Biden picks California Sen. Kamala Harris as his running mate

By Kathleen Ronayne and Will Weissert
Associated Press

By John J. Kim / Chicago Tribune-TNS
California Sen. Kamala Harris speaks during a rally for former Vice President Joe Biden at Renaissance High School on March 9 in Detroit.

WILMINGTON, Del. — Joe Biden named California Sen. Kamala Harris as his running mate on Tuesday, making history by selecting the first Black woman to compete on a major party's presidential ticket and acknowledging the vital role Black voters will play in his bid to defeat President Donald Trump.

"I have the great honor to announce that I've picked @KamalaHarris — a fearless fighter for the little guy, and one of the country's finest public servants — as my running mate," Biden tweeted. In a text message to supporters, Biden said, "Together, with you, we're going to beat Trump."

Harris and Biden plan to deliver remarks Wednesday in Wilmington.

In choosing Harris, Biden is embracing a former rival from the Democratic primary who is familiar with the unique rigor of a national campaign. Harris, a 55-year-old first-term senator, is also one of the party's most prominent figures and quickly became a top contender for the No. 2 spot after her own White House campaign ended.

Harris, who is also Indian American, joins Biden in the 2020 race at a moment of unprecedented national crisis. The coronavirus pandemic has claimed the lives of more than 150,000 people in the U.S., far more than the toll experienced in other countries. Business closures and disruptions resulting from the pandemic have caused an economic collapse. Unrest, meanwhile, has emerged across the country as Americans protest racism and police brutality.

Trump's uneven handling of the crises has given Biden an opening, and he enters the fall campaign in strong position against the president. In adding Harris to the ticket, he can point to her relatively centrist record on issues such as health care and her background in law enforcement in the nation's largest state.

Harris' record as California attorney general and district attorney in San Francisco was heavily scrutinized during the Democratic primary and turned off some liberals and younger Black voters who saw her as out of step on issues of systemic racism in the legal system and police brutality. She tried to strike a balance on these issues, declaring herself a "progressive prosecutor" who backs law enforcement reforms.

Biden, who spent eight years as President Barack Obama's vice president, has spent months weighing who would fill that same role in his White House. He pledged in March to select a woman as his vice president, easing frustration among Democrats that the presidential race would center on two white men in their 70s.

Biden's search was expansive, including Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a leading progressive, Florida Rep. Val Demings, whose impeachment prosecution of Trump won plaudits, California Rep. Karen Bass, who leads the Congressional Black Caucus, former Obama national security adviser Susan Rice and Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, whose passionate response to unrest in her city garnered national attention.

Rice congratulated Harris on her selection, calling her a "tenacious and trailblazing leader." Rice said she would support Biden and Harris "with all my energy and commitment."

HOT HELP

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Wachtel said that everything fell into place to allow the department to follow through on Medina's "unique" request.

"It was a matter of being in the right place at the right time," she said.

Medina took to Facebook at 6:56 p.m. Friday to express her appreciation for the police department's willingness to help her father.

"I am so blessed to have such a wonderful city looking out for my dad," she wrote. "You have all went above and beyond for a daughter all the way in Garland, Texas, worried about her dad all the way in Oregon. This is why my house will ALWAYS back the blue."

SCHOOLS

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Witty said Tuesday afternoon that he was pleased that state officials listened to the information presented to them and eased the requirements for school districts in counties with populations of 30,000 or less or with a population density of fewer than six residents per square mile.

Baker County meets both standards.

"It does move away from the one-size-fits-all," Witty said. "They've given us more flexibility and more authority has been given to the local public health officials."

Under the original metrics the governor announced July 28, schools couldn't have in-person classes unless their county had a COVID-19 weekly case rate of less than 10 new cases per 100,000 population for three straight weeks, and a weekly positive test rate of 5% or below, also for three straight weeks.

Baker County would not meet either metric based on the case totals for the past few weeks. To meet the case rate standard the county could not have more than one new case in any of the three weeks.

The original metrics also had a statewide metric — no school district could offer in-person classes unless the statewide weekly positive test rate was 5% or below for three straight weeks.

"It might have been impossible to get back to in-person school for the whole year had changes not been made to the original metrics," Witty said.

The new metrics, while allowing for a return to in-person classes sooner, still will provide for the safety of the students, the staff and the community in general, he believes.

"I think this is a very strong move in the right direction for us," Witty said.

The new metrics announced Tuesday exempt school districts in rural counties such as Baker from the statewide test rate standard.

The weekly new case rate and positive test rate metrics have been replaced. The new metric for the Baker School District to offer in-person classes requires that Baker County have 30 or fewer new cases over the preceding three weeks, with fewer than half of the new cases during that period happening during the last of the three weeks.

Baker County would have met that requirement based on the most recent three-week period for which statistics are available, July 12-Aug. 1. During that period the county had 22 new cases, with nine in the last of the three weeks.

However, the new metrics also require that county health officials conclude that there is no community spread of the virus.

Witty said Tuesday that in his recent conversations with Dr. Eric Lamb, the county health officer, Lamb's opinion is that there is community spread happening, with between 2 and 9 new cases reported weekly since late June.

For that reason, Witty said, the District will continue with plans for comprehensive distance education when school starts on Sept. 8.

"The county has said we do have a community spread," he said. "I have faith in their expertise and we're going to lean on it. At some point — hopefully sooner than later — we will be able to come back to in-person school."

That decision will be made based on the likelihood that the district could continue to qualify to have in-person classes for an extended time, Witty said.

He said Tuesday that it's too soon to predict when in-person classes might resume.

"We need to let the data tell the story before we start predicting what's going to happen," he said.

The Baker School Board agreed during a special meeting Aug. 6 to review the numbers after six weeks of classes — in late October — and to begin to plan from there.

An all-online education system still will be available to families who don't want their children to return to classrooms, Witty said.

TESTING

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That's a rate of 6,629 per 100,000 people, based on the county's estimated population of 16,800.

Only Curry County has a lower testing rate, of 4,813 per 100,000. Curry County, on the southern Oregon Coast, has had 1,107 residents tested from a population of 23,000.

Nancy Staten, administrator of the Baker County Health Department, said Tuesday that Baker County's testing total reflects in part the number of people who have come to Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City or another health provider and had symptoms that meet the OHA criteria for testing.

The state agency suggests people contact a health care provider, to be assessed for a possible test, if they have COVID-19 symptoms such as a cough, fever or shortness of breath, or if they have been in close contact with a person who has tested positive.

Health officials define close contact as being within 6 feet of a person for 15 minutes or more consecutively.

Both Staten and Alicia Hills, the Health Department's nursing supervisor, have said that some people identified as close contacts with a person who tested positive, but who did not themselves have symptoms, have been asked to self-quarantine but have not also been tested unless they developed symptoms.

Staten said Tuesday that although she would like to see more county residents tested, she doesn't believe that the relative scarcity of tests is obscuring a large number of infected but nonsymptomatic residents.

If that had been the case, Staten said she would have expected the people with no symptoms to have spread the virus. That would have led to more people visiting their doctor because they had symptoms, and thus more people being tested and, ultimately, more positive tests.

Baker County's case total as of Wednesday was 45 — that includes at 41 people who tested positive as well as four "presumptive" cases. The five cases reported Tuesday and Wednesday are positive tests, not presumptive cases, Staten said.

Presumptive cases are people who have COVID-19 symptoms and have had close contact with a person who tested positive, but who themselves have either tested negative or have not been tested.

COVID-19 in Baker County

WEEK START	NEGATIVE TESTS	POSITIVE TESTS
March 1	1	0
March 8	2	0
March 15	8	0
March 22	2	0
March 29	5	0
April 5	14	0
April 12	27	0
April 19	9	0
April 26	16	0
May 3	26	1
May 10	43	0
May 17	41	0
May 24	53	0
May 31	51	0
June 7	57	0
June 14	65	0
June 21	66	0
June 28	74	8
July 5	109	3
July 12	80	6
July 19	112	7
July 26	136	9
August 2*	78	1

Source: Oregon Health Authority *through Aug. 8

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LIVE AUCTION

Highland Dr Real Estate:
3120 Highland Dr, Baker City, OR
August 15th, 2020 @ 10 AM
Preview: August 14th, 2020 10AM-6PM

Dream location overlooking the City. This amazing 2.32 acres is a must see. Beautiful custom built home with over 3400 sq/ft. Wonderful floor plan with open kitchen and family room with city views. The kitchen offers a large island and dining area with custom oak cabinets. Along with the living room off the entry there is a large master bedroom with city views, with a large walk in closet and walk in shower. A nice second bedroom and office/bedroom plus a large utility with bathroom on the main level. Lower level offers a large bonus room, bedroom, cold storage. Nice private back yard. Outside you'll find a fantastic 40 x 50 shop with tack room and storage, plus a 35' x 47' covered RV storage. Lots of parking. This is a wonderful property.

TERMS: This property to be sold at LIVE auction on Aug. 15, 2020 at 10:00 am (pst). Sold As-Is, Close in 30days. 5% earnest money day of the auction, non-refundable. 5% buyer's premium. Seller to provide title insurance & 1/2 of closing doc fees.

* Call Larry with any questions. You do not have to have an agent to participate. All real estate agents must register at least 2 days prior to auction and be present day of auction.

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