

# Walker wins Oregon GOP presidential straw poll

**Dorchester Conference ponders 2016, staying relevant**

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

About 300 people deliberated the future of the Oregon Republican Party at the 51st annual Dorchester Conference, which featured speeches from state politicians, a 2016 presidential candidate straw poll and group discussions on several timely issues.

The conference ran from March 13 through 15 at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

The main event was Sunday's presidential straw vote, a conference tradition where attendees selected who tops their candidate list to run for the Republican Party in the 2016 presidential election. The winner of the 2015 Dorchester straw poll was Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker with 39 votes.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush was the runner-up with 22 votes. Florida Sen. Marco Rubio was third.

Other candidates mentioned were New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie; Ohio Gov. John Kasich; Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul; ; former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin; former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee; Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal; Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren; and a few others. Not all conference participants voted in the poll.

A few attendees, during the open comment session before the vote, suggested Jeb Bush could be a problematic candidate for his last name alone — he is the son of former president George H.W. Bush and the younger brother of former president George W. Bush, who both are widely unpopular with Democrats.

"I feel so strongly we're

just shooting ourselves in the foot if we vote for Jeb Bush" in the Republican presidential primaries, said Ginny Brewster, of Happy Valley.

Others felt Bush did a good job as governor of Florida and that having gubernatorial experience is important for the president. He could likely overcome his name's associations, they said.

Supporters of Walker talked of his practiced leadership, his ability to win a governorship in a traditionally blue state and his marketability.

Alison Bruun, president of the Dorchester board of directors, said, no matter who is selected, the Oregon Republicans must be organized, unified and fully support that candidate. She expressed the desire to once again make Oregon a swing state that will induce presidential candidates to make campaign stops.

## Discussing the issues

How the Republican Party can stay relevant in Oregon was one of the most significant and complicated topics discussed by the group.

As of February, 37.7 percent of Oregon voters were registered Democrats; 32.5 percent were registered non-affiliated, independent or minority parties; and 29.8 percent were registered Republicans, according to the Oregon Secretary of State's Office. The Grand Old Party hasn't nabbed the governorship since Vic Atiyeh led the state in the 1980s.

Small groups of people were separated around tables. Each table generated a few ideas that then were presented to the entire group. Some of those ideas included marketing the party



Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., spoke at the 51st annual Dorchester Conference in Seaside, held March 13 through 15.

KATHERINE LACAZE PHOTO

ty as being full-spectrum and socially diverse.

A few attendees suggested the party is out of touch with mainstream views and sometimes isolates individuals who don't believe in all components of the general party platform.

Marshall Kosloff, of Lake Oswego, said the party needs to more appropriately address the concerns specific to Oregonians, such as health care costs, tax increases and making post-secondary education accessible to all people. Those state-specific issues, he said, must be elevated above the main issues targeted by the national Republican Party.

"The voters have moved away from our core positions," said attendee Jim Parker. The party must be willing to reposition itself to be aligned closer to voters' ideals and concerns, he said.

## Communication problem

Other attendees suggested it's not Republican ideologies that have strayed from popular opinion but rather how they're communicated to the

general public or the candidates selected to represent the party. Rather than shifting to the center, they said, the center must be shifted to the right.

Kathy Lamberg, of Lane County, and several others said the Republican Party must work harder to show it is genuinely concerned with the welfare of constituents. Lamberg, who ran for state representative of the 14th district last year, said that can be accomplished by "bringing a personal relationship to people" and expressing "the idea that we really care."

Other suggestions included:

- Expanding the party's social media presence;
- Marketing the party in a more appealing way and with better commercials;
- Communicating how the Oregon Republican party is different from the national party and George W. Bush's regime;
- Reaching out to new voters as soon as they register;
- Broadening the party's positions and policies; and
- Running for a special district commission or board seat in the May 19 election.

The conference also featured a debate on the issue of Uber, taxis and town cars as forms of transportation and what actions a government should take to ensure the public is safe and the playing field is level when companies try to circumvent the rules.

Terrorism and counterterrorism was the topic of another issue discussion and the debate focused on the utility of economic sanctions.

After the debate, attendees voted on a resolution posing the question: Was President Barack Obama premature in lifting the economic sanctions against Cuba and should the policy be reversed and the sanctions reimposed to try to bring regime change for the good of the Cuban people? A majority of conference attendees voted "no," although a few spoke against the way in which the sanctions were lifted and felt the U.S. didn't get any concessions in the process.

## Making a change next year

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., gave the keynote

speech expressing disappointment in the current federal administration and touting the importance of the 2016 election for the Republican Party.

Many leading Democrats, Walden said, including Obama and former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, are lacking in transparency, violating the law and U.S. Constitution, isolating allies and cozying up to countries that pose a threat to U.S. interests. He also expressed distaste for former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, saying he and Rep. Pete Sessions, R-Texas, had made it a mutual goal to "get her fired."

Walden spoke about what he believes are some recent Republican victories, such as electing the country's youngest person to office, Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y.; flipping Florida's 26th Congressional District with Carlos Curbelo; and electing the first black Republican woman in Congress, Rep. Mia Love, of Utah.

"As we get ready for 2016," Walden said, "you've got to realize (the opposition) may have the elites and they may have the liberal press and all the bureaucracy in Washington on their side, and they'll use every lever — this administration is all about Chicago-style politics — but we have the spirit of freedom and the will of the American people to move forward and win. We have to prevail. ... You know what the consequences are if we don't. Can you imagine a third term of Barack Obama headed up by Hillary Clinton? That is what we will get, and it's not what we can afford."

# Vandenberg calls conference cancellation 'unfortunate'

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The conference is intended for educators, health personnel, counselors, social and youth service workers, parents, teen parent program staff, community members and teens, according to the event website. A majority of participants in the past have been older than 18; those younger than 18 had to have written parental permission and be accompanied by a legal guardian or chaperone.

The content is aligned with Oregon's Comprehensive Sexuality Education requirements, according to the Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force. Those requirements state all human sexuality education programs should emphasize abstinence as the only method that is 100 percent effective against unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

"Such courses are to acknowledge the value of abstinence while not devaluing or ignoring those students who have

had or are having sexual relationships," the rule states. "Further, sexuality education materials, instructional strategies and activities must not, in any way, use shame or fear-based tactics."

During the 2014 conference, a keynote speaker discussed abstinence and a workshop was conducted on abstinence; other sessions addressed healthy relationship skills; and discussions centered on youth-adult communication.

## Price of cancellation

Convention center contracts normally include a \$1,000 fee if an event is canceled within 12 months of its scheduled date. In this case, because of the center's longtime relationship with the client, the cancellation fee was waived as a courtesy, said Russ Vandenberg, the center's general manager. That courtesy often is extended to long-term customers, or the fee is applied to a future booking,



LOUIE OPATZ PHOTO

Pete Battjes protested the Adolescent Sexuality Conference last year outside the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

which wasn't done in this instance, said Director of Sales Gretchen Darnell.

The organizers "weren't very specific" and "didn't go into any detail" about why they were canceling, Vandenberg said.

The Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force's email announcing the cancellation referenced the more than 30

years the conference has "provided valuable content and discussion to inform and engage public educators, health professionals, parents and youth."

"Our mission continues to be focused on facilitating communication and awareness on all facets of healthy sexuality for youth in our community," the email states. "While we remain clear in our vision, we feel current conditions have shifted the setting and our ability to offer open, safe and honest conversations about sexuality."

In addition, the email states, the organizers value their relationship with the Seaside community and "cannot, in good conscience, hold a conference when we believe conference participants and our Seaside partners may be put in uncomfortable or

unpleasant situations."

The city received some pressure to cancel the event a few months ago, but the Seaside City Council chose to not breach its contract with the group and to allow use of the convention center this year.

Vandenberg called the cancellation "unfortunate."

"We don't like losing events," he said. "We're here to drive economic impact. We weren't hoping they would cancel by any means. ... We don't judge clients or judge what they bring into the building. If we got into the business of starting to judge clients and what they did, it wouldn't be professional on our part."

The group's rental fees for 2015 were \$1,125, but Darnell said it "is hard to speculate what the revenue loss is

exactly."

"We don't know what their food and beverage costs would be, as they hadn't ordered it yet," she said.

While they are pursuing other groups to use the center, Vandenberg said, "It's unlikely someone will, because of the short time frame."

Individuals who had paid their registration fees will be refunded and cashed checks will be reimbursed, according to the task force.

"We remain dedicated to our mission and will carefully consider how to continue our work in a positive, respectful manner," the task force said. "Thank you for your continued support."

Event organizers have not said if or when the conference will take place in the future.

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