

Findley

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district in the Salem area that was nearly a toss-up in the last election, with the outcome decided by only about 400 votes. The new map protects the Democratic incumbent by nearly 8 percentage points.

Ultimately, Findley said, red districts got redder and blue districts got bluer. However, he said, there are more blue districts in the state.

That, he said, is the basis of a lawsuit filed last month in the state Supreme Court to overturn the legislative redistricting plan.

The congressional map, Findley added, is being adjudicated in a separate process by a five-judge panel of state circuit court judges.

Findley said it is early in the process, but a decision would need to happen at "rocket speed" to beat filing deadlines for upcoming elections.

Findley said the changes to his own district make sense geographically. For instance, his district now includes Crook County but he no longer represents Wasco County.

Nonetheless, he said he is looking at redistricting through the lens of the public, which, despite 22 virtual sessions, had no meaningful input in the process.

The lack of transparency, coupled with the partisanship of the contentious special session, has, in his opinion, given the public yet another reason to distrust the political process.

"You had many people who provided input and they were ignored," he said. "Now they think, 'Well, what's the sense in me voting? What's the sense in me participating in any more hearings? What's sense of participating at all? They going to do what they want to do, and it doesn't matter.'"

The fix, according to Findley, is to form an independent, nonpartisan redistricting commission, as roughly 20 other states have done.

"We need to take politics

out of it," he said. "We need to take everything out of it and just do the facts and figures."

Petitioners are working to put a measure creating such a commission on the ballot next year.

According to Common Cause Oregon, a nonpartisan public interest group, the redistricting commission would consist of 12 Oregonians, vetted to rule out conflicts of interest and neutralize partisan power. The commission would include four Democrats, four Republicans, and four registered voters unaffiliated with either major party.

Findley said if the roles were reversed and Republicans had the majority in the Legislature, he would like to think they would not have done something similar. That said, he added, an independent process that removes partisan politics is the right thing to do.

"I just think it's the right thing to do for the process," he said.

Questions on aquatic center

John Day resident John Morris raised concerns about the new aquatic center being planned for the Seventh Street Sports Complex, citing issues with transparency and finances.

Parks and Rec, which is not affiliated with the city, has partnered with the city to cover maintenance costs and build the pool on a piece of land the district owns.

Morris also said he has a problem with the 1% administrative fee that John Day City Manager receives for writing grants.

Findley, who secured \$2 million in state funding to help pay for the project, said while he does not disagree with Morris's sentiments, he nonetheless believes in the pool. He said in Malheur County, 90% of children can swim because they have access to a community. However, in Nampa, where the community is without a pool, just 10% know how to swim.

He said when he was approached about pushing

for the state funding he was assured the project was essentially shovel-ready.

John Day Mayor Ron Lundbom said Green typically receives a 1% administrative fee on grants that he brings in, adding that if there is a fee, it comes out of the grant funding and not out of the city's general fund.

Lundbom has previously defended the practice, noting that it is not unusual and pointing out that Green has been highly successful in bringing funding into the city.

Move Oregon's border

In May, Grant County voters passed a referendum requiring County Court members to discuss moving Oregon's border to allow the county to join Idaho.

Grant County resident Sandie Gilson, vice president of Citizens for Greater Idaho, asked Findley if he would be willing to push for secession in the Legislature.

Findley said he has mentioned the desire of counties in his district to secede from Oregon to join Idaho three times on the Senate floor.

Findley said while the likelihood of seceding is slim at best, he would push for it in the Senate if Grant County's commissioners made a formal request.

"I work for the constituents in my counties," Findley said. "If the counties request it, I will carry (a bill) on the Senate floor."

Findley noted that Oregon and Idaho's legislatures would have to agree to the move, as would both houses of Congress. Even then, he said, the president could still veto the proposal.

Not all of the constituents at the event were in favor of Findley pushing for the border shift.

Katy Nelson, a Prairie City resident, told Findley that if he ends up taking the matter to the floor of the Senate that he should grandfather in those who wish to remain part of Oregon.

"I will be seceding my acres ... if they join Idaho," she said.



Ethan Kowing, an Oregon state trooper from John Day, speaks at a Grant County Conservatives rally Saturday, Oct. 30, in the Trowbridge Pavilion of the county's fairgrounds.

Conservatives

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The day's first speaker was Paul Sweany, a John Day insurance adviser. He called the Grant County Conservatives "a work in progress" led by a core group of 15 or 20 people who have been meeting weekly since May.

He said the GCC-PAC was formed as a way to "galvanize Grant County residents" and raise money to support political candidates who will bring conservative leadership back to our county and the cities in our county."

The political action committee was formed on Sept. 23 and so far has not reported any contributions or expenditures, according to records on file with the Oregon secretary of State's Office. Sweany and Shaun Robertson are listed as the PAC's directors.

Sweany called for qualified and committed conservative candidates to enter upcoming races for city council seats, mayoral positions, a spot on the County Court and the positions of district attorney and county clerk.

"We believe we have to pull together and the time to do so is now," he said. "We hope you'll join us."

Ethan Kowing of John Day, who was placed on leave from his job as an Oregon state trooper after posting a video from his patrol car in opposition to mask and vaccine mandates, said he felt compelled to take a stand.

"I could no longer stay silent because I was watching our tyrannical leaders take more and more away from us without any real resistance," he said. "The freedoms you surrender today are the freedoms your grandchildren will never know."

Kowing got a standing ovation from the crowd, with several people calling for him to run for sheriff of Grant County, and a quilt auction brought in \$600 to help him cover expenses as he fights to keep his job.

A number of Saturday's speakers made the drive over from La Grande, including Blake Bars of the Union County Freedom Alliance, who painted vaccine and mask mandates as the first step toward authoritarianism.

"This has never been about health," he said. "This has always been about money, power and control."

Dr. Jason Kehr, a La Grande chiropractor, urged people to stand up against laws they see as unjust or unconstitutional.

"Americans have become slaves to a master they call the federal government," he said.

His father, Dr. Dan Kehr, a chiropractor from Monument, struck a similar tone.

"Ronald Reagan said it: Freedom is one generation away from extinction," he said. "This is about fear, control and submission."

Several speakers expressed frustration with the state government, saying the concerns of rural Oregonians are often brushed aside by a legislature dominated by politicians from the urban centers of Western Oregon.

Mike McCarter and Sandie Gilson talked about Move Oregon's Border, a movement that seeks to address those frustrations by detaching a number of Eastern and Southern Oregon counties from the state and making them part of Idaho.

McCarter, a La Pine resident who serves as president of Citizens for Greater Idaho, noted that Grant was one of seven Oregon counties that have already passed ballot measures expressing the desire to secede from the state. Harney County residents were scheduled to vote on a similar measure on Tuesday, Nov. 2, as the paper was going to press, and at least two more counties are expected to weigh in on the issue next year.

"It can happen," McCarter said, "and it is moving like a freight train right now."

Gilson, who lives in John Day, is the group's vice president. She said state Sen. Lynn Findley, who represents a large swath of Eastern Oregon in Salem, has promised to carry a secession bill in the Legislature if county commissioners write letters asking him to do so.

"It's time for all of us to step up and be a part of this and make sure our county commissioners do what we've asked them to do as our elected officials," she said.

Other speakers included Mark Simmons of La Grande, a former speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives; Marc Thielman, the Alsea school superintendent, Republican gubernatorial candidate and chief petitioner behind the School Choice Amendment initiative; Hugh Johnson, a retired corrections officer from La Grande; Stephen Joncus, a Portland-area lawyer who is suing the state over vaccine mandates; and Marine Corps veteran Angela Hove and her husband, Kyle Hove, a retired Oregon State Police sergeant, both of La Grande.

While some of the rhetoric was heated, there were no calls for violence, with several speakers reminding the audience that Grant County residents whose opinions differ from theirs are still their neighbors and emphasizing the importance of having calm, non-threatening conversations about controversial issues.



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