

Walden, McLeod-Skinner take on the issues

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

Republican Greg Walden seeks an 11th term as the U.S. representative for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District. But he said this election is different.

He is feeling heat from some constituents. He has paid for billboards. And Democrat challenger Jamie McLeod-Skinner said she has now raised more than \$1 million. Still no threat to the \$3.2 million in Walden's account, but a good showing for a Democrat in this district.

A look around Pendleton shows plenty of McLeod-Skinner yard signs and none for Walden. Still, his visit Friday to town drew all of four protesters outside the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton, while about a dozen local public and health officials crowded into a conference room to meet with the man.

Walden and McLeod-Skinner this week talked about key issues in the race.

How they see the district

"We've got systems that are broken," McLeod-Skinner said, with 50 percent of district residents at or near the poverty line.

She took that figure from the United Way's "ALICE Report" for "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed," which qualifies the threshold as the average income a household needs to afford basic necessities (housing, child care, food and the like). The ALICE



This composite photo shows U.S. Rep Greg Walden and Jamie McLeod-Skinner, who is challenging him for the seat.

FILE PHOTOS

Threshold includes poverty-level households.

U.S. Census data shows 13.8 percent of the district's population had income below the poverty line, while the median household income is \$51,813 and the mean household income is \$68,305.

Walden said he does not see 50 percent poverty in the district, but pockets lack economic recovery and growth while others are booming.

Economic development

Walden said rural broadband is essential to the district's prosperity. T-Mobile has an "aggressive plan" to build the next generation of wireless communication throughout Eastern Oregon, he said, and other companies are likely to follow. Walden said public safety, education, health care and business all will benefit.

"This is really important to make sure we're not left behind," he said.

McLeod-Skinner, too, said growth hinges on broadband. She also touched on the need for a compact between states so Oregon could take more water from the Columbia River for growth. And she said the Port of Morrow could be just the place for a regional recycling hub.

Tariffs

Retaliatory tariffs on American agricultural exports are jeopardizing communities, McLeod-Skinner said, and the \$4.7 billion bailout to make up for losses is not the answer.

"Farmers don't want to borrow money from China," she said, "they want to sell wheat to China."

Walden agreed, but he said the wheat farmers he talked to are going to take

the "Trump bump" at 14 cents per bushel, and the tariffs are endurable for now. He contended the administration's use of tariffs is resulting in better deals with Canada and Mexico, with China as the big goal.

According to the Pew Research Center, the U.S. tariffs in 2016 across all products was 1.6 percent. Mexico's was 4.4 percent and China's was 3.5 percent.

Health care

McLeod-Skinner advocated for doctors, nurses and other professionals and tradespeople to serve in rural Oregon in exchange for the cost of their education.

"When I think about health care, I think about big picture ideas," she said.

That includes the consolidation of services and industry, she said, so patients could obtain health insurance through the government or a public-private

partnership.

And she wants to allow for the negotiation with pharmaceutical companies to keep drug prices down.

Walden rolled through Eastern Oregon on Friday to talk about his bill that helps local communities fight the opioid crisis.

"This will save lives," he said.

And he defended his vote to end the Affordable Care Act.

"Nobody gets kicked off as long as you're on Medicaid," he said.

Connecting to the people

McLeod-Skinner, her supporters and Walden critics have hammered the conservative politician for his lack of public town halls this election. McLeod-Skinner said that's part of the job.

"No. 1 — show up," she said.

Walden contended he has

no problem with that and has had multiple meetings on his seven trips this year to Umatilla County alone.

"I'm talking to people all over the district," he said.

But he does have a problem when people berate and even threaten his staff, he said, that's become a regular occurrence at his office in Bend. He said there's is more to the job than holding town halls, and in the past 12 months he handled 129,500 correspondences through a variety of means.

"So I'm deeply engaged in all of this," Walden asserted.

Nov. 6, election night

McLeod-Skinner said if she wins, she is heading to Burns on Nov. 7 to attend a public meeting. She said she is committed to maintaining connections with the people of the district.

Walden said he remains dedicated to working for the district and the often quiet work of passing bipartisan legislation. He said 92 percent of his 129 bills have had the support of 10 or more Democrats. The bill to fight opioid addiction passed with a wide bipartisan margin.

Political forecasting websites show the House is likely to flip from Republican control to Democrat, but Oregon's 2nd Congressional District remains a Republican lock. Fivethirtyeight.com estimates McLeod-Skinner taking almost 35 percent of the vote and Walden winning with about 61 percent.

That would be a drop of about 11 points for Walden since the 2016 election.

MEASURE 104

Amendment could increase requirements for tax vote

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
CAPITAL BUREAU

PORTLAND — Oregonians will have a chance to vote this November on how much legislative support certain state tax laws should need to pass.

The measure would amend the state Constitution to require a three-fifths majority, or "super-majority," approval in both the Oregon House of Representatives and Senate for changes to tax expenditures such as credits, exemptions and deductions.

If approved, the measure would also require bills containing fee increases — for fishing licenses, for example — have supermajority approval.

Given the current makeup of the Democrat-majority Legislature, those measures would require some Republican support to pass.

In 1996, Oregon voters approved a three-fifths majority requirement for bills "raising revenue."

This, supporters of Measure 104 say, meant that any bill modifying a tax expenditure was interpreted to require a three-fifths majority vote, and this is how lawyers for the Legislature interpreted the Constitution for years.

But in recent years, the courts have said that in order to be considered a bill for "raising revenue" under the state constitution, and thus require the three-fifths majority, a proposed bill must meet two tests: it must collect or bring money into the state treasury, and either impose a new tax or increase the

rate of an existing tax.

The measure would essentially define what it means to "raise revenue," and that definition would apply to a broader range of tax measures than the current legislative counsel interpretation.

Supporters of Measure 104 say that the measure would encourage bipartisanship and force lawmakers to work together to write legislation that is palatable to three-fifths of lawmakers.

Supporters also point to Senate Bill 1528, passed earlier this year by a simple majority, as an example of legislation that, in their view, should have required a three-fifths majority vote to pass.

That bill disallowed Oregon taxpayers from taking a new federal deduction from their state taxes. Had the Legislature not acted to disconnect from federal tax reforms, projections showed taxpayers would pay about \$1.3 billion less in state taxes over the next six years.

Opponents of the measure, on the other hand, say it could intensify a culture of "horse-trading" in the Capitol, and create legislative gridlock.

If lawmakers know that just a few votes stand between the measure passing and failing, they could withhold support until they get something else they want, opponents of 104 say.

They also say that it could be harder to discontinue tax expenditures that no longer serve the public interest, and force cuts to services such as health care and education.

Brown, Buehler facing off for governor

By PARIS ACHEN
CAPITAL BUREAU

Editor's note: This information was condensed from a pair of Sept. 27 stories in the East Oregonian.

Despite running for governor on the Republican ticket, state Rep. Knute Buehler has increasingly used the word "independent" to describe himself. He says he rejects the "narrow partisan labels" that have increasingly polarized the nation.

"Oregon is hungry for an independent-minded leader who is able to close a lot of these divides ... and is a governor for everyone no matter who you are, where you live, who you love or even how you are registered to vote," Buehler said during a September editorial board meeting of the Pamplin Media Group.

Since his election to the Oregon House of Representatives in 2014, Buehler has voted both with and against his party.

This is the second time he has challenged Democratic incumbent Kate Brown for state office. That last time they faced off was for Oregon secretary of state in 2012, a race won by Brown.

Brown — the nation's first openly bisexual governor and the face of progressive policies such as no co-payments for reproductive health care — is seeking a final term as Oregon governor.

As a Democrat, Brown enters the race with an advantage among the state's liberal-leaning electorate. Her campaign has focused on her wealth of political experience beginning in 1991 and has sought to discredit Buehler's claim to support pro-choice policies.

In response to Buehler's outreach to Independents, nonaffiliated voters and even Democrats, Brown has highlighted the times when she brought conservatives and liberals together to address shared problems. Last year, for instance, she negotiated with Republicans to secure their votes for a \$5.3 billion transportation package.

"I'm the only one in



Knute Buehler



Kate Brown

the race that has a track record of bringing Oregonians together to tackle difficult issues facing Oregon." Brown said during an editorial board meeting with Pamplin. "I'm a consensus builder and a collaborator. And that's the same kind of strategies I'll use if Oregonians give me the opportunity to serve as governor for four more years."

Education

Buehler released an ambitious outline earlier this year to boost the state's public education system from bottom five among the states to the top five in five years.

One of Brown's top priorities for another term is to improve the state's four-year high school graduation rate. The first part of her strategy is to follow the statute that voters approved with Measure 98 in 2018.

Brown says she will seek to nearly double the investment in high school career and technical education to \$300 million in the next biennium. Secondly, she wants to expand access to prekindergarten programs to an addi-

tional 10,000 students. She wants to expand the school year to 180 days from 165. Finally, she wants to look for ways to improve teachers' access to professional development and mentoring.

Health care

Buehler has pledged to protect Oregonians from federal cuts to the Medicaid program, which provides health care subsidies for low-income residents, and to advance the state's innovative coordinated care organizations. He said he wants to integrate mental health care into the Oregon Health Plan — the state's version of Medicaid — and in health care delivered by those CCOs. He says he supports a woman's right to choose but has been criticized for voting against the state's Reproductive Health Equity Act, which bans a co-payment for reproductive health care, among other things.

One of Brown's priorities is to increase the number of insured adults from 94 percent to 99 percent and insured children from over 98 percent to 100 percent.

Housing

Buehler has proposed creating 4,000 emergency shelter beds statewide to get homeless residents off the streets, partly with state funding and partly with federal and philanthropic contributions. He supports measures to fast-track housing development and offer property tax abatement to incentivize the construction of affordable units. He also is a proponent of tweaks to the state's land use laws to make it easier to build affordable housing in areas that are now outside the urban growth boundary.

Brown has pledged to request \$370 million from the Legislature for affordable housing incentives and housing assistance in the next two years. Since she became governor, lawmakers have allocated \$300 million to assist in building affordable units, homelessness prevention programs and rental assistance. Oregon Housing and Community Services has awarded subsidies and tax credits to build about 15,000 units in the past three years.

Public Employees Retirement System

Buehler says he would move the pension program's \$25 billion in unfunded obligations to retirees to the top of his agenda.

"I won't sign any new spending bills until I have a PERS reform bill on my desk," he said. Reforms he would like to see would: cap annual payouts to future retirees at \$100,000 per year; require public employees to contribute to their retirement fund; and transition the pension plan to a 401(k) retirement plan.

Brown has spearheaded some modest changes to the pension system, such as incentives for public employers to pay off debt.

She said she wants covered workers to have "skin in the game," and noted that after recent rounds of collective bargaining, 98 percent of state workers will pay 6 percent of their salary for their pension side accounts. That contribution has long been paid by the state.



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