

Local & State

OREGON'S 2ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Free-for-all in Congress race

By Gary A. Warner
The (Bend) Bulletin

Jamie McLeod-Skinner said Thursday she's in the 2020 race for Oregon secretary of state to stay, despite the surprise retirement of her former political foe, U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River.

The Democrat from Terbonne admitted the sudden chance at the seat she ran for in 2018 was enticing.

But after a quick political gut-check, she signaled she would stay the course.

"At this time, the best way I can serve my fellow Oregonians is as secretary of state — I will continue to seek that office," McLeod-Skinner said.



McLeod-Skinner

McLeod-Skinner's decision and Walden retiring without an heir apparent has turned the 2020 race for the sprawling 2nd Congressional District seat into a free-for-all among Democrats, as well as Republicans.

McLeod-Skinner ran an energetic campaign against Walden in 2018, winning Deschutes County and holding the veteran Republican congressman to 56% of the vote overall. But Walden's margin of victory of 17% shows how tough it is for Democrats to win in the district.

The day after the 2018 election, McLeod-Skinner told followers on her Facebook page to save the yard signs for a rerun in 2020. But she also talked about a possible statewide bid.

McLeod-Skinner filed to run for secretary of state in September and staked out a centrist spot geographically and politically.

"There's a sense that we need to connect with all the people in the state, bridge the rural-urban divide," McLeod-Skinner said in September. "There's excitement about the idea of a rural Democrat as secretary of state."

Since then, Rep. Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, the former House majority leader and Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, an Emmy-winning television reporter-turned-Salem political heavyweight, filed to run for secretary of state.

Then came Walden's announcement Monday that he wouldn't seek a 12th term.

Walden's decision gave McLeod-Skinner pause.

Asked Monday if she was considering a switch to the congressional race, McLeod-Skinner didn't say no.

"Since his announcement, I've received a lot of calls, and I am in the process of returning them," she said.

But on Thursday, she said she is staying the course.

That leaves Walden's seat up for grabs next year, with a scrum of veteran politicians vying to replicate Walden's move from Salem to Washington, D.C. It's a plum for Republicans — the closest thing to a sure bet in a state where Republicans have been shut out of top jobs in recent years. Both senators, the other four representatives of the House, the governor, attorney general



EO Media Group

Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, greets a veteran before a town hall in Boardman earlier this year. Walden, the top Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee and Oregon's only Republican in Congress, announced last month that he will retire in January 2021.

"Incumbency is the single strongest factor in determining favorites in elections. Walden's retirement removes that factor."

— Jim Moore, political science professor

and treasurer are Democrats.

Only Secretary of State Bev Clarno, the former House speaker from Redmond, is a Republican. She was appointed by Brown after the death early this year of the incumbent, Dennis Richardson. She says she will not run for the office in 2020.

Kevin Hoar, spokesman for the Oregon Republican Party, said the lack of a favored candidate to replace Walden is no mistake.

"GOP primaries tend to be more open and competitive than the insider, pre-arranged successions you tend to see on the Democrat side," Hoar said.

Republicans have an 8% voter registration edge over Democrats in Walden's district. District voters haven't elected a Democratic representative since Al Ullman in 1980. The Cook Political Report rates the district as "solid Republican" for the 2020 election.

Despite the odds, 2020 is the best year in a generation for a Democrat to run, said Jim Moore, a political science professor at Pacific University who specializes in Oregon politics.

"Incumbency is the single strongest factor in determining favorites in elections," Moore said. "Walden's retirement removes that factor."

Moore said it will be tough for any candidate to have the name recognition and drawing power throughout a district that covers two thirds of the state in the east, central and southern parts of Oregon. It's just under 70,000 square miles with 831,000 residents. The biggest city is Bend with

Oregon's 2nd Congressional District

- Size: 69,491 square miles
- Population: 831,343
- Median age: 42.4 years
- Race: 90% white, 2% Native American, 8% all others
- Hispanic ethnicity (all races): 14.2%
- Unemployment: 6.2%
- Median household income: \$56,358
- High school graduation rate: 88.8%
- College graduation rate: 26%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey

about 98,000 people.

Walden, who comes from the far north-central part of the district in Hood River, served a decade in the state Legislature before shifting to Congress. Over two decades, he's become the GOP's political glue that held together the vast district.

Republicans running or likely running for the seat are best known in only one compass point within the district.

Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, has officially announced he wants the seat.

Much of the eastern and central portions of state Senate District 30 that he represents, including Baker County, overlap Walden's turf. But the congressional district's biggest population centers, Jackson County (Medford, Ashland) and Deschutes County (Bend, Redmond), are outside of Bentz's district.

Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, widely mentioned as a candidate, has a northern slice of Walden's district. He's the new House deputy minority leader in Salem.

Jason Atkinson told the Medford Mail-Tribune last week that he is considering a run.

Born in Ashland, Atkinson represented southern Oregon districts in the House and Senate for 14 years, opting not to seek reelection in 2012.

He finished third in the 2006 GOP primary for governor. Since leaving office, he's been active in Klamath River water issues and attempts to

bring big league baseball to Portland.

In the center is Knute Buehler, of Bend, the former state representative and 2018 GOP nominee for governor. He said this week he is looking into the race, but has no timetable of when he would decide.

As a moderate on hot-button social issues like abortion and LGBTQ rights, Buehler's problem could be winning the closed GOP primary, with a small and conservative pool of voters.

Though he lost both races, Moore said Buehler's name recognition from the 2012 secretary of state and 2018 governor's race may be the next best thing to incumbency.

"Knute Buehler has, in effect, won Congressional District 2 four times already — primary and general in 2012, primary and general in 2018," Moore said.

White City online retailer Mark Roberts, who ran for the Independent Party nomination in 2018, is back for 2020 as a Republican.

Democrats John R. Holm, a Medford caregiver, and Raz Mason, a political activist from The Dalles, have entered the race for Walden's seat. Mason was one of the Democrats who lost the 2018 primary to McLeod-Skinner.

Another 2018 candidate, Jennifer Naehring, a physician from Bend, has been mentioned by some Democratic activists. More candidates are expected to emerge.

After the primary, McLeod-Skinner said she is ready to help the Democrat in the congressional race with know-how gained from traveling 45,000 miles around the district and raising \$1.3 million.

"Last year, we built a political infrastructure," she said, adding "I will continue to support the development of their leadership."

Walden cited no specific reason he is retiring and said that if he were to seek reelection, he was sure he would win.

But Democrats were quick to credit McLeod-Skinner's 2018 race and growing Democratic voter registration in Central Oregon for helping Walden make up his mind.

"I am sure it was embarrassing losing his home county, as well as the largest county in his district last cycle" said Jason Burge, chair of the Deschutes County Democratic Party. "2020 would have been even worse for him."

As for Walden's future, he has specifically said he will run for no other office — at least in 2020.

Broadcasting & Cable, a website covering the television industry, wrote on Oct. 28 that Walden, who has a pre-political background in radio, would be a strong candidate to become president of the National Association of Broadcasters. The group is led by former U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Oregon.

Walden is 62, by no means old by political standards. Moore, the Pacific University political science professor, says he will keep an eye on Walden approaching 2022 when term limits will require Brown to step aside.

"As someone who has watched Greg Walden's career for decades, I will not truly believe that he is done with politics until I see him not file for the 2022 governor's race," Moore said.

Wheel failure led to jet car crash in August

The (Bend) Bulletin

A front-wheel mechanical failure as her jet car approached 550 mph apparently caused the August crash that killed speed racer Jessi Combs, according to the Harney County Sheriff's Office.

The failure occurred Aug. 27 as the car, powered by a jet engine, sped across the Alvord Desert in southeast Oregon, according to a news release from the sheriff's office. Combs, 36, was attempting to break the women's land speed record of 512 mph set in 1976 by Kitty O'Neil.

Based on evidence collected at the scene and recovered by her North American Eagle Racing Team, the failure was most likely caused by hitting an object in the desert about 180 miles southeast of Bend, according to the news release dated Sept. 17. The failure led to the collapse of the front wheel.

Combs died from blunt force trauma to the head that occurred before a fire engulfed the race vehicle after the crash, the news release stated.

Widely known in the niche sport of jet-car racing, Combs holds the record as the fastest woman on four wheels — O'Neil piloted a three-wheeled vehicle — for a 398 mph performance in 2013 and had driven even faster in follow-up runs, but mechanical problems prevented those from making the record books. She was known by fans as the "fastest woman on four wheels."

Combs was born in Rapid City, South Dakota, and lived in Long Beach, California. She turned down a full scholarship to interior design school to travel North America, settling in Denver to start a snowboarding career, according to her website. She studied collision/refinishing, chassis fabrication, street rod fabrication and trim/upholstery at WyoTech, graduating at the top of her class. Combs also took up metal working, leather craft and photography, her website stated.

With her education in automotive design and fabrication, she appeared as a host on Spike TV's "Xtreme 4X4" before a freak accident with a piece of heavy machinery broke her spine.

OPEN TO COMMUNITY

Sponsored by Baker Branch AAUW

For More Information, call Mickey @ 541-519-0695



Your Family Deserves The **BEST** Technology... Value... TV!...

\$59.99 MONTH for 24 months

Add High Speed Internet **\$14.95**/mo.

190 Channels America's Top 120

CALL TODAY Save 20% Off! 1-866-373-9175

LeafFilter GUTTER PROTECTION NO MORE GUTTER CLEANING, OR YOUR MONEY BACK - GUARANTEED!

0% FINANCING AND 15% OFF SENIOR & MILITARY DISCOUNTS

FREE ESTIMATES! 1-855-536-8838

Promo Number: 285

Mon-Thurs: 8am-11pm, Fri-Sat: 8am-5pm, Sun: 2pm-8pm EST

Dental Insurance Physicians Mutual Insurance Company

Call for your FREE Information Kit!

Get help paying dental bills and keep more money in your pocket.

1-877-599-0125

www.dental50plus.com/25