

Walden

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the re-election bid of President Donald Trump. Seven Democrats have said they won't run. Walden is the fourth GOP House member who lost a committee chairmanship last year because of the majority switch who has announced they are leaving next year.

Walden said he was not retiring out of any concern that he could lose re-election or fail to regain the House majority, where he had served as chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee before Democrats took control in 2018. He is now ranking member of the committee.

"I am confident I could earn the support of 2nd District voters for another term," he said. "I'm also optimistic that a path exists for Republicans to recapture a majority in the House."

Walden, whose background is in radio, gave no specifics about what he will do after he retires from Congress.

"For me, the time has come to pursue new challenges and opportunities," he said.

Walden's statement would appear to rule out



HH file photo

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden congratulates Pendleton High School senior Kirk Liscom on being accepted into the United States Naval Academy during a town hall meeting in May in Hermiston.

running for any other political office next year. Merkely is running for a third term in the U.S. Senate. Oregon's secretary of state, attorney general and treasurer positions are also on the ballot. As the state's most high-profile Republican, Walden could be pressured to run for governor in 2022 when Gov. Kate Brown is ineligible for re-election due to term limits.

While the overwhelming majority of his votes were solidly in line with the Republican agenda in the House, Walden has not been in lock-step with President Trump on issues.

As chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, he supported

Trump's position on repealing the Affordable Care Act, to relax net neutrality rules, and has backed Trump on the current Ukrainian scandal.

In his statement, Walden recounted his more than 20 years in office, saying that he had worked to find solutions to the opioid crisis, improve forest health, and increase access to high-speed broadband. Walden said he was proud to champion the issues facing Oregonians east of the Cascades and south of the Willamette Valley.

"Rural Oregon values run deeply in my veins," Walden said. "My ancestors arrived here in 1845 and I grew up on a cherry orchard in The Dalles with par-

ents who survived the Great Depression. They taught me the true meaning of community; the importance of giving back; and the value of hard work. That's why I've given it my all for the people and the way of life we so enjoy in Oregon."

The son of former state Rep. Peter Walden, Greg Walden was elected to the Oregon House in 1989. He was Majority Leader for the 1991 and 1993 legislative sessions. He served two years in the Oregon Senate from 1995 to 1997.

While Walden's departure from Congress had been a subject of speculation, it came as a surprise to Republicans in his home state.

Sen. Cliff Bentz said he'd talked to Walden months ago, shortly after speculation the congressman wouldn't run again emerged. Bentz said Walden made no mention of future plans, and he'd assumed the longtime lawmaker would run again next year.

"I would just hope that he is running again," Bentz said last week. "Please, Greg. Please."

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said Walden's departure raises the broader concern of politics continuing to shift to the extremes at either end of

the spectrum.

Oregon is in effect a one-party state, he said, and political balance is crucial to good governance. He said he hoped Walden's move out of politics does not continue the slide at the federal level.

When it comes to spitting about which Republicans might run for the seat, Murdock said, "You have to look at who has the horsepower."

Bentz brings that kind of broader visibility, Murdock said, as does Knute Buehler. The former state representative from Central Oregon ran a credible campaign for governor and tweeted Tuesday he was considering a run.

"And nobody in Portland is going to vote on this one," Murdock quipped.

Murdock also said he appreciates that Buehler ran as a moderate, again advocating for that sense of balance.

"We moderates could have a voice," he said.

Walden's announcement took Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, by surprise.

"He's made a decision, and I respect that," Hansell said. "It will be a huge loss for us in the district."

He said he hailed Walden's work with local national forest plans and

with securing funding for the Eastern Oregon Airport as some of the involvement that made him "a champion" for the district.

"It's an open seat, I think the Republican Party will work very hard to keep it," Hansell added.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepburn, who interned for Walden's office in the early 1990s when the congressman was working as a state representative, wasn't as taken aback by the Monday announcement.

"I think after 22 years, elected officials get tired and want to move on and do other things with their life. Greg has been a tremendous statesman," he said. "We'll be losing a tremendous amount of seniority in D.C."

Smith said his "phone has been ringing off the hook" with people asking him if he's going to run for Walden's seat, but he feels like he's better off serving as a senior legislator in Salem rather than a freshman representative in Washington.

Smith predicted that the Republican primary contest would be a "race to the right," but a "mainstream" candidate would emerge as the nominee.

Oregon Public Broadcasting contributed to this report.

Elections

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includes a primary in May and a general election in November. That creates situations, such as the 2018 race, when John Shafer and Larry Givens faced off. Shafer won more than 50% of the vote in May, but was not technically elected until November, when his name again appeared on the ballot — this time as the only candidate listed. He took office at the beginning of 2019, nearly eight months after voters first chose him.

If voters approve Measure 30-132, when only one or two candidates file for a seat on the board of commissioners, no primary will be held in May. Instead, the candidate or candidates will appear on the ballot in November, saving the cost of a primary race and shortening the amount of time between when a commissioner is elected and when they take office.

"Elections cost money," Elfering said.

If more than two candidates file, they will appear on the ballot in May, and the top two vote-getters will advance to a general election in November.

Hermiston School District is also on the ballot, asking voters to approve a \$82.7 million bond. The money, coupled with \$6.6 million in matching funds from the state, would pay for replacement of Rocky Heights Elementary School, a new elementary school on Theater Lane, a new annex added to the high school, updates to pickup/dropoff areas in front of schools and new property for future schools. It is not

expected to raise the current school bond tax rate of \$3.65 per \$1,000 of assessed value, and would be paid off within 26 years.

In answer to a question about whether the city and county giving Amazon a break on property taxes would affect the bond, Mooney said the planned development, while located in Hermiston's enterprise zone, is actually located in the boundaries of Stanfield School District, not Hermiston's, and the tax dollars would have gone there.

"Hermiston School District would not see any money from that," she said.

However, Amazon has agreed to donate \$50,000 a year to Hermiston School District, in recognition that its employees will likely have children in the district. Since the money is considered a voluntary gift, not tax revenue, it will not count against the amount of per-student dollars the school district gets from the state each year.

Part of the challenge of putting a measure or candidate on the ballot isn't just convincing voters of a certain position — it's also getting them to actually cast a vote. When voter turnout in Oregon is tallied after an election, it's not uncommon for Umatilla County to rank dead last.

The county had the lowest voter turnout of any county in the state during the November 2018 election, with 56.5% of eligible voters turning in a ballot, compared to 68.4% statewide.

Umatilla County elections clerk Kim Lindell said as of Monday evening, only 10.28% of ballots had come in.

"I think turnout for this election is going to be on the lighter side because most of the county will just see the two amendments," she said. "Charter amendments are important, but they're not very exciting."

The reasons Oregonians don't exercise their right to vote are varied. Some simply forget to turn in their ballot before deadline. Others don't like their choices, don't think their individual vote matters or feel like they don't have enough information to make an informed decision.

Amanda Walker of Umatilla falls into the last category. She said she didn't turn in her ballot last year because she didn't feel like she knew enough about the candidates and measures presented.

"I didn't feel like I had enough time to get informed, and I didn't want to vote blindly," she said.

Last November's ballot was packed with choices, including local, state and federal candidates and measures that would do everything from prohibiting grocery taxes to repealing Oregon's sanctuary state status. Walker said it can be hard for the average person working full time to track down credible information for each item.

She suggested that people find a trusted friend who is up to speed and ask them to explain ballot measures or candidates' positions.

Jose Garcia, chair of Hermiston's Hispanic Advisory Committee, said the committee has worked hard to try to register Hermiston residents to vote, but he often hears from people who flat-out refuse to register or to cast a vote, even though they are qualified to do so.

He chalked it up to a lack of trust in government.

"It goes back to some organization, some institution where they had a bad experience, or a relative suffered some consequences, and now that sense of safety is gone," he said.

Lindell said if people have distrust in the elections process or worry it's rigged, they are welcome to come to the elections office in Pendleton and be an official observer while ballots are being counted, or just talk with staff to find out how the process works.

She said Oregon's vote by mail system makes it very secure against hacking by

foreign governments or anyone else, as it is unconnected to the internet and backed up by physical ballots the county has in hand.

Some people said they didn't vote in the last election because they didn't receive a ballot. Lindell said ballots are mailed out 20 days before an election, which means people should get them about 17 or 18 days before the election. Anyone who notices they haven't received one should call the elections office at 541-278-6254 or visit oregonvotes.gov to check on their registration.

New voters must register at least 21 days before an

election, but registered voters whose status has become inactivated or are registered under the wrong address can get that fixed. They can have a ballot mailed to them up until the Thursday before election day, or they can walk into the elections office in Pendleton and fill out a ballot in person up until 8 p.m. on election day.

During Monday's city council meeting, mayor David Drotzmann noted that the city had endorsed the school bond, and encouraged residents to vote.

"It's one thing to say you support an initiative; it's another thing to actually turn in your ballot," he said.

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BTW: Warming Station trainings scheduled

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Nov. 7 from 6:30-8 p.m.,
Nov. 10 from 2-3:30 p.m.,
Nov. 13 from 6-7:30 p.m.,
Nov. 15 from 9-10:30 a.m.,
Nov. 19 from 6:30-8 p.m.
and Nov. 21 from 6-7:30 p.m.

While chaperoning little ghosts and goblins during Thursday's **Treats on Main** in Hermiston, people are encouraged to make a donation to **UNICEF** — United Nations International Emergency Fund. Members of the **Hermiston High School Key Club**, a service organization affiliated with **Kiwanis International**, will be handing out candy and accepting donations for UNICEF, which will help support **The Eliminate Project**.

The effort is devoted to helping prevent mothers and

their babies from dying due to disease. Money will go toward the purchase of vaccinations that prevent diseases like tetanus.

Contributions can also be dropped off at the HHS office, 600 S. First St. Donating any amount of cash or even spare change adds up, said **Jessica Rodriguez**, HHS Key Club editor. During the past two years, the local club has raised more than \$700 towards the effort. For more information, contact Key Club advisor **Janet Sexton** at janet.sexton@hermiston.org or 541-667-6144.

Ken Daniel has been named as the new **Blue Mountain Community College Foundation** executive director, the school announced on Monday.

Daniel replaces **Margaret Gianotti**, who will retire

Dec. 2 after 12 years in the role. The BMCC Foundation invests and fundraises to support BMCC student scholarships and programs.

Daniel comes to BMCC from the **Family Health & Wellness Foundation** in Kennewick, Washington, where he served as executive director. The foundation was formerly a part of **Trios Health**.

Thursday's menu for the **Harkenrider Senior Activity Center** is baked chicken, red parsley potatoes, corn, fruit salad and cake by **Sun Terrace**. Friday is hot roast beef sandwich, mashed potatoes and gravy, and dessert. Monday is barbecue pork sandwich, salad and dessert. Tuesday is ham, scalloped potatoes, peas and carrots, and dessert. Next Wednesday is baked fish, broccoli, green salad and Jell-o.