



ELECTION EDITION

Race is on for school board

Six candidates make their case for election to four open seats

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

As decision-making about students returning to the classroom during the pandemic has elevated interest in school boards across Oregon, the race for Hermiston's Board of Education is no exception.

Hermiston voters will see seven names on the May ballot for four school board positions.

Liliana Gomez

Liliana "Lili" Gomez, running for Position No. 3, is a Hermiston native and a records specialist for the Hermiston Police Department. She said she has always had an interest in education, including serving as a tutor during her teenage years and teaching English overseas. She is on the Hermiston School District budget committee.

Now that students have returned to school full time, Gomez said she believes it is important for the district to focus on students' mental health and be proactive about having resources available for students as they return.

"We all know that this took a toll on every single person, adults included, and no doubt this took a toll on students," she said.

Gomez said if elected, one of her goals would be to help break down barriers to student success and parent involvement, including linguistic and cultural barriers. Another would be to help the district stay on sound financial footing.

While more than half of Hermiston students are Hispanic or



Students eat lunch in front of Hermiston High School on Tuesday, April 27, 2021.

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald



Anderson Hansell Gardner Gomez Medelez Pitney Sherman

Latino, Hispanic students as a group have still seen lower average test scores and graduation rates than the student body as a whole. When asked how the district can close the achievement gap, Gomez — who was in the district's English Language Learner program herself in elementary school — said it must look at getting the best return on investment for programs to help

any group of students that may be struggling.

"I know that these programs are in place, and I know that they work," she said. "But can we do better? Yes, we can always do better."

Dain Gardner

Dain Gardner is also running for Position No. 3 on the school board, against Gomez. The

incumbent, Mark Gomolski, is not seeking another term.

Gardner, an Air Force veteran who says he attended multiple schools "all over," is a senior trooper for the Oregon State Police's Fish and Wildlife Division. He said he decided to run for school board because of his two children in the district, and the difficult experience they have had during the pandemic.

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He said he is glad students are back in school full time, but thought the district should have "pushed back" against state regulations sooner. He would like to see the district fight for more local control in the future, not only over what school looks like during the pandemic, but also over curriculum and other aspects of students' education.

"There are some things being shoved around the country that really don't apply necessarily to Hermiston like they do, maybe, in some of these other places," he said.

Gardner said it is important for the school district to do all it can to get parents involved in their children's education.

"When it comes down to it, schools are extremely important, but so are the parents," he said. "And I think they need to be involved as much as we can get them involved."

Sally Anderson Hansell

Sally Anderson Hansell is running for Position No. 4 against incumbent Brent Pitney. Anderson Hansell is an attorney at Anderson Hansell PC and an owner of TCH

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Port of Morrow commission races contested

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Voters in the May 18 election will have plenty of choices in the race for Port of Morrow commissioners.

Two of the seats up for election feature a three-way race, while a third seat has one candidate. Those elected will take their seats on July 1 for a four-year term.

Rick Stokoe

For Commissioner Position 1, current chair Rick Stokoe is running for another term.

Stokoe has worked in law enforcement for more than 31 years and has been Boardman Police Department Chief since 2011. He was appointed as a port commissioner in 2015 and reelected in 2017.

Stokoe said he has always been involved in the community, and on regional and state boards. Some of his local volunteer work includes the Morrow Education Foundation, coaching youth sports and as a volunteer ambulance driver for the Morrow County Ambulance District. He said he sees his service to the Port of Morrow Commission as another opportunity to help Morrow County.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

A sign marks the entrance to the Port of Morrow's East Beach Industrial Park on July 17, 2020.

"It's extremely satisfying to me to give back to the community," he said.

Stokoe said if reelected, one of his biggest areas of focus will be on helping the port create and retain family wage jobs for the region. Part of that is making sure the infrastructure is in place to sup-

port development, he said, and being fiscally responsible.

He said he is proud of the work the port commission has done so far.

"We're the second largest port in the state, and that comes with a lot of hard work," he said.

Jonathan Tallman

Jonathan Tallman is one of two

CANDIDATE FORUMS

Boardman Chamber of Commerce held a virtual candidate forum for Port of Morrow Commissioner Position #3 candidates on April 13, and the video is available on the Boardman Chamber of Commerce Facebook page. The chamber held a virtual candidate forum on its Facebook page for Position No. 1 candidates on Tuesday, April 27.

challengers running against Stokoe for position 1.

Tallman is an owner of the local, family-owned Boardman coffee shop The Farmer's Cup. He said the business has seen "triple digit growth" but managed to avoid the waste that often comes with such fast growth. He said he can bring similar skills to the Port of Morrow, which has also seen rapid growth.

Tallman has been at odds with the Port of Morrow Commission and other local officials for more than a year now, as Umatilla Electric Cooperative has pursued an easement to build a transmission line through the Tallmans' property to accommodate new growth, and threatened to use eminent domain if the family doesn't sign an agreement voluntarily. Tallman said he feels there has been a lack of com-

munication throughout the entire process from the port and others.

"This is the only way I can be part of the conversation," he said.

Tallman also has criticisms about the way the port commission operates in general, and said he feels current commission members have too many conflicts of interest and are finding ways to use the position for their own gain (Commission members interviewed for the article denied this allegation and said they recuse themselves from any decisions that may have even an appearance of conflict).

He said he feels there is "a lot of waste" in what the port is doing, and as a commission member he would focus on reducing that waste. He also wants the port

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