

Candidates Forum M.C. Treasurer M.C. Commissioner

Tuesday, Nov. 5, two candidates for Morrow County Treasurer, Gayle Gutierrez and incumbent Margo Sherer, will face off at the polls and three candidates "Whisker Bill" Marren, Jerry Peck and John Wenzel, will vie for the Morrow County Commissioner's spot currently held by Don McElligott. McElligott earlier said that he would not seek the position another term.

The Gazette-Times asked the candidates to respond to questions concerning issues and their candidacies. Following are their responses:



Margo Sherer

Margo Sherer, 55, Ione, has lived in the county 37 years. Sherer and her husband, Dick, who owns a hay and cattle ranch four miles from Ione, have three grown children. Sherer has been Morrow County Treasurer for 16 years.

She graduated from Odessa High School in Odessa, WA., and has attended numerous classes and workshops relating to her job. She has received certification from the Oregon Association of County Treasurers and Finance Officers.

Sherer was Morrow County Treasurer from 1981-1996; Morrow County Tax Collector from 1979-1994; the president of the Oregon Association of County Tax Collectors from 1984-85; and president of the Oregon Association of County Treasurers and Finance Officers from 1989-1990.

Sherer is a 14 year member of Soroptimist International of Heppner and has held the office of treasurer for five years.

Please explain what a treasurer's job and duties are.

The county treasurer is the cash manager for 30 county funds and 60 trust and agency funds (entities other than Morrow County). Cash management is the practice of planning, monitoring and manipulating cash to accomplish any organizations objective of having sufficient liquidity to pay obligations when they are due while maximizing investment revenues.

The treasurer receipts all county and trust fund revenue. The treasurer has the banking responsibilities including depositing, bank transfers, check signing, check reconciliation, check ordering and safe keeping, loan applications and investment of a four to seven million dollar investment portfolio.

This department is one person who makes decisions and does all of the work.

The treasurer distributes property taxes, interest earnings, etc. and pays the taxing districts.

Do you feel county taxpayers are better served by local investments which return money to the local economy or by out-of-county investments which may earn a higher interest rate?

I have always diversified by type and financial institution in order to minimize risk. At the present time, our county banks with one exception are offering the same rate of interest as out-of-county investments. The State Treasury Local Government Investment Pool offers liquidity and a high rate of interest, but I am proud to help the local economy with county investments whenever possible.

How can you assist in making the treasurer's office more accountable to the voters?

I report monthly to county court, departments and districts that leave funds with me.

I would happily provide information (it's all public record) to any interested citizen who asks. I am also always open to new ideas.

Do you feel that north Morrow County is well served by the treasurer's office?

I have served all of the citizens of Morrow County in creating procedures that enable the taxing district to receive their taxes and interest earning in a timely manner, days faster than required by Oregon statute. I transfer to their bank accounts whenever possible or offer same day pick up.

In cooperation with the tax collector, I have made arrangements for tax payments to be made at banks in Heppner, Ione, Boardman and Umatilla.

How can you assist in healing some of the interdepartmental courthouse problems?

We're all working together under the leadership of the county court to keep the lines of communications open between departments with staff members where we express our concerns and discuss our professional objectives. Court agendas are posted and minutes are distributed as a means of communications. I am a part of the Public Information Committee which is sending out a county newsletter each quarter. We are all determined to do the best job possible and are always ready to offer our support to other departments.

What changes, if any would you make if elected?

If re-elected, I plan to organize a county investment advisory committee, asking 4-6 interested professional and lay people to meet with me on a regular basis to review county investments. They would help me prepare a written county investment policy by clearly defining scope, objectives authority, qualified institutions, diversification and maturity.

This policy would be reviewed by the Oregon Short Term Fund Board, the governing board for the Oregon State Treasury Local Government Investment Pool, before final adoption by the Morrow County Court.

What are the other major issues facing you as Morrow County Treasurer?

A major issue at this time is ensuring the services of this one person office remain uninterrupted and efficient.

Why should voters elect you over your opponent?

I have 16 years experience in cash management to best direct the nearly 20 million dollars the treasurer annually receives. I have demonstrated professionalism, efficiency and straight-forward honesty in my four terms as treasurer and would be honored to be re-elected to a fifth term.

Please comment on the lawsuit you have against the county. For example, why did you file suit against the county? What do you hope to gain by the lawsuit (financial settlement-if so how much? Reinstatement?)?

I have been the elected treasurer for 16 years. I was also appointed tax collector in 1979 and worked in both capacities until June 22, 1994, when I was dismissed as tax collector. The pending legal action is a challenge to my abrupt removal from the tax collector position in 1994. I believe that my professional reputation required that I take this action.



Gayle Gutierrez

Gayle Gutierrez, 39, Heppner, has lived in Morrow County since 1969 except for a brief time in The Dalles. Gutierrez and her husband, Kim, who is a mechanic for Morrow County Grain Growers, have two children, Jessica, 12, and Joshua, 9.

Gutierrez has been employed as accounting technician with Morrow County for four years and has worked for Morrow County for seven years.

Gutierrez graduated from Ione High School and received a associate in science degree from Blue Mountain Community College.

She is involved with Heppner Little League and her children's activities.

Please explain what a treasurer's job and duties are.

The treasurer has many duties. The main duty is to properly invest the county's funds and make sure there is enough cash on hand so the county can do day-to-day business such as paying the accounts payable and payroll. Other duties include receipting in revenue, maintaining bank and investment accounts, maintaining cash balances of county and trust and agency funds, check signing and invoice verification, tax refunds, preparing tax turnovers for trust and agency funds, and county land sales. The treasurer also handles the Special Transportation Fund needs, but it is not a required service of the treasurer's office.

Do you feel county taxpayers are better served by local investments which return money to the local economy or by out-of-county investments which may earn a higher interest rate?

It would be wonderful to be able to invest all the county's funds locally at all times. The taxpayers deserve the highest rate of return as possible, but it can't always be done locally. I would do my best to have as much invested locally as possible because it does return money to the local economy. The taxpayers are served best when their money is invested wisely and safely.

How can you assist in making the treasurer's office more accountable to the voters?

I can make the treasurer's office more accountable to the voters by always being accessible and have any information they may want readily available. If there is enough interest by the public, I can prepare quarterly reports and mail them out to those people that are interested, or they can come in the office and just ask.

Do you feel that north Morrow County is well served by the treasurer's office?

I feel the north and south ends of the county are served equally well by the treasurer's office. There are no boundaries where the treasurer's office is concerned. The Treasurer does not invest the funds thinking this part is for the north end and this part is for the south end.

How can you assist in healing some of the interdepartmental courthouse problems?

I have a wonderful working relationship already established with all the departments. I will continue this positive relationship by treating everyone fairly and with respect. Ensuring the lines of communications are open to every office no matter what problems may occur. I am very open minded and I am willing to listen to what anyone might have to say... good or bad. When all the departments are working as one, everyone benefits, including the taxpayers.

What changes, if any would you make if elected?

The major change I would make would be to implement a written investment policy. My opponent mentioned in your May 15th edition that she would start an investment committee. I feel that you need written guidelines before bringing people in to advise. I have

already requested and received several investment policies from other counties. I plan on collecting the best ideas from these policies and incorporate my ideas on the safest and most productive means of investing the county funds. I would have this policy in place within the first year of my first term.

What are the other major issues facing you as Morrow County Treasurer?

I would bring back the respect and integrity the office of treasurer once had. I want to be a leader in making people proud of their elected officials and make them feel good about their county government.

Why should voters elect you over your opponent?

With my experience working for the county, including the treasurer's office, the respect I show and have earned from the employees and elected officials, and with my written investment policy, I know I could serve Morrow County with the integrity and the professionalism we all know it deserves.



Jerry Peck

Jerry Peck, 56, Boardman, has lived in Morrow County for 48 of his 56 years. He is divorced, has four grown children.

Peck has been employed as a grocery store manager for the past 1 1/2 years at Plaid Pantry, Inc.

Peck graduated from Boardman High School and attended Oregon Technical Institute from 1958-59. He was Morrow County Commissioner from 1985-1992, Mayor of Boardman in 1976 and 1984, and served on the county school board from 1968-1975. Peck is a member of the Historical Society and was involved in Cub Scouts and Little League. He was also a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

What do you feel is your role as Morrow County Commissioner?

To represent the citizens of Morrow County in matters related to local, state and federal issues affecting Morrow County.

As a board member, do you feel you represent the county as a whole or the area from which you were elected?

Both. A commissioner should convey concerns of his area to all county officials, but the decisions the commissioners make should represent the entire county.

How can you help accommodate the growth and industry, and accompanying problems, in the north end of the county, while maintaining quality of life in an insecure economic situation in the south end of the county?

The growth and industry in the north end of the county will necessitate more services to be provided, such as housing and law enforcement.

In the south end, we need to provide assistance to the agricultural and forestry-based economies and build upon the tourism and recreation aspects such as our museum, the Morrow County parks, Blue Mountain Scenic Byway and increased recreational hunting. At the same time, we need to continue searching for other diversified industry for the south end. Hopefully, having a new economic development specialist working for the county full-time, will help bring this to fruition.

What do you feel is the commissioner's role in the ongoing

problems concerning the Morrow County Health District? Should the health district remain as a county-wide entity or should the district be divided?

The commission's role is formation and setting boundaries for special districts, but should not be involved in management of the district.

I have long advocated districts being formed where the users of a service are the people who vote on that service, but a fair and equitable tax valuation base must be achieved to make this possible.

What is your position on maintaining Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner? Is there a future for the hospital?

I feel that Pioneer Memorial Hospital must be maintained in Heppner. We must periodically evaluate what services should be provided in order to assure a continued future for the hospital.

What is your position concerning the current plans to build a medical clinic in Irrigon?

I think the community of Irrigon needs to be a partner in the decision-making process to determine the need for a medical clinic in their community. It is important to analyze the medical needs of each area of the county and to make sure they are maintained.

What would you like to see changed in road maintenance or the road department?

I would like to see more of our roads completely rebuilt to today's standards, with adequate base and width. I am very pleased with the direction the road department is taking. They are working hard to partner projects with other agencies, making both dollars and construction projects go farther.

How would you encourage the separate county departments to be more accountable to the public?

I believe county departments become more cognizant of public accountability when they are required to make presentations at public meetings. This also is a good opportunity for citizens to ask questions of these departments.

Do you feel north Morrow County is well served in the area of county services? If not, how can this be rectified?

I think the citizens of north Morrow County have been fairly well served in the area of county services. As the population increases in the north end, providing of more services will have to be evaluated.

How can you assist in healing the anger and resentment that exist between north and south county residents?

I feel that I have the ability to communicate well with both ends of the county, voicing the concerns of each to the other. This anger and resentment seems to lie within a vocal minority. It is not necessarily the feeling of most of the citizens.

Should county commissioners be elected from districts or at-large? Why?

I would like to continue to see the county operate with at-large positions because it gives voters the ability to choose the best candidate regardless of where they are from.

What are the other major issues facing you as a county commissioner?

Major issues include: emergency preparedness for nerve gas incineration, crime prevention and jail space, continued evaluation of services provided, and prioritization of funding for departments.

Why should the voters elect you over your opponents?

I have experience for this position. In the eight years I previously served as a county commissioner, I developed a good working relationship with many other local, state and federal agency representatives.

Please address the issue concerning your residency.

Although I am currently

employed outside of Morrow County, I have always continued to maintain my residence in Boardman. Unfortunately, like many other Boardman residents, my employment takes me out of the area during my work week. I spend most of my days off in Boardman and have always considered it my home. I have certainly spent enough time here to keep up on county issues. I continue to live in the house I built 25 years ago and sold to a relative five years ago after my divorce. I maintain 1100 square feet of living space in this house. I am also a part-owner of both commercial and residential property and therefore I am a Morrow County taxpayer. It is my plan and desire to spend full time in Boardman after being elected to the Morrow County Commission.



John Wenzel

John Wenzel, 54, Irrigon, has lived in the county 23 years. Wenzel and his wife, Jeanette, who is a housewife and former registered nurse, have two grown children.

Wenzel has been self-employed for the past 25 years and is the owner of Irrigon Motors.

Wenzel graduated from Madison High in Portland and attended Portland State University. He has been a member of the Morrow County School District local advisory committee. He has been involved with Little League and Babe Ruth baseball programs and is a member of the Irrigon Chamber of Commerce.

What do you feel is your role as Morrow County Commissioner?

My job will be to serve all of the people of Morrow County equally and to try to ensure that we have a smooth running and efficient county government.

As a board member, do you feel you represent the county as a whole or the area from which you were elected?

As I have stated from the start, all of the commissioners have to represent the county as a whole.

How can you help accommodate the growth and industry, and accompanying problems, in the north end of the county, while maintaining quality of life in an insecure economic situation in the south end of the county?

Historically, the south end has helped finance the needs of the north end. Now the reverse is starting to happen. Beyond the money issues, one end can't survive without the support of the other, and this county won't survive if we stay separated. But, I do not see the county commissioners' jobs to be economic development. Bringing economic development is better left to the Port of Morrow, the local Chambers of Commerce and private interest. The role of the county commissioners is to ensure that these developments contribute to the welfare of the county in a positive way.

What do you feel is the commissioner's role in the ongoing problems concerning the Morrow County Health District? Should the health district remain as a county-wide entity or should the district be divided?

We have an elected medical board to solve those problems. However, when an issue ends up with the county commissioners for a decision, we will have to study all of the evidence available and try to make Continued, next page