

Former Oregon governor believes new approach needed

By KATHY ANEY
STAFF WRITER

Former Gov. John Kitzhaber started his keynote speech at Thursday's health care summit in Hermiston with a personal story.

He told of his early years as a 27-year-old Roseburg emergency room doctor fresh out of medical school and awed by the responsibility of caring for people who arrived at the hospital injured, sick, confused or frightened. Occasionally, patients died.

"When I was unable to save a life, I walked across the hall to a small room where people waited for news of their loved ones," he said. "It seemed like a long, lonely journey across 30 feet of tile floor."

In those days, he treated each individual patient without regard to cost, viewing death as the enemy and treating people as individuals. In 1978, he was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives where he was forced to look at health care from a different angle.

"I came face-to-face with a fundamental contradiction," he said. "As a legislator, I couldn't ignore the cost."

Kitzhaber's keynote speech this week came midway through the 2019 Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization Clinician & Staff Summit at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. Clinicians, health care administrators and policy makers sitting at white, linen-covered tables listened to Kitzhaber's thoughts on national and state health care reform.

Kitzhaber said he



Former Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber shares his thoughts about health care delivery in Oregon on Thursday at the EOCCO Clinician & Staff Summit in Hermiston.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

believes we are thinking about health care all wrong on the national level.

"For decades, we've been asking the wrong question. We've been asking about the subsidies and who pays," he said. "Instead we should be asking, 'Why does health care cost so much in the first place?'"

He said price points in the U.S. are higher than most anywhere else in the world. "Why?" he asked the group.

Kitzhaber ticked off several reasons. Private equity investors are buying up the most profitable parts of the system, driving up costs. Insurance companies have cut eligibility and lowered reimbursement rates. The national debt increases to

pay for hikes in Medicare and Medicaid costs.

"The insured uninsured" have \$5,000 deductibles and "don't really have insurance at all," he quipped. "Cost shifting is the way we avoid confronting reality."

One way out, he said, is funding health care from a specific pot of money indexed to a sustainable growth rate.

"That's exactly what we're trying to do in Oregon with the CCOs," Kitzhaber said.

In 2009, as a state senator, Kitzhaber helped pioneer the Oregon Health Plan. He later helped birth the state's system of 15 coordinated care organizations, locally governed networks of health

care providers who deliver care to the state's most vulnerable residents. The idea is to focus on prevention to get people healthy, reduce visits to expensive emergency rooms and lower costs. The EOCCO serves Umatilla, Morrow and 10 other Eastern Oregon counties.

During the first five years, some CCOs performed better than others, but the state saved more than \$1 billion. There were bumps, too, including the Cover Oregon disaster, and the state's Affordable Care Act insurance exchange website designed by Oracle Corp., which failed spectacularly.

Kitzhaber is unhappy with recent reforms to Oregon health care, which he

called CCO 2.0. Last week, he sent a letter to Gov. Kate Brown, House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney to weigh in on two developments he considers especially worrisome.

He opposes new reporting requirements that will force CCOs to hire more personnel, increase costs and "appeared to have been copied and pasted from the current insurance code."

"I am concerned that this increase in rules, regulations and reporting will be particularly burdensome on smaller rural CCOs which have become important community assets," he wrote. The reforms, intended to increase oversight, may

quench the ability of locally based CCOs to operate.

"These provisions and others appear to retreat from the community model based on local control and a sense of local ownership in favor of a more punitive top-down approach," he wrote.

Kitzhaber also objects to the state granting Trillium Community Health, owned by Fortune 500 company Centene Corp., to contract to administer the Oregon Health Plan in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties, in addition to Lane County, which it already administers.

The governor said Oregon has much to lose if the CCO model goes south, including 30 years of collaboration and a chance to pioneer health care policy for the country as a whole.

"If we lose this model, we lose the opportunity to steer the national debate," he said. "Right now, the model is in question."

Kitzhaber resigned in 2015 under a cloud as the FBI investigated his fiancée and first lady, Cylvia Hayes, for influence peddling. He left office barely a month into his fourth term as governor. Still, Kitzhaber remains a strong voice in the world of health care reform policy.

A health policy publication called "State of Reform" recently quoted Kitzhaber comparing himself to Don Quixote during a private dinner in Washington, D.C., where he goes frequently to talk about health care reform.

"I think of these trips as 'Don Quixote goes to Washington,'" he said. "Health care reform is probably my windmill."

Candidates begin filing for 2020 elections

Only one person has filed for the May 2020 elections in Umatilla County so far

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

The 2020 elections may be months away, but the county filing period for candidates opened on Sept. 12.

So far, only one person has filed for candidacy: Dan Dorran of Hermiston filed for Umatilla County commissioner position three.

Kim Lindell, Umatilla County elections manager, said that the 2020 elections in the county are on the back burner as her office gears up for the special election that is happening on Nov. 5.

"I don't want to have a discussion that is louder than the November elections," said Dorran, who is involved with two charter measures that are on the upcoming ballot.

Voters in November will also have the chance to weigh in on several other matters, including the Hermiston School District bond measure and the formation of the Milton-Free-water ambulance district.

Open positions in the county for the May 2020 primaries include county commissioner position No. 3, Umatilla County district attorney, and Umatilla County sheriff.

Lindell said others have called to inquire about the

commissioner position.

For Dorran, who has previously served on several local boards including the Umatilla County Fair Board, the position would be an opportunity to provide a strong voice from Umatilla County on matters ranging in scope from local scope to statewide.

He said that he hasn't begun work on his official campaign yet.

"I think there are things we take for granted in Umatilla County. We are a logistical and distribution hub," Dorran said. "Umatilla County is sitting on a good spot compared to a lot of other rural counties."

Dorran said that people had expressed an interest in him filing for candidacy as early as the last county commissioner election.

"I feel extremely humbled that people asked me to consider running. It's something that I'm passionate about and look forward to," he said.

Lindell said Umatilla County voters should keep an eye on the county website for updates on both the November 2019 election and the May 2020 primaries.

During the May 2018 primary elections, only 13,310 ballots were cast from a pool of 42,511 registered voters in Umatilla County. The numbers improved to over half of the registered voters later that year during the November elections.

"We like to keep voters apprised and active in voting," she said. "Voting sort of falls off of people's radar in Umatilla County."

In Morrow County, only one open position for the 2020 elections has two contenders so far.

According to Morrow County Clerk Bobbi Childers, current Morrow County Sheriff Kenneth Matlack has filed to run for his position again. Another candidate, Boardman Police Department Sgt. Mark Pratt, has announced his bid for the position but hasn't yet registered with the county.

Pratt said he used to work for the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, and that as sheriff, he would hope to enhance the office's partnership with other stakeholders.

"I would like to make sure that the victims of crimes are constantly kept in touch with by the deputy authorities," Pratt said.

He mentioned he'd be interested in adjusting the different roles and responsibilities at the sheriff's office.

Matlack, who is currently at a conference regarding border security and immigration in Washington, D.C., was not available to comment before deadline.

Both candidates have published campaign websites and Facebook pages regarding their candidacy.

Matlack's website

brought to attention the 2017 restructure of the Morrow County Sheriff's Office's command staff as a recent success in his career.

"Our restructure for patrol, as well as for our communications and civil staff, has now allowed for promotional opportunities for advancement which will allow for better retention of our employees," Matlack stated on the site.

Matlack was elected to the position in 2004. His Facebook campaign page states he wants to prioritize financial responsibility and the continuation of 24-hour coverage.

The other open positions for the upcoming Morrow County elections include Position 1 on the board of county commissioners, which is currently held by Jim Doherty, treasurer, which is held by Gayle L. Gutierrez, and the county clerk position. Childers said she filed for the clerk position.

Childers said that Gutierrez and Matlack were the only other two people to file for candidacy with the county so far.

The deadline to file for the May 2020 primaries is March 10, 2020. If only two people are filed for a position, their election will go straight to the November 2020 ballot.

"I just do it so I can get it out of the way," said Childers. "But some people wait until the filing deadline."

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