

EDITORIAL

Waiting
on the
debates

Several weeks ago we had good reason to believe that Greg Walden, our 10-term congressman, would be debating his Democratic challenger, Jamie McLeod-Skinner of Terrebonne.

But with a little more than a month before ballots are mailed for the Nov. 6 election, we’re not quite so sure any debates will happen.

This would be disappointing.

Back in late July, during the Chief Joseph Days parade in Joseph, McLeod-Skinner challenged Walden to a series of debates.

“I look forward to debating you,” Walden said. “We’ll figure out a schedule that works.”

Justin Discigil, a spokesman for Walden, told us Friday that “we have every intent” of scheduling debates. “We don’t see any reason why we can’t work out something,” Discigil said.

He said there has been no discussion, however, between the two candidates.

McLeod-Skinner proposed a specific slate of three debates, the first of which, set for Aug. 31 in Umatilla County, obviously won’t happen. The two other dates and places she suggested are Oct. 7 in Jackson County and Oct. 22 in Deschutes County.

We understand that as a Democrat in a district where Republican voters outnumber Democrats by about 45,000, McLeod-Skinner probably has more to gain by debates than does Walden, who has easily won re-election nine times, five times with more than 70 percent of the vote.

It would afford her free publicity, if not else — Walden’s campaign budget, at around \$3.2 million in late June, was about 31 times bigger than McLeod-Skinner’s.

But the issue here isn’t about whether Walden or McLeod-Skinner would benefit more from debates — it’s about how voters in the 2nd Congressional District would benefit.

Debates offer voters a unique opportunity to listen to, watch, and, depending on the format, even pose questions to candidates. Speeches and candidate questionnaires and sometimes even advertisements can be useful, too. But only in face-to-face debates can we see how candidates react to spontaneous questions — and to each other’s answers.

We think debates are valuable in any election.

But this year’s contest might be the most competitive during Walden’s tenure in Congress, which dates to 1999. James Foster, a professor emeritus of political science at Oregon State University’s Cascades campus in Bend, said McLeod-Skinner is Walden’s most formidable challenger. Foster believes she could win.

The prospects for debates are intriguing. McLeod-Skinner has driven 35,000 miles around the district talking to voters, and she has emphasized that her positions aren’t those of an orthodox urban progressive. Walden, meanwhile, has two decades of experience in Washington, D.C., to draw on.

Gubernatorial candidates Kate Brown and Knute Buehler have agreed to three debates so far.

We hope Walden and McLeod-Skinner can appear at least once on the same stage.

From the Baker City Herald editorial board. The board consists of editor Jayson Jacoby and reporter Chris Collins.



Your views

School bond: Must we always build something new?

It seems ironic that Irv and Susan Townsend’s letter of Aug. 27 (“Small savings can cover your share of bond”) appears next to an editorial (“State squanders tax dollars.”) I feel like I already pay more than my fair share of taxes to the state of Oregon. I mistakenly thought my contributions, along with every other residents’, were substantial enough to cover our public school needs — even without those magical “lottery dollars.”

I was discussing this bond issue with a good friend, she made the point that when she was growing up and wanted something bad enough she would find a way to save up, cut out unnecessary expenditures, take on extra jobs, find ways to “earn” more ... attempting to sneak into Grandma’s cookie jar never crossed her mind. Proposing to add \$500, or more, to my already healthy property tax bill is more than a little maddening no matter how you choose to sugarcoat it, not even if you break it down to pennies per minute. Do we live in such a disposable society that it is now cheaper to build brand new schools rather than fix or maintain what we have? If you haven’t noticed Baker City is hardly a cheap place to live. Making it any less desirable with even higher property taxes seems counterproductive to encouraging growth. When did it become my job to “find additional dollars?” Why do I need to make changes in my lifestyle? And please save the overused guilt trip, “But what about the the kids? — it is quickly losing its impact. Children are, if anything, resilient. I recall navigating between modular classrooms and 50-year-old hallways and was still

Letters to the editor

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educated without being traumatized. Meanwhile I am watching two people breathe new life into a decades old school. Not once have they asked me for money. Instead they are using available resources, grants, fundraisers, contributions, community participation, volunteers and other “old school” methods. Strange concept, huh?

I have always been open to giving but “fiscal responsibility” does not equal reaching into my pockets whenever a perceived need arises. Peace to all!

Mike Meyer
Baker City

McLeod-Skinner a better choice than Walden

Republican advisor David Winston’s recent op-ed called attention to the yawning gap that now exists between the needs of American workers and retirees vs. the understanding and mindset of those in power (“Elites failing to listen to citizens,” Sept. 3).

This immediately brings to mind our U.S. representative.

I believe that Rep. Greg Walden, chair of the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee, has a moral obligation to lead in answering our country’s

most pressing needs: relief from global warming, relief from widespread poverty, and relief from incredibly expensive healthcare. Instead, he obediently follows the dictates of his political bigwigs, remaining either silent on or minimizing these key issues, thus betraying us by withholding the promise of his powerful committee.

As the op-ed pointed out, there are millions of frustrated and despondent people living paycheck to paycheck. In Baker County, 42 percent of working families cannot make ends meet.

I invite my fellow readers to go beyond Rep. Walden’s glib and superficial words on issues of most importance to us. Please take a look at all he’s ignoring, like the causes and consequences of global warming, 40 years of stagnant wages and growing inequality, and the millions who now live without health coverage.

And then take a look at his outrageous, budget-busting tax cut for the already wealthy.

In vibrant contrast, Jamie McLeod-Skinner, his opponent in the November election, has traveled 35,000 miles around the 2nd Congressional District over the past 14 months, listening to people’s needs and forming meaningful responses ... which Walden now refuses to debate.

Please look up Jamie on Facebook and on the internet. I bet you will conclude, as I have, that we urgently need to replace Walden with this empathetic, energetic, intelligent woman, who places top priority on the vital issues that confront us.

Marshall McComb
Baker City

GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson is a man on a mission. He wants his office to do all it can to increase state government’s transparency, accountability and integrity, and the audits his office does of state agencies are a part of that effort.

Now he is making audits even more useful by issuing follow-up reports on how well agencies are doing implementing the recommendations auditors include in their initial reports.

It’s a smart move. Too often agencies in and out of state government make big plans to improve what they do and then don’t get very far in putting those plans to work when everyday business gets in the way of change.

Richardson already asks agencies to agree or disagree with each recommendation included in the audit. He also asks that they include a date by which they plan to have proposed changes in place. Most agency heads agree with what auditors suggest, though not always with every recommendation. And most submit reasonable timelines for getting the work done. The new reports measure how well those timelines are being met. They’ll be available to the public on the secretary of state’s website.

Richardson’s office issued its first follow-up report Wednesday, taking a look at how well the state’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission is doing adopting recommendations from an audit completed in December

2017. The audit itself dealt with HECC’s procurement procedures and made five recommendations, from hiring new staff to better training and cleaning up a backlog of work on procurement contracts and agreements.

While HECC has not completed all the changes suggested, it continues to work to do so, and none has been simply shoved into a closet. That’s good news.

Although no one has said so directly, making the follow-up reports public helps in another way. Surely no agency that’s been under unpleasant scrutiny for the way it operates wants to see a follow-up report that says it isn’t working hard to fix its problems. Richardson’s follow-up reports are likely to cut that to a minimum.

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Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

