

Forum from 1A

A similar measure banning aerial spraying was adopted by voters in Lincoln County last May.

The decision to remove the measure was mandated by a Lane County Circuit Court decision late last year, after ruling the criteria for the implementation of the measure to be included on the ballot was going to illegally impact more entities than the legislation intended.

On March 7, Judge Karsten Rasmussen of the Lane County Circuit Court upheld a determination of Lane County Clerk Cheryl Betschart that the Freedom from Aerial Spraying of Herbicides Bill of Rights Charter Amendment does not comply with a statutory separate-vote rule. This ruling disallowed the inclusion of the ban on the ballot.

The setback for the measure's proponents was absorbed after months of work gathering the 1,000 signatures of registered voters needed to meet the state requirements for voter sponsored initiatives, ultimately exceeding it by 14,000 signatures.

This earlier determination by the court was not well received by sponsors of the

ban measure, many of whom were at the debate on Friday.

The issue of aerial spraying, and the actions of the commissioners in regard to spraying, was the subject of heated protests by dozens of individuals at the Lane County Board of Commissioners meeting in December.

The County Commissioners were accused by angry voters of turning the initiative process over to the timber industry and discounting the wishes of the electorate.

Some of the audience members from that confrontational meeting were at Friday's debate and were still irritated by the failure to place the ban on the May ballot.

When the forum began, the event moderator, Ralph Nichols, asked questions provided by the public. The questions were gathered in a basket and the candidates answered them alternately.

The candidates first recounted their respective backgrounds and experiences, as well as their differences on certain issues.

Bozievich, seeking reelection for his third term as a county commissioner, was previously an engineer and has been a long-time civil servant.

His record during his tenure in office shows strong support for policies supported by the timber and construction industries. Additionally, his financial contributions reflect the support of Murphy Plywood, Seneca Sawmill and the Wildish Company.

Kent, an educator with no previous political experience, is currently an instructor at Lane Community College.

In contrast to Bozievich, Kent's largest financial contributor is Mountain Rose Herbs.

The experience gap was apparent as the candidates discussed their plans to improve the economy and bring jobs to the area.

"I'm proud to say that the current year's fiscal budget, that I supported, was structurally balanced, without any cuts to services and doing so without using any reserves," Bozievich said. "In addition, we cut the tax rate for the public safety levy. The county has the highest financial rating it has ever had, and that has allowed the county to refinance debt, saving over \$3 million in interest payments over the life of the debt — which is tax payer money."

Kent spoke about increasing tourism and working with RAIN (the Regional

Accelerator and Innovation Network), and then suggested something different than her opponent in regard to financial stability for residents of Lane County.

"Agro-tourism is something I've heard about and we should explore," Kent said. "Some local farmers that went to the Friends of the Farmers meeting the other night were complaining about being held up by Lane County. Because they want to do this new culturally relevant thing, they've got folks that want to come out to the farm — but there are so many rules and permits that are stumbling blocks for them."

Bozievich offered a rebuttal, explaining, "... a lot of the roadblocks to agro-tourism are there because the state wants to protect farmland from commercial development. It's a reflection of those state laws in our city codes that need to be addressed."

He continued, "The county gave a \$50,000 grant to RAIN to start their development project here in Florence, and we have a position in our economic development department that is solely focused on rural economic development."

The question of whether the candidates supported the controversial practice of aerial

spraying prompted widely divergent responses from the candidates.

Bozievich said he believed spraying was an effective part of timber management practices and would "not change practices," he said.

Kent was opposed to spraying.

"I feel we need to look at alternatives to aerial spraying and also look at sustainable forestry practices. There are alternatives to aerial spraying. I'm pragmatic. This stuff is poison," she challenged. "We have Vietnam veterans that have told me that the herbicides are composed of some of the same chemicals as Agent Orange."

This response brought a groan from some in the crowd and the first out-of-order comments of the afternoon, audibly questioning Kent's assertions.

The dichotomy of fact-based responses by Bozievich compared to Kent's more holistic and inclusive approach to topics like road improvement, distribution of tax monies, homelessness and mental health services continued throughout the debate.

Audience response was equally spirited, with occasional applause following answers from both camps. Supporters of both candidates

left the hall discussing amongst themselves the debate and the issues raised during the forum.

Currently, there are 246,244 registered Lane County voters. Should either candidate receive more than 50 percent of the vote this May, they will advance to the general election in November without an opponent.

April 24 is the last day for voters to check their registration for the May 15 Primary Election. Ballots are set to be mailed April 26, and are due back on or before Election Day.

The election will include county candidate filings for the county assessor, which currently has one candidate, Michael Cowles; the West Lane commissioner, which has Bozievich, Hills and Kent as candidates; a Springfield commissioner, which has two candidates; and the East Lane commissioner, which has six candidates.

Countywide, there are several measure filings, but they are limited to voters in the City of Eugene and the fire protection districts of Coburg, Mohawk Valley and McKenzie.

For more information about the Lane County voting process, visit lanecounty.org/elections.

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