

EDITOR'S DESK

Contested races present an opportunity to speak up

Election season is upon us once again, this time for local taxing districts.

These May elections on non-primary years can be, to be honest, a little boring to cover as a journalist. They often feature race after race with either no candidates at all, or an incumbent running unopposed.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

This time, I'm happy to see races across Umatilla and Morrow counties draw multiple candidates. Contested races pique voter interest and spur candidate forums

and other opportunities for people to get to know those who are running to represent them. They bring renewed attention to incumbents' track records and signal to all elected officials that if they don't do a good job, there is no guarantee they will keep their seat.

People like to complain about the job that local elected officials are doing. But, as Hermiston City Councilor Doug Primmer likes to say, the world is run by those who show up.

The *Hermiston Herald* doesn't do endorsements of candidates or ballot measures, but I would encourage everyone to make an effort to get to know the candidates and make an informed decision. There are numerous routes you can take to do so:

You can read local media cover-



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

A ballot is dropped into a drop box in Hermiston on Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2020.

age of the races, including articles in the *East Oregonian* and *Hermiston Herald*.

The *Herald* and *EO* have also posted the full video of our group interview with the Hermiston School District Board of Education's candidates to our Facebook pages.

Some local organizations are also posting video of candidate forums to their social media pages. This includes the Boardman Chamber of Commerce's videos of interviews with Port of Morrow candidates.

The forms that candidates filed to run for office are public records and can be found on your county elec-

tions office's website.

I would also encourage everyone to get to know the districts that candidates are running for, as well. On social media and in talking with members of the community, I often come across misperceptions about the basic facts of how certain government bodies are run. One common point of confusion, for example, is when people mistakenly believe that the city of Hermiston funds or runs Hermiston School District, despite the fact that they are separate entities, run by different boards and funded by different revenues.

Informed voters make better deci-

sions at the polls, but they are also more likely to make a difference throughout the year by speaking up in a knowledgeable and constructive way that elected officials will listen to.

Tuesday, April 27, was the last day to register to vote in the May 18 election, and ballots are mailed out on Wednesday, April 28. If you are not sure if you're registered to vote, think you may be registered under the wrong address, haven't received a ballot as Election Day approaches, or have other questions, you can reach out to the Umatilla County elections office at 541-278-6254 or the Morrow County elections office at 541-676-5604.

Ballots are due by 8 p.m. on Tuesday, May 18. If you mail them (you don't need a stamp to do so) they must be received, not merely post-marked, by then. And remember that in Hermiston, the ballot drop box was recently moved to the Stafford Hansell Government Center.

Between the low voter turnout of local taxing district elections and the number of contested races, it is likely at least one race will be decided by a mere handful of votes. If you want your vote to make a difference, this election is a great opportunity to cast a vote that carries significant weight.

COLUMN

Prioritizing valuable education time in final months of school

In the past year, the Hermiston School District has had a singular focus: providing the best possible educational and extracurricular opportunities to our students in the face of unprecedented and challenging circumstances.

Our students don't have the ability to control the spread of COVID-19, and they don't get a say in the guidelines and restrictions required by the state government. They rely on their families, the community, and the school district to provide a place where they can safely learn.



Tricia Mooney

We have taken that role seriously, and as situations and regulations have changed, we have made every decision by first asking what's best for our students.

As we enter the final months of the school year, it's hard not to think about the opportunities that were lost this fall and winter as COVID-19 case rates climbed and we were restricted from re-opening classrooms. It's made the last push toward summer that much more important, as we work hard to make up for lost time and prepare students at all levels for the next phase in their education.

That was the driving factor in the district's decision to opt out of statewide assessments this spring. While the tests are a valuable annual tool to measure growth in reading, math, and science, the trade-off is face-to-face instructional time. That is too precious of a commodity this year to give up, and we're going to do what's best for both our students and our teachers by keeping as many

instructional and engagement hours on the calendar as possible.

This doesn't mean we're skipping the important assessment part of education. Our teachers are highly attuned to each of their students' progress, both through virtual classes and now in the classroom. They're relaying these to parents as they work to catch up on lost progress.

Staff are also rebuilding connections with students, and we are exploring summer education options to build a bridge and maintain some momentum between this school year and next.

For athletics and activities, we've been doing everything we can to provide a full schedule as an addition to academics. Because of the indoor nature of "winter" sports, they were moved to the end of the school year. Navigating the health guidelines as an Oregon school competing primarily against Washington schools has been a challenge, but we have cleared the significant hurdles and are starting this week.

As we move forward, our focus will remain the same. Even as things begin to feel more normal with students in the classroom and other activities up and running, we know that it will take a long time to truly get back what we've lost as a community.

We need to continue creating a healthy community if we want to return to a healthier educational environment. Now that the vaccine is widely available, it's the fastest route we can take to make sure our kids can stay in the classroom and don't miss any more opportunities.

Dr. Tricia Mooney is superintendent of Hermiston School District.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gardner the best candidate for the job

I am supporting Dain Gardner for the Hermiston School Board. I have known Dain for over 20 years, both personally and professionally. Dain steps up whenever there is a need, so it was no surprise to me that he chose to step up now, by running for the Hermiston School Board.

Dain is extremely loyal, steadfast and confident. These traits make him a natural born leader and the most logical choice for the position on the school board.

Dain is a father of two daughters and recognizes the need for education and accountability, one that he will take great care with and manage well. He will be a huge asset for all of Hermiston.

Dain saw a need for our kids to get back into the schools full time. He joined a group dedicated to this endeavor, supporting those parents who had like-minded goals. Dain is methodical in his actions and thoughts, looking at the totality of the situation, reviews the documented criteria and then moves forward, observing all the guidelines and rules, with fairness and equality.

I hope you will join me in voting for the best candidate available. Dain will work in partnership with teachers, management and parents to provide the best possible outcome for our community and children. Isn't that what our ideal goal is when selecting a candidate? Someone who will do their very best for our kids? I believe that it is Dain Gardner. Thank you.

Karen Primmer
Hermiston

Support public safety with Measure 30-148

I'm writing in support of Measure 30-148 to fund critical equipment, vehicles, and facilities in Umatilla County Fire District #1. These will keep firefighters and EMTs safe in line of duty and ensure

ENDORSEMENT LETTER DEADLINE

The Hermiston Herald will accept endorsement letters for the May 18 special election until Monday, May 10 at 5 p.m.

Endorsement letters must be less than 300 words and may be edited for length, spelling, grammar or clarity. They should include the author's name and city of residence, which will be published, along with the author's phone number, which will not be published.

Letters are run on a first-come, first-served basis.

You can email letters to editor@hermistonherald.com or drop them off or mail them to the Hermiston Herald, c/o Jade McDowell, 333 E. Main St. in Hermiston.

We will publish our last letters on Wednesday, May 12. Any letters received after the deadline will not run.

Election Day is May 18.

their ability to respond when an emergency arises.

Nothing is more important than safety when it comes to the men and women who risk their lives to protect their community. Having modern equipment and vehicles at the ready ensures these first responders can perform at their best.

Because Western Umatilla County is growing so quickly, the call volume increases every year. This bond will keep a high level of service and allow UCFDI to plan for the future.

Please join me in supporting this bond and the men and women of Umatilla County Fire District #1.

Terry Rowan
Hermiston

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.