

# Five candidates vie for Umatilla County commissioner

By ALEX CASTLE  
STAFF WRITER

Ballots have been mailed out for the May 19 primary election in Oregon, and voters of all parties will have a chance to vote for a candidate to replace Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering, who is stepping down after eight years in office.

The top two vote-getters in the May election will advance to a head-to-head competition during the November election, and the winner of that vote will take office in January 2021.

The position is nonpartisan, and candidates can be from anywhere in Umatilla County. Five candidates have filed: HollyJo Beers, Dan Dorran, Mark Gomolski, Patricia Maier and Jonathan Lopez. Below are excerpts from interviews with the candidates, taken from longer profiles published in the East Oregonian and available in full length at [www.eastoregonian.com](http://www.eastoregonian.com).

## Jonathan Lopez

An associate pastor at Hermiston's Living Springs Apostolic Church and the chief executive officer of the Einstein Learning Center, Jonathan Lopez, 29, has committed himself to the Umatilla County community in his short time here.

"I have no political background or involvement in my past history, but I am a person who always cares and is concerned for his community," he said. "If I'm being prosperous, if I'm being successful, then I shouldn't be content with other people's misery."

Lopez is now focused on dedicating himself to helping the local community progress, which he hopes to achieve as the next Umatilla County commissioner.

"I want to work for all the residents of Umatilla County. I want to reestablish our place in the world so that they can see our potential and what we have here as a county in the state of Oregon," he said.

Lopez was born in Los Angeles and moved to Harrisonburg, Virginia, when he was 10 years old, where he was raised and lived until moving to Hermiston at the end of 2017.

That fact, coupled with him being more than 30 years younger than any of the other commissioner candidates, could label Lopez as the new kid on the block. Lopez doesn't want to use that youth to completely overhaul the ideas and perspectives of the area's older generations, but rather hopes to be a unifier between generations.

"Age brings wisdom, but me being younger also allows me to connect with other populations, such as the young couples coming to the area," he says. "I could be a good bridge between both generations."

Lopez is also a member of the Hermiston Hispanic Advisory Committee, and as the COVID-19 pandemic has escalated over the past months, he's committed him-

self to disseminating bilingual information on his social media pages to keep a portion of the population that data shows has been especially vulnerable to the virus.

He may be young and relatively new to the area, but Lopez feels his fresh perspective and commitment to the community can help lead Umatilla County toward progress.

"I believe that if we use our county to its best capabilities, we can make it shine," he says.

## Patricia Maier

The owner of local general contracting company, Pat Maier, 73, has spent just about her entire life in small business.

In those 17 years of doing business throughout the county, Maier and her company, 1-A Construction & Fire, have had to navigate environmental regulations, public utility companies, property disputes and other challenges during her 17 years in business.

"I don't think any of the other candidates has the background in business that I have," she said. "If you've been in business for 17 years, you've been through the ups and the downs."

Maier plans to use that experience of keeping a small business afloat and solving the problems that come her way to propel her into becoming the next Umatilla County commissioner.

"When I run into a problem, I have to tackle that problem and I have to solve that problem," Maier says. "I believe in action. I believe in working for what I get. I believe in going to work and taking care of things."

Maier hopes to represent a fresh addition to the county, which she says has been bogged down by too many "good ole boys" who have held elected positions, something she proudly proclaims she's not part of.

Born and raised in Strong City, Kansas, Maier now resides in Hermiston and her background also includes serving as an administrator for Northwest Pipeline and as the former director of United Way of Umatilla and Morrow Counties. She also highlights that she's worked in the health care and railroad industries, along with being a member of her neighborhood watch organizations.

As a commissioner, Maier wants to use her insight as a small business owner to help each corner of the county thrive economically. To achieve her goal, Maier aims to connect individually and better understand each city so they can identify opportunities for growth, which is what she says she did back in Hermiston during the mid-1980s.

Maier currently boasts a personal endorsement from Suni Danforth, the chair of the Umatilla County Republican Party, which she believes she earned by being the conservative candidate in the race who's ready to get to work for Umatilla County.

## CANDIDATES AT A GLANCE

### JONATHAN LOPEZ

**Age:** 29  
**Residence:** Hermiston  
**Birthplace:** Los Angeles, California  
**Years in Umatilla County:** 3  
**Highest level of education:** Masters in business administration at Georgetown University  
**Occupation:** CEO of Einstein Learning Center, associate pastor at Living Springs Apostolic Church in Hermiston.



Lopez

### PATRICIA MAIER

**Age:** 73  
**Residence:** Hermiston  
**Birthplace:** Strong City, Kansas  
**Years in Umatilla County:** 48  
**Highest level of education:** Studied business and accounting at Butler Community College (Kansas)  
**Occupation:** Small business owner



Maier

### MARK GOMOLSKI

**Age:** 62  
**Residence:** Hermiston  
**Birthplace:** Chicago, Illinois  
**Years in Umatilla County:** 7 years  
**Highest level of education:** Two years at St. Xavier College in Chicago  
**Occupation:** Retired



Gomolski

### DAN DORRAN

**Age:** 64  
**Residence:** Hermiston  
**Birthplace:** Walla Walla, Washington (raised in Hermiston)  
**Years in Umatilla County:** 52 (12 years spent in Alaska)  
**Highest level of Education:** Oregon State University, five years studying resource economics  
**Occupation:** Dealer sales manager at Atlas Copco



Dorran

### HOLLYJO BEERS

**Age:** 66  
**Residence:** Milton-Freewater  
**Birthplace:** Pendleton (raised in Pilot Rock)  
**Years in Umatilla County:** 66  
**Highest level of Education:** Eastern Oregon University, bachelor's degree in liberal arts with minors in criminal justice and history  
**Occupation:** Retired



Beers

"I believe in conservatism, I believe in our way of life, and I believe in the everyday people," she says. "I will work hard for the everyday person, and I am not in the pocket of anyone."

## Mark Gomolski

Born and raised in Chicago, Mark Gomolski, 62, was only 10 when he lost his father to a heart attack. With his mother under the pressure to financially support their family, Gomolski tried to apply for a permit so he could legally get a job at age 14.

Gomolski was denied the permit, but resiliently wrote a letter to the editor of Chicago Today detailing his situation. Chicago City Hall eventually got wind of the letter, and it ended up in front of the mayor at the time.

The mayor then sent a member of his staff to contact Gomolski and his mother to set up a meeting, where Gomolski was told he'd be getting his permit and an opportunity to work for the city.

"He had told me back then that as long as he was mayor, I would have a job in the city," Gomolski says.

"As a 14-year-old trying to help support your family, that leaves an impression."

As a candidate for Umatilla County commissioner, Gomolski is running to work for the people and give back to the community that he now calls home.

"People need a commissioner who will listen to them, help them when possible and who will not forget them," he says. "I will not forget you."

Gomolski moved to Umatilla County seven years ago after a career in Cook County, Illinois, government and today is retired in Hermiston, where he's served for three years on the Hermiston School Board and been a member of the Hermiston Hispanic Advisory Committee. He also served on Umatilla County's charter review board, helped Elfering with his 2016 campaign, and is a volunteer for organizations such as Agape House and Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church.

While much of his professional experience is in government work, Gomolski feels he embodies the average, everyday working indi-

vidual and is striving to represent those like him in the 2020 race for Umatilla County commissioner.

"I'm just an average guy trying to do what's right for my community," he says.

## Dan Dorran

Dan Dorran's father always used to tell him to never run for public office.

"It's easier to accomplish things behind the scenes," Dorran recalls the advice from his late father and local pioneer of the energy industry, Russ Dorran.

While perhaps not completely behind the scenes, Dorran, 64, has served for decades as an appointed or volunteer member of various infrastructure committees, fair boards and chambers of commerce.

And after all that experience, Dorran believes he's poised to be the candidate in a crowded race for Umatilla County commissioner who will not only be able to accomplish his goals while in office, but be able to do so the moment he steps into it.

"What it really boils down to is, how are we going to be ready to address issues on January 1, 2021? He said. "And I think I am the prepared candidate — I will be a day one candidate."

Born in Walla Walla, Washington, and raised in Hermiston, where he resides today, Dorran was a fixture on the Umatilla County Fair Board for nearly 20 years and served three terms as president.

He was also a member of the steering committee that worked on the \$21 million development of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center in Hermiston that is now home to the fair.

Most recently, Dorran served on the county's charter review committee in 2019, and currently sits on boards for the Farm-City Pro Rodeo and Umatilla County 4-H Association.

Mixed with Dorran's community involvement is 22 years of professional experience at Atlas Copco, a Swedish multi-billion dollar global engineering and manufacturing corporation.

"The one thing that is always important to me is you get something done. You set goals, you get things done," he said. "It's the ability to get along together with very diverse boards and come up with a consensus that moves the ball forward towards whatever the goal is that you set."

According to Dorran, he's already coalesced supporters that include over a dozen members of the county fair board and steering committee whom he served with, along with an endorsement from Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner.

He may not have followed the advice of his late father, but Dorran is convinced he doesn't have to remain behind the scenes for the county to reach its goals in 2020 and beyond.

"I'm not sure what he'd say now, but I think things have changed and it's possi-

ble to make a real difference if you know how to work well with and navigate these diverse boards and committees of people," he says.

## HollyJo Beers

Nothing is more sacred to HollyJo Beers than the U.S. Constitution.

As one of five candidates running in the May 19 primary for the only open seat on the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners, Beers, 66, is promising the nation's foundational document will guide her as she aims to use her mixture of local and statewide political activism to better represent the voices of Umatilla County.

"I'm not a part of the good ol' boys club, and I'm not a 'yes' man," she said. "I am a constitutionalist. I believe in the Constitution and in protecting the people's rights, and for liberty and justice for all people of Umatilla County."

Though she'll readily acknowledge her minimal experience in holding elected office, Beers, who resides in Milton-Freewater, has lived in Umatilla County all her life and worked a variety of jobs.

Now retired, in the last five years, Beers has been politically engaged with Umatilla County's chapter of the Oregon Three Percenters, a group she now leads locally that is devoted to resisting infringements on the Constitution by the U.S. government.

In Umatilla County, the Oregon Three Percenters have particularly petitioned and lobbied for greater protections of the Second Amendment, which Beers claims as essential to protecting the rest.

"Once the Second Amendment goes, you have no way to defend yourself from the rest of them falling," she says.

Nationally, the Three Percenters have been associated with protests against immigrants and refugees. The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled the group as "anti-government extremists," a label Beers strongly disagrees with.

"We are not anti-government, we're anti-corrupt government," she said. "That's been a common liberal description of our movement. When people around here look at me, they don't see that."

Beers has been fighting urgently for over the last half decade for Umatilla County voices to be heard in Salem, by traveling around the state, attending rallies and organizing local ones of her own.

"I want to come back here to Umatilla County and institute the things that I have learned and the ways that we can deal with some of the laws coming out of Salem," she says.

Locally, Beers says her top objectives are economic development, homelessness and government accessibility.

"I think I bring a fresh voice, a different perspective, and a new look at things," she says.

# Candidates for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District speak at forums

HERMISTON HERALD

Primary candidates for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District shared their vision last weekend at a series of three virtual candidate forums hosted by EO Media Group.

The first forum, on May 1, featured four of the five Democratic candidates for the seat that will be vacated at the end of the year by Republican Congressman Greg Walden.

Those candidates were Nick Heuertz, a 48-year-old Central Point resident and a business consultant; John Holm, a 51-year-old licensed Realtor and political strategist from Medford; Alex Spenser, a 55-year-old writer and performance coach from Klamath Falls; and Chris Vaughn, a 54-year-old Bend resident and specialty food sales representative.

A fifth candidate, Jack



Clockwise from top left, Nick Heuertz, John Holm, Chris Vaughn and Alex Spenser, are the Democrats seeking the nomination to run for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District.

Howard of La Grande, did not participate.

On May 2, Republican candidates were divided up between two forums. The first featured Travis Fager,

48, a La Grande resident and manager of a commercial radio station; Justin Livingston, 42, a real estate broker and Bend City Councilor and Jeff Smith, 57, a computer



Top: (l-r) Jason Atkinson, Cliff Bentz, Knute Buehler and Jimmy Crumpacker Bottom: Travis Fager, Justin Livingston and Jeff Smith

programmer from Elgin.

The second round of candidates interviewed were Jason Atkinson, 49, a business consultant from Central Point who served in the Ore-

gon Legislature for 14 years; Cliff Bentz, 68, an Ontario farmer, attorney and former state representative; Knute Buehler, 55, an orthopedic surgeon who represented

Bend in the state House until an unsuccessful run for governor; and Jimmy Crumpacker, 41, a commodities trader from Tumalo.

Four other candidates declined to participate: David Campbell, Glenn Carey Jr., Kenneth Mendenbach, and Mark Roberts.

Candidates were each asked the same set of questions, which covered topics such as health care, economic recovery and climate change.

Videos for all three of the forums can be found on the *Hermiston Herald* Facebook page or on the videos section of [www.hermistonherald.com](http://www.hermistonherald.com). Written articles about the forums can be found in the May 2 and May 5 editions of the *East Oregonian*.

*Biographical information about the candidates was compiled by Kyle Spurr of the Bend Bulletin.*