

Bentz running for Walden's seat; Buehler, others ponder campaign

From staff and wire reports

Ontario Republican Cliff Bentz, who represents Baker County in the Oregon Senate, announced Tuesday that he will seek to replace Greg Walden, who said Monday he will not run for re-election in 2020.



Bentz

Bentz has served in the state Senate for almost two years, and he previously served 10 years in the Oregon House of Representatives. "Congressman Walden has done (and is still doing) a great job as Oregon's only Republican Congressman," Bentz said in a press release. "It was a surprise to learn that he has decided not to run again.

"The challenges in Washington, D.C., are great," Bentz said. "However, based upon my years of working as a rancher, farmer, attorney, and as member of the Republican party successfully passing legislation in a Legislature controlled by Democrats, I feel confident that I can adequately represent the people of the 2nd Congressional District of Oregon," Bentz said he will be establishing a congressional campaign team over the next several weeks. His campaign web-

site is: <https://www.cliffbentz.com>

Bentz isn't the only Republican who has expressed an interest in replacing Walden as representative for the 2nd District, which includes all of Oregon east of the Cascades and parts of Jackson and Josephine counties in Oregon's southwest corner.

Knute Buehler, a former state lawmaker who was the Republican nominee for Oregon governor in 2018, announced on Twitter that he's considering seeking his party's nomination for Walden's seat.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reports that former state Sen. Jason Atkinson of Central Point also is considering a run.

Buehler, of Bend, is a surgeon by training and served two terms in the Oregon House of Representatives, after first winning election in 2014. He ran unsuccessfully for secretary of state in 2012 against Kate Brown, and Brown defeated him again in his 2018 bid for governor.

Buehler is fiscally conservative but on social issues, he is much more moderate than Walden. Buehler is pro-abortion rights and a champion of gay marriage.

Like many Republicans, Buehler was

surprised by Walden's announcement. In a telephone interview on Tuesday evening, Buehler said he is exploring a run for Congress but won't impose a deadline on when he'll jump in or stay out of the race.

"I want to make sure I am not rushed into making the decision," Buehler said. "I have no specific time marker for making a choice."

It has been just under a year since Buehler lost the governor's race to Brown. But that campaign started in August 2017 and was demanding on his wife, Patty, and his adult son and daughter, Buehler said.

"I really need to talk to Patty and my children," Buehler said. "You have to be all-in if you are going to do something like this."

Buehler said he has already had conversations with people who backed his past campaigns to gauge whether a run for Walden's seat is a good idea.

"I have supporters throughout Congressional District 2 and around the state," he said. "I value their opinions. This is a really important decision for me personally and for the future of the state. This is a position that can do a lot of good for people."

Baker City Police investigating graffiti

By Chris Collins
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Baker City Police are investigating damage to five Baker City business buildings and one home site that were vandalized with spray paint over the past week.

Officer Jonathan Parsons noted graffiti of a similar pattern sprayed at the six sites, Lt. Ty Duby said today.

Crimes of first-degree criminal mischief are being

investigated at these businesses: AmeriTitle, 2245 Main St.; Club 24, 1924 Broadway St., the building that houses the Baker City Herald, Styles R Us salon, Calvary Chapel Church and A Therapeutic Massage at 1668 Resort St.; Bella, 2023 Main St.; and the Baker Tower, 1705 Main St.

Private property at 2580 First St., owned by Charles and Candice Hofmann, also was damaged.

BUYING

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Cleanup and minor remodeling is planned in the spring, and Baker Charter Schools expects to be in the building by June, Huld said.

The online schools, which have 60 students and 25 staff locally, will move to that building from the current location at North Baker School, 2725 Seventh St.

"The building will better meet our needs, allowing us to more efficiently utilize space for both faculty and staff," Huld stated in a press release.

Baker Charter Schools has eight locations across Oregon currently serving 2,500 students statewide. The main office, which contains financial and student records for the entire state, is housed in Baker City.

Huld said the Ellingson building has office spaces as opposed to the classrooms at North Baker, which will better meet the needs of Baker Charter Schools.

Baker Charter Schools is its own entity with its own budget and board of directors, although it works in partnership with Baker School District.

Huld said the school is using funds from its savings to purchase the building, not tapping into its operating funds.

Baker Charter Schools consists of two separate charter schools — the Baker Web Academy, an online or textbook-based K-12 school, and Baker Early College, which allows students in grades 10-12 to complete high school and start their college experience early.

More information is available at <https://bakarcharters.org/about-us>

Baker School District Superintendent Mark Witty spoke in favor of the Baker Charter Schools' purchase of the Ellingson building.

"We appreciate the strong relationship that we have with Baker Charter Schools and believe this purchase will be advantageous in providing the operational space necessary to continue to grow the service model even further in the State of Oregon," Witty stated in the press release.

Arctic air just misses October record

■ Low of 3 degrees at the airport; coldest October reading on record is 2, set in 2006

The frost, it seems reasonable to conclude, has permeated the pumpkin.

Certainly any squash exposed overnight in Baker City acquired more than a superficial scrim of ice.

The temperature dipped to 3 degrees this morning at the Baker City Airport.

That not only broke the previous record low for Oct. 30 of 9 degrees, set in 2006, but it's also the second-coldest temperature ever recorded during October at the airport, where records date to 1945.

The coldest October day was Oct. 31, 2006, when the low was 2 degrees.

Today is also the second straight daily low temperature record at the airport.

Tuesday's low of 6 degrees broke the previous record for Oct. 29 of 9 degrees, set in 1971.

Today's record likely will be the last for a while, as the National Weather Service

is forecasting a gradual warming trend through the weekend.

Conditions for Thursday's trick-or-treating event from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. in downtown Baker City should be clear with light winds, and temperatures dropping from around 40 to the mid-30s.



Gambleton

Baker teacher honored

Stacy Gambleton, a fourth-grade teacher at South Baker Intermediate School, received an Apple Appreciation Award from Community Bank. The bank collected nominations for teachers in each town with a Community Bank branch.

Among the entries for Gambleton: "She is so great with the kids — kind, patient and loves everyone." "She is the best teacher ever!" Gambleton chose the Fourth-Grade Book Club to receive the \$200 donation that goes with her award.

WALDEN

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Tom Van Diepen of Baker City, who is a precinct committee person for the Baker County Republican Party, said when he heard Monday that Walden would not seek re-election he initially felt the same trepidation that Jones has about whether the 2nd District will remain Oregon's lone GOP stronghold.

But Tuesday afternoon Van Diepen said that, after further reflection, he's not as worried about Republicans losing the seat.

"Anything can happen, but I don't see a progressive or a liberal making much headway in Eastern Oregon," Van Diepen said.

Although registered Republicans outnumber Democrats in the District by more than 46,000 — 189,983 Republicans as of September, compared with 143,353 registered Democrats — the GOP's percentage has been decreasing over the past five years.

In September 2014, two months before Walden was elected to his ninth term, Republicans accounted for 40% of the 2nd District's electorate, compared with Democrats' 29.2%.

The percentage of registered Republicans dropped to 37.1% in September 2016, to 34% in September 2018, and to 33.2% this September.

Democrats have also lost ground during that period, going from 29.2% of the District's voters in 2014 to 28.5% in 2016, 25.8% in 2018 and 25.1% this September.

The largest change among the 2nd District's electorate during that period has been the increase in the number of voters who aren't affiliated with any party, a trend due in part to Oregon's "Motor Voter" law, which took effect in 2016.

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— Tom Van Diepen, precinct committee member, Baker County Republican Party

That law automatically registers people to vote if, after visting a DMV to renew a driver's license or some other transaction, they fail to fill out a form declining to be registered.

The Motor Voter law has added hundreds of thousands of people to Oregon's voter rolls, but a majority of these newly registered voters have not declared a party affiliation.

The result is the percentage of non-affiliated voters has swelled. In the 2nd District the non-affiliated percentage has risen from 22.7% in 2014 to 27% in 2016, 32.9% in 2018 and this September, for the first time, there are more non-affiliated voters in the District (34.6%) than registered Republicans (33.2%).

"The District is changing," Jones said.

She points to Walden's most recent election victory, in November 2018 when he defeated Democratic

challenger Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

Walden won 56.3% of the votes to McLeod-Skinner's 39.4% — the smallest margin of victory in his congressional career.

His previous low was his first race when, as a non-incumbent, he won 61.5% of the votes against Democrat Kevin Campbell.

In Walden's subsequent re-elections prior to 2018, he received between 66.8% and 73.9% of the votes.

Jones noted that in 2018, for the first time, Walden lost in Deschutes County, where McLeod-Skinner, who lives in that county, received about 100 more votes. Walden won Deschutes County by more than 32,000 votes in 2016.

(Walden also lost his home county, Hood River, to McLeod-Skinner, 6,735 to 3,578.)

Walden dominated in Baker County, with 6,004 votes to McLeod-Skinner's 1,894.

Van Diepen credits McLeod-Skinner for running a strong campaign, but he doesn't believe her competitive race against Walden means the 2nd District is on the brink of joining Oregon's other districts on the Democratic side of the aisle.

"She worked hard for those votes" he said of McLeod-Skinner.

In a video he posted on his

"I think the District should feel very grateful for the work Greg has put in. It's been an honor to work with him. He's one of the good guys."

— Suzan Ellis Jones, chair, Baker County Republican Party

website Monday announcing his pending retirement, Walden said he is "confident I would earn the support of 2nd District voters for another term."

The Cook Political Report rates the district as one of the 160 most "solid" Republican House districts in the 2020 election. The winner of the Republican primary in May would be the likely front-runner to win the seat in November.

Jones believes the 2nd District has benefited from Walden's seniority. He is the ranking Republican member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

"Greg is right up there in leadership," Jones said. "A freshman coming in is not going to have the same clout that Greg has. That's a given."

Van Diepen, by contrast, said he doesn't mind that Walden's replacement will lack seniority.

Van Diepen said he sup-

ports term limits for Congress — even a single term — because he believes that the longer lawmakers serve, the more likely they are to negotiate to advance their position rather than to focus on representing their constituents.

Ultimately, Van Diepen said his chief concern is that Walden's replacement will be a true conservative, regardless of the candidate's party affiliation.

Although Jones acknowledges that some of her fellow Republicans have at times criticized Walden, saying he isn't sufficiently conservative to satisfy them, she believes Walden has effectively represented what she sees as the District's conservative values.

"I'm a conservative, and to me Greg is a conservative," Jones said. "He is a constitutionalist."

Van Diepen agrees. "I think he's as good as any of them," he said of Walden.

Van Diepen does believe, though, that Walden was most effective in his first term.

Jones said Walden played a vital role in lobbying President Donald Trump to pardon

Dwight and Steven Hammond, the Harney County ranchers who were sentenced to five years in prison after being convicted of lighting fires.

Jones also believes Walden has consistently represented his constituents regarding management and use of natural resources on public land, which makes up more than half of many counties in the 2nd District, including Baker County.

Walden has sponsored legislation intended to increase the rate of logging on federal land and potentially reduce the risk of wildfires.

Jones contends Walden's support of such bills has benefited not only the 2nd District but all of Oregon.

Although she concedes she's disappointed that Walden won't seek another term in Congress, Jones, who said she speaks with Walden on a nearly weekly basis, said she understands, and respects, his decision.

"I think Greg made a good decision for himself and (his wife) Mylene," Jones said. "I think the District should feel very grateful for the work Greg has put in. It's been an honor to work with him. He's one of the good guys."

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