

GOP incumbents outline plans for next term

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
STAFF WRITER

State Rep. Greg Smith and state Sen. Bill Hansell are facing some unusual circumstances in their reelection bids — a Democratic challenge.

Hansell, who represents Senate District 29 from his home in Athena, hasn't faced a Democrat since he was first elected in 2012. This will be Smith's first general election opponent since the Heppner business owner ran for District 57 in 2010.

Irrigon contractor Roland Ruhe is running against Smith, but did not return a call for comment until after the print deadline for the *East Oregonian* edition this article was written for. Joseph retiree Mildred O'Callaghan, Hansell's opponent, did not return a request for comment.

During his 10th term in the Oregon Legislature, Smith received an increased level of scrutiny from media across the state.

Willamette Week said Smith "may be the best



compensated lawmaker in Salem," highlighting connections between his day job as an economic development specialist and the projects he approves as a legislator.

The *Malheur Enterprise* investigated the public contracts he holds through his personal company, including his role as the director of the Malheur County Economic Development Department

Smith said he drew attention to his nonlegislative work because of his willingness to declare potential conflicts of interest on the House floor.

"I don't know how much more transparent I can be," he said.

Smith said he has a bigger target on his back because of his seniority and his close relationship to House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter

CANDIDATE BIOS

HOUSE DISTRICT 57
GREG SMITH



Party: Republican
Age: 51
Occupation: Small business owner and economic development specialist
Birthplace: Portland
Education: Master's degree, Eastern Oregon University
Family: Married, five children and one grandchild
ROLAND RUHE
Party: Democrat

SENATE DISTRICT 29
BILL HANSELL



Party: Republican
Age: 75
Occupation: Retired, former Umatilla County commissioner
Birthplace: Colfax, Washington
Education: Bachelor's degree, University of Oregon
Family: Married, six children and 11 grandchildren
MILDRED O'CALLAGHAN
Party: Democrat

Courtney, who are both Democrats.

Smith said he's able to leverage those relationships into projects back in his district, pointing to funding for a new Head Start facility in Boardman.

Smith continues to sit on the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, which will be responsible for tackling a budget with a COVID-19-shaped hole in it.

While recent budget projections have appeared rosier than expected, Smith said those numbers were inflated by federal stimulus money.

Smith said he anticipates legislators will have to make cuts, reprioritize funding, and even explore new sources of revenue, which could include new taxes.

With the COVID-19 pandemic showing no signs of

abating back home, Smith said everyone needs to make sure they wear masks when out in public and socially distance themselves properly.

"Every Oregonian needs to do a little more to stand up for our public health," he said.

Walkouts were the defining moments of some of the two previous sessions as GOP legislators left Salem to prevent the passage of a cap-and-trade bill favored by Democrats.

Neither Smith nor Hansell anticipated another walkout in 2021, although both admitted that they hadn't anticipated the previous walkouts either.

While there may not be another cap-and-trade bill, the environment promises to come up again as a pertinent topic after wildfires across the state displaced thousands of residents and caused air quality to drop to dangerous levels.

Hansell said the Legislature should review its forest management policy, but he thought state, tribal and private forests were better

maintained compared to federal forests. He added that the state should be focused on working with the federal government to improve forest management.

Hansell compared legislating to a football team playing on offense and defense.

On the offensive side, Hansell said he plans to work on bills that tackle issues relating to sexual abuse and domestic violence. On defense, Hansell plans to stay vigilant on any bills that may hurt the agriculture industry and work to reverse the Oregon Department of Corrections' decision to end its contract with Blue Mountain Community College and other community colleges to run its adult education programs.

Hansell expressed pride in the bills he passed with bipartisan support and the capital projects he helped bring to his district, but his optimism was tempered by a legislative career spent in the minority.

"I'm not at the table where a lot of these decisions are made," he said.

Local voters face state and federal choices on the ballot

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

When Eastern Oregon residents open their general election ballots they will be faced not only with local races and measures, but candidates for state and federal office.

Voters used to seeing Congressman Greg Walden on the ballot for Congressional District 2 will be faced with all newcomers in the race for the first time since Walden was elected in 1998.

On the Republican side of that race, Cliff Bentz is an Ontario rancher and former water and business

law attorney who served 10 years as a state representative and two as a state senator.

During an interview with the *East Oregonian's* editorial board in the spring, he touted his experience with water and land issues in Eastern Oregon, and voiced support for President Donald Trump. He said he had concerns about how much the United States is spending during the pandemic, with little conversation about how the country will pay that money back.

On the Democratic side of the race is Alex Spenser, who describes herself in her voter's guide entry as

a "writer/poet/motivational speaker/performance coach/copperwright/campaign strategist." She is from Klamath Falls.

During a candidate forum hosted by EO Media Group in the spring, she said her focus was on ending the divisiveness in politics and healing the division between Republicans and Democrats. She said it is important to support businesses as they continue to adjust to circumstances created by the pandemic.

Libertarian Robert Werch is also running for the seat.

Sen. Jeff Merkley is also running for reelection, against Republican chal-

lenger Jo Rae Perkins.

Merkley has been a senator since 2009, and before that had a long career in state-level politics, including time as a state representative and Oregon House Speaker.

Perkins, of Albany, is retired from the financial sector, including past experience as an insurance agent, financial planner and banker. She has gained national attention for her vocal support of the QAnon conspiracy theories.

Pacific Green Progressive candidate Ibrahim A. Taher and Libertarian Gary Dye are also running for the seat.

For Oregon Secretary of State, state Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, is facing off against state Sen. Shemia Fagan, D-Portland.

During a recent candidate forum hosted by EO Media Group, Thatcher said she would continue the tradition of former secretary of state Dennis Richardson in using the office to provide checks and balances, as the only Republican holding a statewide office in Oregon.

Fagan said during the same forum that she would be an independent advocate for all Oregonians if elected.

Also on the ballot for secretary of state are Pacific

Green Progressive candidate Nathalie Paravicini and Libertarian Kyle Markley.

For state treasurer, voters have a choice between incumbent Democrat Tobias Read, Republican Jeff Gudman, Constitution Party candidate Michael P. Marsh and Independent Party/Progressive Pacific Green candidate Chris Henry.

Running for Attorney General are Democratic incumbent Ellen Rosenblum and Republican Michael Cross.

For more information about these races, see the Nov. 3, 2020, Voter's Pamphlet or coverage in the *East Oregonian*.

THANK YOU
LAW ENFORCEMENT



"Senator Bill Hansell is a strong advocate for law enforcement. He always has our back." - Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan

RE-ELECT SENATOR BILL HANSELL

ENDORSED BY:



Paid for by Friends of Bill Hansell