process that must be completed no later than May 3. Ballots cast could be coming back to county clerks as early as this weekend.

“Things are heating up — it’s exciting that after so many months, people will get to vote,” said Jessica LaVigne, campaign manager for Tobias Read, the state treasurer running for governor in the Democratic primary.

The open governor’s seat is one of the top ballot battlegrounds. The 19 Republicans and 15 Democrats on the ballot will be reduced to one per party after votes are counted on May 17.

Party nominees for two hotly contested open congressional seats will be decided, while a third seat in the U.S. House has drawn a strong challenge.

All 60 state House seats and more than half of 30 senate seats will be on the ballot. Only a handful have close primary fights, with the real impact coming in November when voters will decide if Democrats’ supermajorities in both chambers go up or down.

With closed primaries, only registered Democrats and Republicans can vote in each party’s ballot for partisan races.

The commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is on all ballots, because the office is officially non-partisan.

Websites and television stations are already becoming saturated with political ads in some areas.

Former House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, is the highest ranking Democrat running against Read in the race for governor.

Kotek ads pop up in



East Oregonian, File

Bundles of ballots sit in trays waiting to be opened prior to the November 2019 election at the Umatilla County Elections Office in Pendleton. Ballots for the primary on May 17, 2022, are heading to voters’ mailboxes as soon as Wednesday, April 27.

between most YouTube videos accessed in Democratic-heavy Eugene.

While less ubiquitous, the biggest fundraisers in the Republican race for governor are also hitting screens big and small around the state.

Ads from former Oregon Republican Party chair Bob Tiernan, former House Minority Leader Christin Drazan, R-Canby, and Sandy Mayor Stan Pulliam cast state government as out-of-touch or inept and stake their claim to be the first GOP candidate to win a governor’s race since 1982.

A common theme with variations of intensity and sharp language is put forward in a more gentle manner by 2016 GOP nominee for governor Bud Pierce, whose ads promise that he will make Oregon “sane, secure and stable” again.

In Sunriver this weekend, Democrats will meet for the Oregon Summit, the top gathering of the partisan troops. It comes one week after Republicans met in Clackamas County, near Mount Hood.

The conference had been postponed earlier in the year because of COVID-19 concerns. With reports Tuesday that Vice-President Kamala Harris and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, have separately tested posi-

tive for the virus, the Democrats’ political messaging will compete with pandemic news involving two of their top nationally known leaders.

Attempts to lead a daily news cycle with an orderly roll out of a political agenda at a conference can be interrupted by the unexpected. Take it from Republicans.

Last Saturday, the key day of the Dorchester Conference in Clackamas County, state political news was crowded by President Joe Biden endorsing the re-election bid of U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby.

“We don’t always agree, but when it has mattered most, Kurt has been there for me,” Biden said in a statement Saturday.

The endorsement put Biden at odds with four of the five county Democratic committees in the 5th Congressional District.

Jamie McLeod-Skinner of Terrebonne won the endorsement of the Deschutes, Clackamas, Marion and Linn county Democratic party groups. The fifth — Multnomah County — has not endorsed in the 5th Congressional District race.

McLeod-Skinner has said a major reason for her insurgent bid was what she and other Democratic progressives have called out as Schrader’s inconsistent and

tepid support for Biden’s “Build Back Better” plan.

Democrats backing McLeod-Skinner dismissed the endorsement as a necessary nod to party cohesion in the closely-divided House.

But Biden’s endorsement is sure to be rolled out when Schrader makes a scheduled appearance in Sunriver with the other three Democrats in the Oregon delegation to the U.S. House.

Another race forcing Democrats to choose sides is the new 6th congressional district. Political newcomer Carrick Flynn has received \$7 million from billionaire Sam Bankman-Fried, CEO of a Bahamas-based cryptocurrency exchange.

Democratic party infighting really took off when Flynn received \$1 million from a political action committee tied to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to Flynn’s campaign.

The crowded Democrat field includes Rep. Andrea Salinas, D-Lake Oswego, and Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon, D-Woodburn, two of the highest ranking Latina officeholders in the state. Former Multnomah County Commissioner Loretta Smith, who is Black, is also in the race.

The sudden support by the Pelosi-backed PAC for Flynn drew the ire of U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, who broke his neutral position to call out Flynn’s fundraising.

“I haven’t endorsed in this race, but it’s flat-out wrong for House Majority PAC to be weighing in when we have multiple strong candidates vying for the nomination,” Merkley wrote on Twitter.

Progressive Democrats have also groused about the late departure of incumbent U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Springfield, in the 4th Congressional District. DeFazio waited until redistricting maps had passed all legal hurdles in the Oregon Supreme Court before announcing he wouldn’t run in 2022.

Parents, addiction recovery advocates call for action

By LYNNE TERRY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

PORTLAND — Moms and others concerned about addiction rallied in Portland on Saturday, April 23, calling for the Oregon Health Authority to take effective and immediate action against substance use.

They included a father who lost his son two years ago after he consumed a counterfeit opioid pill he bought online that was laced with fentanyl.

They included a mom with a 35-year-old son who recently relapsed with a drug addiction.

And they included at least three moms whose children are struggling with addiction on the streets of Portland.

They gathered outside the northeast Portland office of the Oregon Health Authority.

The rally was organized by Mike Marshall, executive director of Oregon Recovers, an advocacy group. He has frequently criticized the state agency’s handling of Measure 110. The ballot measure, passed in November 2020, decriminalized the possession of personal amounts of drugs and was supposed to build recovery facilities throughout the state, pay for harm reduction and point addicts toward treatment. But two years later little of the nearly \$300 million allocated has been spent while Oregon’s addiction crisis continues.

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, alcohol-related deaths have jumped more than 70% and drug overdose fatalities have risen nearly 40%, according to state data. Residential treatment capacity for adults and adolescents has also fallen, and the state has shelved a public education campaign on drinking, Marshall said.

He said the Oregon Health Authority has failed to help an advisory group that is overseeing the distribution of Measure 110 funds. They have a lot of experience with addiction but little experience allocating taxpayer dollars.

“Take action — or resign,” those attending the rally repeatedly chanted, while speakers addressed the need for addiction and recovery services in Oregon.

In recent years, the state

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- Create a coordinated response.
- Make one person accountable.
- Stop poisonings.
- Warn public.
- Rapidly build workforce.
- Release funds.
- Create immediate access to detox.
- Create seven-day respite centers.
- Create immediate access to treatment.
- Create immediate access to recovery housing.
- Aggressively promote recovery.
- Invest in prevention.

consistently has ranked near the top in the prevalence of addiction and at or near the bottom in access to treatment in nationwide surveys by the federal government and mental health groups.

“We need to just find the beds,” Marshall told the group, referring to residential treatment facilities.

One mother, who asked to remain anonymous to protect the identity of her 29-year-old son, told the Capital Chronicle that her son is living on the streets of Portland. He’s been on a waiting list for residential treatment twice — one was a two-month wait and the other for more than six months — but he never entered treatment because he lost the desire.

On the platform, Marshall stood in between two signs with cellphone numbers: one of an unnamed Oregon Health Authority official with responsibility for addiction services and a top health adviser to Gov. Kate Brown. He told the crowd to text those individuals — “be nice,” he said — to ask for immediate action.

Almost immediately, people whipped out their cellphones, punched in the numbers and fired off messages.

Another speaker, Tony Vezina, executive director of 4th Dimension Recovery, a Portland-based recovery group, said the government doesn’t need to create more advisory groups. They are not effective in managing the crisis, he said.

GOP wraps up summit, Dems plan their own

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — There’s political movement in the mountains this week. Republicans are heading out from the shadow of Mount Hood, while Democrats make the trek east of the Cascades.

As Republicans concluded the Dorchester Conference in Welches in Clackamas County last weekend, Democrats are heading to the Oregon Summit in Sunriver Resort Friday, April 29.

The meetings are meant to rally the partisan troops as the primary election moves towards the finish line on May 27 — now just three weeks away.

GOP picks from full field of candidates

Informal straw polls taken of GOP attendees at the Dorchester Conference showed they favor former

Happy Valley Mayor Lori Chavez-DeRemer in the 5th Congressional District that runs from Portland to Bend. Rep. Ron Noble, R-McMinnville, came out on top of a large slate of Republicans in the new 6th Congressional District. Both candidates put out the results on social media over the weekend.

Less was released about the straw poll to choose among the 19 Republicans running for governor. Former Alsea school superintendent Marc Thielman came out on top after multiple rounds, with Portland consultant Bridget Barton placing second.

The straw poll winners were not included in two high-profile debates last week and later this week. The first, held April 21, was co-sponsored by the Bend Bulletin and limited the stage to four candidates who had raised significant funds and

also placed well in larger public opinion polls: former House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby; 2016 GOP governor nominee Bud Pierce of Salem; former Oregon GOP chair Bob Tiernan of Lake Oswego; and Sandy Mayor Stan Pulliam. The same four are set for a debate April 28, co-sponsored by Pamplin Media and KOIN-TV.

Meanwhile, conservative radio personality Lars Larson used the weekend to weigh in with his own endorsement of Barton for governor. He also told listeners they should support Chavez-DeRemer in the 5th district race, and Amy Ryan Courser in the 6th district.

Democrats maneuver into spotlight

Now it’s the Democrats’ turn for strategizing and intrigue at Sunriver Resort south of Bend. The agenda

of the Democratic party’s Oregon Summit also includes a reception for Gov. Kate Brown, who will leave office in January. Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, Secretary of State Shemia Fagan and Treasurer Tobias Read will speak.

Straw polls are also expected following the governor’s candidate forum on May 1.

The Democratic field is just slightly smaller — 15 candidates. Treasurer Read and former House Majority Leader Tina Kotek, D-Portland, are the top fundraisers so far in bids to move into Mahonia Hall, the governor’s mansion in Salem.

But insurgent candidates such as 2018 Independent Party governor nominee Patrick Starnes of Brownsville — running in 2020 as a Democrat — are calling for equal footing in any party-sponsored debates.

COVID-19

Sen. Ron Wyden tests positive for COVID-19

By LYNNE TERRY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

WASHINGTON — Oregon’s senior U.S. senator, Ron Wyden, tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday, April 26.

On Twitter and in a news release, he said the infection was caught during routine testing. He’s experiencing “minor symptoms” and is working from his residence in Washington, D.C., the statements said. He will quarantine according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. It recommends people isolate themselves for five days.

Wyden is 72. He was in

Eastern Oregon last week for virtual town halls and met President Joe Biden when he arrived in Portland on April 21.

A spokesperson, Hank Stern, said Wyden is fully vaccinated and has received two booster shots.

Vice President Kamala Harris, 57, also tested positive for COVID-19 on April 19.

Dozens of Republicans and Democrats in Congress have tested positive for the virus over the past two years. They include House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who tested positive earlier this month and reported no symptoms. She tested positive a day after appearing at a White

House event with President Joe Biden. The California Democrat, 82, also is fully vaccinated.

Members of Congress — Republicans and Democrats — also have become infected with the virus. So have Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Attorney General Merrick Garland. The president’s sister, Valerie Biden Owens, has been infected.

Wyden’s infection coincides with a wave of infections caused by a new variant, B.A. 2, which appears to be the most infectious to date. The variant has become the dominant strain in Oregon, according to Oregon Health

Authority data.

COVID-19 infections have risen in Oregon during the past two weeks, with a seven-day daily average of about 760 known cases. The state only can track reported tests; many people test at home and don’t report the results.

Hospitalizations in Oregon remain low — 135 people are hospitalized with COVID-19. State data show 84% of adults in Oregon have received at least one dose of a vaccine and 45% have received at least one booster dose. A second booster is approved for those aged 50 and over four months after they received the first booster shot.

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