



Gubernatorial candidate Jessica Gomez visits eastern Oregon

“Resources and respect must return to Oregon’s rural Counties.”

-Jessica Gomez

Gubernatorial candidate, Jessica Gomez, stopped in at the Heppner Gazette on Monday to share some of her plans and ideas for eastern Oregon cities. After her visit at the Gazette, she continued to a meeting at the Gilliam and Bisbee building before heading to Condon.

Strong and diverse economies, education standards, poorly spent tax money and access to natural resources are the resounding themes Gubernatorial candidate Jessica Gomez is hearing while visiting with local business and community leaders across eastern Oregon this week.

“Eastern Oregon is full of talented and hard-working Oregonians who know that when rural counties thrive, so does the whole of Oregon.” said Jessica Gomez. “Their voices have been largely ignored because they haven’t been listened to by our current governor. What this week has solidified for me is the need for a governor who will focus on opportunities for the entire state -- not just the big cities.”

Gomez, a small business owner from Medford, says it is high time for a reboot and that Oregon’s recovery is dependent on



Candidate for governor, Jessica Gomez, visited Heppner on Monday.

building strong regional economies. She does not believe in piling on crippling taxes and regulations. Gomez will encourage targeted and strategic investments in broadband, water, transportation and infrastructure so both urban and rural communities can support growth in industries like biotech, advanced manufacturing, smart Ag tech and wood products. To get the workforce businesses need, Gomez said she would encourage employers to offer at-work childcare and classify employer-based childcare as a non-taxable benefit for both employer and employee.

“Our reputation as a business-friendly state has badly slipped. We must foster an environment to make our state once again a great place to live and to work,” said Jessica Gomez. “As governor, my goal is to build back growth in every sector via small business development, infrastructure development, and expanding access to education.”

Another area of importance is giving Oregon students more opportunities to build academic skills. Gomez -- who at age 9 could not read, but later attended community college and, at age 26, built the first state-of-the-art microchip

manufacturing facility in southern Oregon-- knows first-hand the importance of giving children multiple avenues to access educational opportunities and thrive.

While in eastern Oregon, Gomez also stopped in Boardman to exchange ideas with local leaders and joined the Lions Club breakfast and the Miners’ Jubilee in Baker City. She attended the La Grande Car Show and Crazy Days, visited a manufacturing plant and was welcomed with an evening meet and greet. In Pendleton, she met community members and held a frank discussion of the challenges of rural Oregon, watched some early harvesting at Weston and met with the Oregon Wheat Growers League. While in Hermiston, Gomez met with city and county leaders and spent time with Fred Ziari the founder of the innovative Farmers Ending Hunger.

Gomez will continue meeting with business and community leaders in Condon, Moro, The Dalles and will attend the 100 Year Hood River Fair this week.

To learn more about Jessica Gomez, visit her website: jessicagomezforgovernor.com.

Lexington discusses sanitation franchise fees

Hermiston Sanitary would stop providing service

By David Sykes

Hermiston Sanitary Disposal reported they will stop servicing the residents of Lexington after September rather than pay a franchise fee, the town council was told last Tuesday night.

Lexington’s trash pickup is currently done by two companies Hermiston and Miller and Sons Disposal of Heppner. The town had sent letters to both companies informing them of an upcoming franchise agreement requirement and fee to continue to trash collection. Miller and Sons agreed, Hermiston did not. “Our company respectfully declines to enter into a franchise agreement with the Town of Lexington. Therefore After Sept. 30 we will no longer be a solid waste collection provider in the Town of Lexington,” Hermiston said in a letter to the council. Miller and Sons said they would be interested in an agreement making them exclusive, or only company, collecting waste in town.

Miller said with the current number customers they have now and the added Hermiston customers they would pick up, they estimated with a standard franchise fee of five percent on gross pick up charges, the town would make approximately \$150 per month.

The town has been considering the franchise fee for some time, and at least one council member never did like the idea, saying the cost would just be passed on to residents as a new tax. “Miller is just going to raise their rates” to cover the franchise fee, Council member Will Lemmon said.

He also said competition was a good thing and this would now leave the town will only one trash collection company. “Miller and Sons could triple their rates, and no one could stop them,” Lemmon said. In their letter, Miller said, “Contract renewals are reassessed and renewed every 10 years. Prices are controlled and maintained by Miller and Sons and will be

addressed within our company to raise as needed.” “It’s just sucking it out of the citizens,” Lemmon said of the franchise fee. “Everyone tries to get more money out of the people. Let’s not be that town,” he urged. It was announced that council member Curtis Thompson intends to resign from the council over the franchise proposal and losing the Hermiston service which is apparently cheaper than Miller’s. No official action on the franchise was taken by the council at last Tuesday’s meeting.

In other town business it was announced that maintenance man Scott Lamb was resigning his position to go to work for the City of Heppner. Lamb’s last day would be July 29. The town has started advertising for a new maintenance man.

Town Recorder Janette Eldridge talked to the council about the new improved water billing system, which she said cost less and was better, allowing people to pay their water bills online. There will be a cost to use a credit card. Councilmembers wanted to make sure people knew that there is a charge to use the credit card online payment method.

The council heard a report from firefighter Josie Miles who said the department had taken possession of a used Spartan fire engine from the Hermiston Fire Department, and the new town jackrabbit emblems had been installed on the new truck. She said they are planning on taking the new engine to show during the Morrow County Fair & Rodeo parade in August. Ione invited Lexington to join this year’s Fourth of July parade and volunteer fireman Reid Miller drove the town’s tender in the parade. The town also took both brush rigs and the tender down to watch over the fireworks in case they were needed to help in fire suppression.

Miles said the department is working to help

-See FRANCHISE FEES/ PAGE TWO

CREZ keeps steady course after wide-ranging discussion

Most members like what’s happening

By David Sykes

It was a lively discussion, but in the end the majority of CREZ board members last week thought the system they have crafted over the past 10 years developing new businesses and disbursing over \$26 million in tax money around the county, is working pretty well and shouldn’t be changed.

Meeting together for the first-time, board members from both CREZ II and the new CREZ III spent time last Friday not only talking over the future of CREZ spending, but also the general state of economic development in Morrow County.

Over the past 10 years the Port of Morrow and the Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) have worked hand in hand to attract new businesses and encourage expansion of existing businesses in the county, and that alliance has been

highly successful. The Port has attracted new and diversified businesses such as Amazon data centers into the county and helped existing businesses such as food processing grow and expand. The enterprise zone has been an important tool for the Port in recruiting these new businesses, almost all which have been located on Port property near Boardman. The zone offers substantial tax breaks for locating and creating good paying jobs in the county. As an offshoot CREZ has collected substantial revenues in lieu of taxes. In the past 10 years, for example, it has taken in \$26,470,660.

The CREZ board has wide ranging discretion on how these funds will be spent but has adhered to a “four bucket” approach of giving money to education, public safety, community enhancement and housing. This past year it added infrastructure to that group. It has also stuck with a system of distribution which sees money allocated to local groups and municipalities for distribution avoiding a long line of groups, taxing districts and individuals coming before the CREZ board seeking funding. “We have let regional partners decide how the dollars would be spent,” long-time CREZ board member and

this year’s chairman Don Russell said. “I think letting people decide what works best in their region is a good way to go.”

As an example, he pointed out how the CREZ has been giving money to various groups around the county for use in building up housing. Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group, WCVEDG, has served the south county area of Heppner, Lexington and Ione, while Boardman Community Development Association, has handled the Boardman area and City of Irrigon has taken care of that area. Over the years each group has morphed their programs into what works best for them, Russell pointed out. In Boardman they still give a \$5,000 grant for new home buyers. In Irrigon they help out with those buying stick-built homes, and in south county money has been spent on housing rehabilitation and building two new quality duplexes in Heppner and one in Ione. There has also been money given out in south county for community enhancement and business development.

Several changes in the last couple of years also saw CREZ give money directly to the sponsoring enterprise groups, the City of Boardman, Port of Morrow and Morrow County, who

received \$1.8 million each. Last year as a first CREZ gave Ione, Heppner, Irrigon and Lexington \$200,000 each, ostensibly to be used on either infrastructure projects such as studies of water or sewer needs.

For an idea of how money coming into the CREZ has grown over the years, in the first years of 2012 to 2015 it took in a total of \$1,730,846 increasing each year until 2020 there was \$8,763,895 to distribute.

One idea discussed that was outside the normal funding categories, came from Port Manager Ryan Neal who suggested the CREZ consider establishing an endowment fund for scholarships for Mor-

-See CREZ STAYS STEADY/ PAGE EIGHT



The Lexington Fire Department participated in the Ione 4th of July parade with their tender, displaying the new logo. -Photo by Josie Miles.

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