



Eric Burnette



James Crary



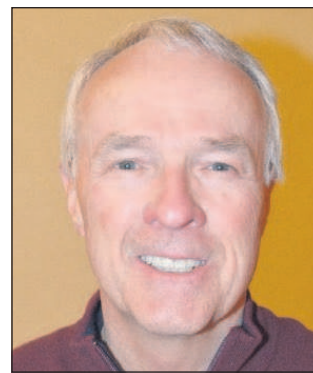
Jamie McLeod-Skinner



Michael Byrne



Dr. Jennifer Neahring



Tim S. White

# Democrats hope to unseat Walden

## Candidates present their case in Canyon City forum

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

A crowded field of Democrats aiming to unseat U.S. Rep. Greg Walden answered questions during a forum at the Canyon City Community Hall March 7.

Oregon's Second Congressional District by area is the largest in Oregon and seventh-largest in the U.S., encompassing two-thirds of the state and including all of 19 counties and part of one more.

The district has been represented by Walden since 1999. The Republican has taken about two-thirds or more of the vote in 10 straight elections, leaving the Democrats facing an uphill battle.

About 30 people listened to the six candidates, who have been criss-crossing the district to spread their message.

### Motivations

Eric Burnette, a retired Merchant Marine officer from Hood River, is the executive director of the Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots. He said he once voted for Walden, who lives only two blocks away, but his views of the congressman drastically changed after Walden voted to repeal Obamacare.

"This is a winnable race," he said, a point echoed by other candidates that night.

Michael Byrne, a licensed stonemason from Parkdale, grew up working on wheat and cattle ranches in Eastern Oregon. He wants the district's representative to support working families, Medicare for all, social and environmental justice and a transition away from fossil fuels. Many of these positions were shared by the other candidates.

"I'm not a politician," he said, noting that it's impossible to present yourself to the voters in one-minute "elevator speeches." Byrne said he felt things were so bad he had to do something, and that meant "going to the top."

"Things at the top can kill you," he said, adding, "Walden has got to go. He's going to get us killed."

James Crary, a retired supply-chain manager for British Petroleum from Ashland, was defeated by Walden in 2016. He has a law degree and taught at the University of North Dakota. Like the others, the direction of today's politics drove him to run.

"When something really irritates me, you can sit back and complain or do something," he said.

Campaign finance reform is Crary's No. 1 issue. The voice in Washington, D.C. is not coming from the people but from corporations, he said.

### Social issues

Jamie McLeod-Skinner, a former Phoenix city manager who lives in Terrebonne, has degrees in civil engineering, regional planning and law and

has served on the city council in Santa Clara, California.

People in the district are hurting, and Walden is not trying to help them, she said, noting that she is the only candidate in the room who has won an election.

Jennifer Neahring, a physician from Bend, is a kidney specialist who has a medical practice in Salem and Portland. Her No. 1 issue is health care, which she says costs too much and affects everything in government.

"The system is broken, so broken," she said.

Tim S. White, a retired Chrysler Corp. finance director from Bend with a master's in business administration, used his experience as a turnaround specialist to write an award-winning book about business. He agreed that the race against Walden was winnable, but Democrats need to change their platform.

The No. 1 issue is not health care, he said, it's jobs. And campaign finance issues are not going to go away, he said, so the No. 2 issue is protecting Social Security.

"The government needs to keep its hands off Social Security and Medicare," he said.

Burnette noted that the Democratic platform is 26,000 words long, and very little of it deals with rural problems.

"The party is not paying attention to rural issues," he said.

But neither are Republicans, who believe the market can fix everything, Burnette added.

"We don't need a tax cut.

We need a raise," he said.

Crary noted that the biggest obstacle to health care reform "is Greg Walden." The solution is Medicare for all, he said.

"I've never heard a person complain about Medicare," he said, noting how much money in private insurance goes to executives and profits.

### Infrastructure

Byrne suggested bringing broadband internet to the John Day area could help stop young people from leaving, but he noted that the area is also a good place for retirees.

"I'd like to live in John Day," he said.

Crary said the answer to keeping young people in Grant County is good-paying jobs, so they can save up to buy a house and send their children to college. Instead of a \$1.5 trillion tax giveaway for the wealthy, federal money should be spent on infrastructure — repairing roads, bridges, sewer and water, which would also provide those good-paying jobs, he said.

McLeod-Skinner has a lot of experience in infrastructure, having repaired water and sewer projects damaged during the war in Bosnia. She sees two types of needed infrastructure improvements: physical and social, the latter including education and health care.

Neahring agreed with the importance of education but pointed out the diversity of the huge Eastern Oregon congressional district.

"There's no two-minute answer," she said.

She also noted that the Trump administration had promised a "grand infrastructure plan" that has never materialized.

White suggested revamping an existing federal education act that has long gone unfunded and giving \$300,000 to \$400,000 to every high school in the nation.

McLeod-Skinner said broadband access could improve health care in rural areas, but a better way to finance health care is also needed.

White pointed out that 20 health care CEOs take home about \$400 million in compensation. The country needs a better tax policy to address that, but big health care companies are Walden's No. 1 contributor, he said.

Burnette took issue with the Democratic platform — it's not clear on health care reform, he said. He wanted to see support for rural facilities folded into improvements for mental health and drug treatment.

"Should you have to drive 100 miles to a doctor?" he asked. "No."

### Public lands

All six candidates supported keeping federal lands public. Neahring wanted to see more collaborative efforts and not some bureaucrat flying in from Washington, D.C., to make quick decisions.

White wanted politicians in Congress to keep their hands off national monuments. He wanted to preserve the legacy of grazing leases for ranchers in a sustainable way, and he criticized Walden's support of the 2017

Resilient Federal Forests Act, which he called a "hand-off" to timber companies.

Burnette noted that if Grant County one day was given all the federal lands in this area, the county government would be unable to manage the lands and would be faced with bankruptcy or a big sale to private interests.

Byrne said he wanted to see public lands managed for multiple use — including a new use called "carbon banking," in which forests are maintained as an asset for climate change financing.

White called for building a major north-south interstate highway through Central Oregon and paying for it with a big cut in defense spending — from the current \$800 billion to about \$300 billion.

Burnette noted how much better America's middle class was doing when unions were strong.

"We need to re-unionize the U.S. economy," he said.

White called for changing the Democratic Party paradigm. He called himself "policy-driven" and wanted to figure out a way to make the issues of jobs and protecting Social Security work politically.

Neahring said Congress needs to focus on the tough issues — education and infrastructure — before more people get hurt.

Looking around, Byrne noted that he was running against "a wide field of super-qualified individuals." But Congress doesn't need more politicians — it needs a working man, he said.

## EOU hopes 'rural university' designation will help with enrollment, funding

By Jade McDowell  
EO Media Group

Eastern Oregon University has always been a home for students looking for a smaller, more rural college experience in Oregon, but that role is now official.

The La Grande-based university has been designated by the state legislature as Oregon's Rural University.

"It defines our role in the

state and shows our unique mission," said Tim Seydel, EOU's vice president for university advancement.

The designation — which passed both chambers of the legislature unanimously and was signed by the governor last week — doesn't come with a boost in state funding or new rules for how the university is run. But Seydel said it could help set EOU apart when applying for state and federal

grants for programs that are targeted toward helping first-generation college students, for example, or those from rural communities.

"When they say, 'Why Eastern?' we can say, 'That's what we do,'" he said.

Seydel said it could also help with recruitment at the university, which was at 3,016 students during the fall term. He said some students are searching for a smaller, more

rural experience where their professors know them by name.

Rep. Greg Smith, who sponsored the bill, agreed that the designation as Oregon's Rural University could help EOU with recruitment of students from rural areas who don't want to attend school in a big city.

"They'll know that they'll be coming to an environment they'll be comfortable in," Smith said.

Officials in other parts of the state have sometimes eyed closing the small university as a way to save the state money, so Smith said he also felt the designation will remind lawmakers from more urban areas of EOU's importance in serving Eastern Oregon residents.

The rural university designation may help EOU's future, but things have already been looking up for the school.

In 2014 morale at the university was low. EOU was in financial difficulty, cutting majors and laying off staff. Students told EO Media Group during a visit to campus that they had seen friends give up on the university and transfer elsewhere.

While low enrollment numbers are still a struggle four years later, Seydel and Smith said other areas — from financials to academics to the success of the university's sports teams — have improved considerably.

The university's reach extends far beyond its hometown of La Grande. Only half of EOU's students this fall were attending the university on campus. Another 1,415 were taking classes online and 88 were high school students earning EOU credit at their schools through the Eastern Promise

program. Seydel said community colleges throughout the region have EOU staff located on-site to advise students considering transfer to EOU.

Seydel said the university is also building partnerships with area industries and government agencies so that students can find more meaningful work study and internship experiences.

One thing EOU staff and students are particularly excited about is the \$9 million the university just received from the legislature for creation of a large indoor multi-use track and field facility on campus. The fieldhouse will help EOU expand its physical activity and health plus outdoor recreation and leadership majors, which Seydel said have been growing already, and give student athletes indoor, on-campus facilities for practices.

**March 21st, Wednesday 8:00am - 2pm**  
**Harney County CWMA**  
**HAY GROWERS CLASS**

The Harney County CWMA presents our Hay Growers Class, March 21st at the Harney County Courthouse Basement Meeting Room. ODA Pesticide License credits will be offered. Speaker subjects to include: Irrigation/Water conservation w/LESA, Herbicide reps from CPS & Bayer-treatment options for broadleaf & annual grass control, OSHA PPE training & Noxious weed ID & treatment, Using Google Earth Pro to support land management & monitoring, County Weed cost share program

This event is sponsored by your Harney County CWMA Partners

Contact person: Steph Bonson@ 573-8397/589-2030

### Committee Volunteers Needed

Grant County is now recruiting volunteers to serve on active boards and committees.

Obtain an Application to Volunteer from County Court, 201 S. Humboldt, No. 280, Canyon City, OR 97820; (541-575-0059) wrightl@grantcounty-or.gov

Applications are due by **Friday, March 30th, 2018.**

Committees are formal public bodies required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Extension & 4-H Service District Advisory Council: Eleven members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to provide guidance and assistance to local OSU Extension staff in planning, developing, and evaluating balanced educational programs directed to high priority needs of county residents. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Planning Commission: ORS 215.020. Nine members serve four year terms and two alternates serve two year terms, meeting as needed to review land use and zoning applications and discuss city and county growth issues and the siting of new facilities. Members must be residents of various geographic areas within the county and no more than two voting members shall be engaged in the same kind of business, occupation, trade or profession with agriculture designations of livestock / forage crop production and horticulture / specialty crop production.

Commissioners serving in this capacity must file an Annual Verified Statement of Economic Interest with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. Members must re-apply to the County Court before their term ends if they wish to be re-appointed.