

Last-minute filings alter picture of county commissioner races

Hermiston campaigns competitive

By ANTONIO SIERRA
Hermiston Herald

David Nelson made a sudden return to local politics on March 8.

On the last day candidates could file for local office ahead of the May 17 election, Nelson, a former state senator, joined a packed race to replace Position 1 Commissioner George Murdock.

The Pendleton resident represented District 29 as a Republican in the Oregon Senate from 1997-2013, including a stint as the majority leader. After retiring from the Legislature, Nelson served on the Eastern Oregon University Board of Trustees before stepping off in 2020.

Then-Commissioner Bill Hansell won election to succeed Nelson in the senate. A decade later, Nelson now is seeking the county board seat Hansell once held.

It's not unprecedented in Oregon for legislators to seek county office after serving in Salem. Former Republican Minority Leader Herman Baertschiger left the senate in 2020 after he was elected to a seat on the Josephine County Board of Commissioners. And in 2016, former state Rep. Jessica Vega Pederson successfully ran for a county commissioner seat in Multnomah County, although



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

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

unlike Nelson, both legislators immediately transitioned from state to county office.

While Nelson brings plenty of name recognition to the race, he won't have a glide path to a seat on the board. Before Nelson entered his name, five other candidates already filed.

Two business owners — Susan Bower of Pendleton and Cindy Timmons of Milton-Freewater — were the first to join the race. Bower has spent more than \$18,000 on her campaign while Timmons has reported more than \$3,000 in expenditures.

The rest of the field is composed of Bob Barton, a Hermiston construction business owner; Jesse Bonifer, an Athena city councilor and Second Amendment activist; and Alvin Young, a Hermiston store manager.

A late entry means voters also will weigh in on Position 2 in the May primary.

Rick Pullen, a former Umatilla County employee, filed a last-minute challenge to incumbent Commissioner John Shafer. In 2018, Pullen ran against Murdock for Position 1. He came in second during the primary and narrowly

lost in the runoff 50-48.

Shafer's other challenger is conservative activist HollyJo Beers, who also is making her second attempt at county office. Beers came in second during the 2020 primary for an open Position 3 seat, but she ended up losing the runoff to Dan Dorrin.

Regardless of the results during the primary, the two candidates who get the most votes in each commission race will advance to a Nov. 8 runoff.

Hermiston City Council

Hermiston voters will have a choice in all but one race in May, but as of 5 p.m. on March 8, the one exception is set to be decided by write-in votes.

The race for Ward 1 will feature a rematch between incumbent Lori Davis and retiree Jackie Linton. Linton also was a candidate for Ward 1 in 2018, but she narrowly missed the runoff and Davis would go on to prevail in the general election.

Ward 2 Councilor Roy Barron is facing a challenge from Stan Stradley, the executive director of the Umatilla County Housing Authority. Barron first won office in 2018.

In Ward 4, former Councilor David McCarthy is challenging incumbent Phillip Spicerkuhn to rejoin the council. Spicerkuhn won a special election unopposed in March 2021 to represent Ward 4 on the council.

Ward 3 has been represented by Councilor Jackie Myers for nearly 30 years. At the deadline, Myers submitted her application and will be on the ballot to resume her position on the council. City officials confirmed that she does intend to run again for her office.

Rounding out the slate of Hermiston elections is the race for municipal court judge, where incumbent Thomas Creasing will face a challenge from Municipal Judge Pro Tem Cameron Bendixsen.

Levy draws challenger

Most races for state offices that represent Umatilla and Morrow counties will not be competitive, but state Rep. Bobby Levy of Echo is facing a challenge in the Republican primary.

Skye Farnam, a Summerville business owner, is seeking to oust Levy. Farnam ran for the District 58 seat in 2018 as an independent but lost to then-incumbent Greg Barreto.

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepner, the incumbent in District 57, is all but assured another term in Salem after drawing no Republican or Democratic opponents.

In Umatilla County Circuit, Position 2 Judge Jon Lieuallen and Position 3 Judge Daniel Hill are running unopposed. And in Morrow County, District Attorney Justin Nelson also is running unopposed.

Hermiston man arrested in the disappearance of Moses Lake woman

By CHARLES H. FEATHERSTONE
Columbia Basin Herald

Police in Hermiston have arrested a former Moses Lake, Washington, resident in the disappearance of 30-year-old Yanira Cedillos of Moses Lake last week.

At a press conference Thursday, March 10, at the Moses Lake Civic Center, Moses Lake Police Department Capt. Mike Williams said Hermiston police officers arrested Juan Gastelum, 27, a former Moses Lake resident, the evening of March 9.

Gastelum has been charged with second-de-

gree murder and rape of Cedillos, who was last seen late March 3 and very early March 4 celebrating her birthday with friends at Papa's Casino in Moses Lake, Williams said.

MLPD detectives learned Cedillos received a number of phone calls and text messages the night of her birthday celebrations from Gastelum, with whom she had lived with and been involved romantically, Williams said. Williams also said MLPD determined Gastelum picked Cedillos up somewhere in the 900 block of North Stratford Road and took her to her

apartment.

Cedillos' family reported her missing March 4, after she failed to show up for work.

Williams said that while Cedillos' body has not yet been found, MLPD detectives collected evidence from her residence at the Heron Creek Apartments in Moses Lake showing Cedillos was killed in her apartment.

"The last evidence we have that she was still alive was a few minutes after midnight, approximately seven minutes after they arrived at the apartment," Williams said.

Williams said MLPD believes Cedillos is deceased, but added he was not at liberty to discuss the evidence that led the MLPD to reach that conclusion.

Gastelum, who also goes by the name Johnny Trujillo, is sitting in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, awaiting extradition to Washington. Williams said Gastelum was taken into custody without incident and would not comment on the suspect's criminal history.

Williams also said the MLPD held off on commenting about Cedillos' disappearance before

March 10 because they did not want to tip Gastelum off about the status of the investigation.

"Since (March 4), our detectives and other officers assisting with this case have been working 16 to 18 hour days tracking down leads and searching for Yanira," Williams said. "We would not and could not risk releasing details that could cause Gastelum to flee or stop cooperating."

Williams said the investigation into Cedillo's murder is ongoing, and more information will be made public in the future.

MLPD Chief Kevin Fuhr thanked the Hermiston police, the Washington State Patrol, the Othello and Quincy police departments, the Grant County Sheriff's Office, Washington, and the Spokane County Sheriff's Office as well as the FBI for their assistance in the investigation.

"Were it not for the assistance of these agencies, we would not be as far along in this investigation as we are," Fuhr said.

The Columbia Basin Herald will continue to monitor this story for any additional information as it becomes available.

SEEKING QUALIFIED PROVIDERS

CAPECO is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for qualified contractor(s) to provide Nutrition Program services, including Home Delivered Meal and Congregate Meal services within Morrow and Umatilla Counties.

Home delivered meals are critical to maintaining independence and provide socialization to people who may feel isolated or lonely at home.

Congregate meals are an opportunity to socialize and gain support through community while CAPECO provides nutrition education.

This service is more than just a meal; its purpose is to nourish the whole person.

Request a copy of the RFP packet by contacting Jody Warnock, CAPECO Program Director, jwarnock@capeco-works.org 541-278-5668

PROPOSALS DUE MARCH 31, 2022



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