

Local & State

EO Media Group Sponsors Forums For 2nd Congressional District Candidates

7 Republicans talk virus, economy

By Kyle Spurr
The (Bend) Bulletin

Seven Republican candidates for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District came together Saturday for a virtual forum.

The candidates included Jason Atkinson, Cliff Bentz, Knute Buehler, Jimmy Crumpacker, Travis Fager, Justin Livingston and Jeff Smith.

Four other candidates did not participate: David Campbell, Glenn Carey Jr., Kenneth Mendenbach, and Mark Roberts.

A total of 16 candidates — five Democrats and 11 Republicans — are running for the congressional seat that opened when Republican U.S. Rep. Greg Walden decided not to seek re-election. Walden has served the district since 1998.

Each party's top vote-getter in the May 19 primary election will advance to the general election in November. The candidates represent all corners of Oregon's 2nd Congressional District, which covers all of Eastern Oregon and the Medford area.

At the forum Saturday — hosted by EO Media Group and livestreamed without an audience due to the COVID-19 pandemic — the seven candidates shared their views on a range of topics such as health care, the economy and the country's response to the pandemic.

Each candidate agreed rebuilding America's economy from the COVID-19 crisis is a top priority.

Atkinson, 49, a business consultant from Central Point who served in the Oregon Legislature for 14 years, said local communities should be able to decide when to reopen businesses and lift social distancing guidelines.

"I believe the decisions should be made locally, and the governor should allow us to do that, and people should be allowed to go back outside," Atkinson said.

"I believe the decisions should be made locally, and people should be allowed to go back outside."

— Jason Atkinson



"They need to be allowed to go forward more quickly."

— Cliff Bentz, talking about allowing rural counties to reopen their economies



"We need a full scale international investigation to determine exactly how this virus started."

— Knute Buehler



"We need to get people back to work. That is critical."

— Jimmy Crumpacker



"We want candidates that are fluent in middle class reality."

— Travis Fager



"I'm the only person that actually is an elected official and who is making decisions on how we are opening our area."

— Justin Livingston



"The reason why our health care costs keep going up and up is there are too few providers and too much demand for their services"

— Jeff Smith



Atkinson also took time at the forum to highlight issues facing military veterans, whom he said are an overlooked population. He said he's dedicated to making sure veterans have the services they need.

"It's an issue that is constant and for me that will be a priority," Atkinson said.

Bentz, 68, an Ontario farmer, attorney and former state legislator, said it is important not to open businesses too soon during the pandemic, or people won't feel safe visiting them.

He described the state's plan to reopen businesses as a one-size fits all approach that doesn't account for the rural counties with minimal cases of the virus.

"They need to be allowed to go forward more quickly," Bentz said.

The candidate who wins will need to travel through the district to find out exactly how the virus affected residents, Bentz said.

"Let's go out and find out what people need," he said.

Buehler, 55, an orthopedic surgeon who represented Bend in the state House until an unsuccessful

run for governor in 2018, said he has a set plan to address the district's recovery from the virus.

He calls it the five Ts: Trim the data to find any areas with a cluster of cases. Have the capability to test people and to treat people. Trace people who might have contacted someone with the virus. And toggle back and forth between more and less social distancing.

"I would love to go to Washington, D.C., and help implement that kind of plan," Buehler said.

Buehler said he is suspicious of the virus's origins in the Chinese wet markets and would support Congress calling for an investigation.

"We need to hold China and the World Health Organization accountable for what happened here," Buehler said. "We need a full scale international investigation to determine exactly how this virus started."

Crumpacker, 41, a commodities trader from Tumalo, said his main goal is to reopen an economy shut

down by the pandemic.

"We need to get people back to work," Crumpacker said. "That is critical."

An important part of supporting the U.S. economy is making sure medical supplies are made domestically and not overseas, Crumpacker said.

"We are seeing the impact of the last few decades of outsourcing," he said. "We need to bring them back."

Fager, 48, a La Grande resident and manager of a commercial radio station, was the 11th and last candidate to file for the election. Fager wanted to join the race to support people in the middle class who he personally relates to, especially through the pandemic, he said.

"We want candidates that are fluent in middle class reality," Fager said.

As a former wildland firefighter, Fager said he would like to see better forest management practices that help prevent wildfires.

"I was a firefighter," Fager said. "I know what it's like to stand on

the fire line and stand between the fire and the resources."

Livingston, 42, a real estate broker and Bend City Councilor, said he is already working on ways to reopen the local economy in his position as a city councilor.

"I'm the only person that actually is an elected official and who is making decisions on how we are opening our area," Livingston said.

One way to support the economy through the pandemic is to reduce federal regulations that affect businesses and banks, Livingston said.

"We need to support business," he said. "We need to look at reducing regulations to get business back up and open."

Smith, 57, a computer programmer from the small Union County town of Elgin, said the main issue he is focused on is reducing the cost of health care. Smith said there are too few doctors and nurses in hospitals. If more are trained and hired, then people have more opportunities to access health care, he said.

"The reason why our health care costs keep going up and up is there are too few providers and too much demand for their services," Smith said.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, Smith described the government's response as a complete overreach that caused unnecessary strain on the economy.

"We have trampled upon people's civil liberties in the process," Smith said.

Democratic candidates criticize Trump's handling of pandemic, discuss aid for farmers

By Kyle Spurr
The (Bend) Bulletin

Four candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District gathered virtually Friday evening for an online forum.

The candidates included: Nick Heuertz, a 48-year-old Central Point resident and a business consultant; John Holm, a 51-year-old licensed Realtor and political strategist from Medford; Alex Spenser, a 55-year-old writer and performance coach from Klamath Falls; and Chris Vaughn, a 54-year-old Bend resident and specialty food sales representative.

A fifth candidate, Jack Howard of La Grande, did not participate.

They took turns answering questions about why they are running in the May 19 primary election during the forum, which was hosted by EO Media Group and livestreamed without an audience due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are 16 candidates — five Democrats and 11 Republicans — running for

"The national leadership seems to be putting a price on life in order to keep the economy going."

— Nick Heuertz



"The very most important thing is to end the divisiveness we all feel on a visceral level."

— Alex Spenser



the congressional seat that opened when Republican U.S. Rep. Greg Walden decided not to seek reelection after serving since 1998.

Oregon's 2nd Congressional District is the largest of the state's five districts and is the seventh largest district in the nation, covering all of Eastern Oregon and the Medford area.

At the forum Friday, the Democratic candidates laid out their priorities for the district, especially how they plan to help lead the country through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Heuertz said a way to keep the economy running through

the pandemic is to invest in infrastructure, which can create new jobs in renewable energy. He envisions more people working to improve power grids as well as roads and bridges.

"It's about spending the money correctly, investing in the planet and the people," Heuertz said. "If we invest in our society, our economy will grow."

Heuertz, like the other candidates, criticized the Trump administration's response to the pandemic.

"The national leadership seems to be putting a price on life in order to keep the

"This coronavirus showed what we have is not anywhere close to what we need."

— John Holm



"Let's get back to family farming. It's better for the animals. It's better for not spreading disease."

— Chris Vaughn



economy going," Heuertz said. "It's wrong ethically and economically."

Holm said the pandemic has revealed several problems in the region, such as unreliable internet for businesses and students, people struggling to afford health care and businesses worrying about their future.

"This coronavirus showed what we have is not anywhere close to what we need," Holm said.

Holm specifically wants to support local farms and connect them with restaurants.

"We are going to have to find ways to help the farmers

that are not going to get their produce back and sold," Holm said. "We are going to have to find solutions to help these people."

Spenser said no matter the topic, COVID-19 or otherwise, her top priority is addressing the division in politics between Republicans and Democrats.

"The very most important thing is to end the divisiveness we all feel on a visceral level," Spenser said. "Until we have healed the divide, nothing else can get done."

Spenser said the pandemic has created new opportunities for certain businesses, such as internet providers and

companies that connect people remotely. She said it is important to support businesses as they adjust to the pandemic.

"There are businesses that are growing," Spenser said. "New businesses are learning and growing through this process."

Vaughn said he sees other ways the pandemic can make positive changes. Specifically, he points to the slaughterhouses that he said spread the disease.

"Let's get away from these big factory farms," Vaughn said. "Let's get back to family farming. It's better for the animals. It's better for not spreading disease."

Vaughn's top priority as a member of Congress would be to support work related to climate change.

He and the other candidates believe in climate change, and see it as one of the biggest issues facing the world.

"Planet Earth does not need humans," Vaughn said. "But if humans want to be a part of the Earth we need to fix our environment."

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