

Democrat McLeod-Skinner includes Hermiston on campaign trail stop

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Democratic Congressional candidate Jamie McLeod-Skinner talks to people at a recent Pendleton Farmers Market.

Rep. Greg Walden's challenger in the November election spent time in Hermiston last week, including a visit to the county fair.

Jamie McLeod-Skinner, running against the incumbent for U.S. Congressional District 2, said partway through the visit that she was enjoying the opportunities to get to know the area better and meet with local farmers.

McLeod-Skinner describes herself a "rural Democrat" who spent her time as a teenager outside Ashland riding horses, herding sheep and bucking hay (her family moved to Oregon when she was a teen). She worked on water-related humanitarian projects in post-war Kosovo and Bosnia and later returned to the United States to work for the same organization's refugee resettlement program. She used her civil engineering degree to work on water systems projects in the Santa Clara, California area, served on a variety of water-related boards and later went back to school for a law degree, specializing in water, natural resource and Indian law.

"I've got a real interest in water," she said.

She said if she represented Eastern Oregon in Washington, D.C. she would be interested in encouraging compacts to allow area farm-

ers to draw more water from the Columbia River while still balancing the need to protect fish.

McLeod-Skinner has some experience in politics at the local level, including years on the Santa Clara city council and a four month-long stint as city manager of Phoenix, Oregon. She said she was the eighth city manager in seven years and blames the city council's dysfunction as the reason she didn't last long either before being fired.

She said she believes in "people over party" — a philosophy that she argues Walden has moved farther away from the longer he stays in Washington, D.C. She said it won't matter to her which side of the aisle good ideas come from, as long as she can help the

government implement common-sense solutions or "know when to get out of the way."

McLeod-Skinner is a believer in renewable energy and said the government should be investing there. After spending time in Eastern Oregon on the campaign trail she has some ideas for economic development that could also help the environment, such as a recycling center that would help process some of the plastics that China is no longer taking.

"It would ultimately need to be a private venture, of course, but I could see a major investment of public-sector funds," she said.

McLeod-Skinner said Republicans "gave too much away" to corporations during last year's tax cut package and she believes

they are now going to use the resulting deficit increase as an excuse to cut Medicare and Social Security — something she plans to fight.

She also said she believes the Affordable Care Act must be improved, but not in a way that will make people lose coverage.

"We need to be helping to move it forward and not continually undermining it," she said.

She said she is concerned with rising college costs as well, and would like to see a sort of "civilian GI bill" where young people could get their education paid for in exchange for public service.

She discussed a middle-of-the-road vision for immigration. She does not believe in open borders, but does believe that those who are already here illegally should have some sort of path to legal residency without leaving the country, if they pay a fine for breaking the law and haven't committed other crimes. She also believes that instead of "terrorizing families" ICE should be focused on protecting the country from legitimately dangerous people and fighting human trafficking related to illegal immigration.

"I believe there is a common-sense way to move forward, that's fair to hard-working folks trying to put food on their table, that respects our laws but also helps the agricultural system," she said.

Neal to succeed father as Port of Morrow manager

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

The Port of Morrow has a new helmsman.

Ryan Neal, the current general manager of warehousing for the Port of Morrow, was selected unanimously by the port commission, and will fill the role to be vacated by his father, Gary, this fall.

Neal said he was excited for the opportunity to continue building on the successes of the current port staff.

"I'd like to continue our strategic plan, and drive economic development," he said. "I think we always try to find solutions to whatever problems we run into, whether permitting or financial issues. We try to find ways to accomplish our goals."

Commissioner Rick Stokoe said the commission has given Neal a conditional offer of employment, which is contingent on his passing a background check and going through contract negotiations. His salary will be between \$175,000 and \$225,000 annually.

"We decided Ryan was the best fit," Stokoe said. "He's well-informed with what's going on at the port."

He said Neal is also involved with the community, which was one of the commission's top priorities.

"All our applicants were highly qualified," he said. "But some were from big shipping ports, that only do container shipping. We do

a wealth of things — economic development, shipping, helping businesses. We need someone who understands our port."

He said the commission has not yet given Neal a start date, but estimated it will be sometime in October.

Neal was one of four finalists the commission interviewed. All

four appeared at a public meeting at the port on Monday, for which Stokoe said more than 100 people showed up. They shared a little about themselves and their vision for the port.

The other candidates were Dean Gardner, a longtime financial officer and businessman of Selah, Washington; Stephanie Seamans, a CPA from Kennewick; and Peter Wilhelm, a businessman who has worked for paper mills in Wallula, Washington and Zeachem.

The candidates went through four sets of interviews on Tuesday. They sat before three panels — one consisting of people familiar with the technical aspects of ports and industry, one of community members, and one of people in the business and finance world. The panelists were selected from throughout the region, said George Dunkel, the Special Districts Association of Oregon employee who conducted the candidate search.

"I feel honored that the commission selected someone that I know well," said Gary Neal. "It's a pretty exciting opportunity for him."



Ryan Neal

Lacrosse program asks for fields at EOTEC

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

The city of Hermiston is looking at developing 20 acres of lacrosse fields at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

The proposed sports fields would be created in the undeveloped acres near EOTEC's main entrance, currently used for overflow parking during the Umatilla County Fair.

According to a news release from the city, "the intention would be to design the grass fields in a way to allow that temporary (parking) use to take place each August and return them to playing condition for the remainder of the year."

Hermiston Youth Lacrosse approached the city, which took over full ownership of EOTEC this

spring, and VenuWorks, the professional management company running EOTEC on behalf of the city, with the proposal.

Under their proposal, the lacrosse organization would contribute about \$95,000 in monetary and in-kind donations it has secured to develop the multi-sport fields, with the understanding that lacrosse would take first priority.

As Hermiston has grown, the community has struggled to keep up with demand for sports fields. In 2012, the city invested approximately \$180,000 toward developing two soccer fields near Rocky Heights Elementary School.

"The sport of lacrosse has been growing rapidly in the Hermiston area, but the growth causes field avail-

ability shortages when other sports seasons overlap," the news release states.

The proposal was briefly discussed at Monday's council meeting, but the council unanimously voted to wait for further review before making a decision. The city has appointed an EOTEC advisory board made up of representatives from the city, Umatilla County Fair, Farm-City Pro Rodeo, hospitality industry and community at large, but major decisions such as the lacrosse fields are still brought before the council for a vote.

The committee and Venu-

Works are also working on a written long-term plan for EOTEC, which opened its event center in the spring of 2016 and hosted the its first fair last year.

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