Baker County Commission: Position 1

Loran Joseph

Loran Joseph is running against incumbent Bruce Nichols for a four-year seat on the Baker County Board of Commissioners.

Ballots for the May 19 primary will be mailed Wednesday, April 29. Because there are just two candidates for the office, the one who receives the most votes in the May 19 election will be elected and take office starting in January 2021, County Clerk Stefanie Kirby said.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Age: 39

I graduated from Baker High School in 1998, and earned a bachelor of science degree in Psychology from the University of Oregon in 2006. I worked in the hospitality industry during college and was the general manager of the Days Inn in Eugene when my wife (Jenny Mowe) and I decided to move back to Baker City in 2007 to take over the family business of building doors and windows. The 2008 recession negatively impacted the housing and building industries to the extent we shifted into the renewable energy business and built a wind farm in Lime near Huntington. Jenny and I have two sons, ages 12 and 6, who were both born here in Baker City. Since 2010 I have helped her create a phenomenal business, Sweet Wife Baking, and we are in the process of expanding into a historic building.

PREVIOUS PUBLIC SERVICE OR PERTINENT VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

- Mayor of Baker City: 2019 – present
- Baker City Councilor: 2016 – 2019
- Baker City Budget Board: 2017 - present
- Baker County Transient Lodging Tax Commission: 2017 – present
- Baker City Parks Board: 2017 – present
- Lane County Transient Lodging Tax Commission: 2007

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO RUN FOR THIS SEAT ON THE COUNTY COMMISSION?

Baker County needs to bridge the gap between the older establishment and the working families that will be taking over ranches, businesses, farms, and the workforce over the next few years. The relationships that I have built in these sectors will allow me to be an approachable point of contact for the citizens of Baker County. I believe that our economic development will be dependent upon creating a business climate and quality of life that appeals to the working families that will be the largest drivers of our economy, and that I can represent these interests while protecting the legacies that have made Baker County such a great place to live and work for generations. Baker County needs to work harder to bring back recent graduates who are ready to settle down and attract a younger workforce to fill the vacant employment positions that will be available when the economy reopens. I promise to bring all of my energy, work ethic, and experience to bear for the benefit of the entire county.

IF ELECTED, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR TOP THREE PRIORITIES DURING YOUR TENURE?

1. Revamp economic development.

We need to better evaluate and hold accountable contractors if we hire them for economic development. It is more likely that a lack of funding will eliminate the possibility of hiring, requiring the Economic Development Committee to create new programs and policies for the limited funds we will have. It will be imperative that all of the county is represented there by the business community. The tourism, agriculture, retail, medical, manufacturing, construction, and other industries have all been hurt by the impacts of COVID-19. Our focus cannot be narrow and our tools cannot be limited. If existing ordinances need to be changed in order to pursue new strategies we need to make those changes quickly.

2. Balance the budget

We know for a fact that revenue from the Oregon Lottery, Transient Lodging Tax, gas taxes, liquor taxes, and other sources will be drastically reduced. We will need to make the hard decisions that balance the needs of the community with what we can afford. New sources of income may not be feasible as almost our entire population will be hurting from the impacts of COVID-19 and the associated shutdown.

3. Bring a sense of urgency.

We cannot continue the economic development policies we have had in place for the last four years. During an exceptional period of growth in our national economy, Baker County saw little of those benefits. Neighboring communities that we are in direct competition with have made large investments that improved their quality of life and economic base while we maintained our status quo. We will need to make strides as quickly as possible in order to compete for the jobs and opportunities that will be available when Oregon begins to reopen.

WHAT ARE YOUR TWO BIGGEST CONCERNS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON THE COUNTY, AND HOW WOULD YOU PROPOSE TO DEAL WITH THOSE?

Firstly, let me state how proud I am of Baker County. We have come together to protect each other and stop the spread of disease admirably. We have managed to prevent a single diagnosed case of COVID-19 from occurring here at the time I write this. That's 66 negative tests. The toll of these actions has been heavy. The incredible number of layoffs and businesses closed, children unable to play together or go to school, people afraid to go in the grocery store, the anxiety that stems from the financial insecurity staring so many of us in the face; these are consequences that feel unnecessary in this moment to many people. However, history and the experiences in other countries show that if we go back to normal too soon the virus can take hold quickly and have a devastating effect. We need to continue to protect our vulnerable populations until vaccinations or herd immunity exist. The Baker County commissioners have created a reopening plan based on input from local doctors that we can follow once the state approves it. There are many unknowns currently and our decisions need to be based on the best science that is available with input from professionals. My biggest fear is that we let our guard down and the virus overwhelms our hospital. It is important that we continue to stay united and follow the guidelines in the reopening plan in order to protect our family, friends, and neighbors. As a commissioner I will work with the health department and all the cities to ensure that our county follows the guidelines in the reopening plan and stays safe.

The economic impacts and the missed months of education time for our children are costs that may never be recovered. I don't have the answers at my fingertips and there might not be any good ones. What I can promise is that I will do everything I can to try and mitigate the negative effects while working to restore our industries. We are lucky to have a diverse economy that I believe will bounce back quickly once we begin the reopening process. We have excellent resources in the county, industry leaders that we should enlist the help of to steer the county's response effectively. I don't believe that we should react in a top down fashion — every community and industry is different and we need to hear from them to know what they need and what they think will be helpful.

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