

Meet the candidates for Columbia County Commissioner

Columbia County voters will decide on Republican and Democratic candidates in the May 18 primary election for a vacancy on the Columbia County Board of Commissioners. Winners of the primary election will face each other on the November ballot. There is no incumbent because County Commissioner Rita Bernhard, a Democrat, has decided to retire at the end of her term in January 2011. Bernhard has been on the board of commissioners since 1999.

All of the candidates were interviewed by *The Independent*, asking the same questions of each one. Here are the questions and the candidates' responses. Responses are in alphabetical order by party affiliation, then by surname. The candidates are Henry Heimuller (D), Russ Moon (D), Shawna Sykes (D), Judith Taylor (D), Glenn Dorschler (R), and Terry Luttrell (R). After the questions and answers, there is additional information about each candidate.

From the Candidates:



Henry Heimuller

1. What will you do to keep operating with less money (bad economy, or?)

Heimuller (D) – We need to get the budget to where it's easily readable. Personally, I think we need to get the budget to where it's transparent. Then we need to look at efficiencies. Some departments, I know, are bare bones. The county may need to share employees across departments by looking at the workload more globally. I think some of that has started to occur.

Moon (D) – I say what I mean and mean what I say. I'm a good listener, researcher and problem solver. This is a good question, I don't have the information on this, but would want to understand the budget better.

Sykes (D) – I have been meeting with department heads at the county level. It's already lean, most departments have already been cut down to the staffing level. We have a bunch of great employees, but there's still value in sitting down together to try to find more efficiencies. It's in everyone's best interest to optimize resources. We also need to look at technology use, there are possibilities in energy efficiencies.

Taylor (D) – I know the budget is the biggest item right now. We have to prioritize. I'm conservative on spending and know some departments are lean and some may have a bit more resources. We need to look at the budget at a line item level and see what we can do with what we have and what we can do without.

Dorschler (R) – We need to cut back as needed and prioritize. Public safety is a priority, then go from there. We need to keep the people we have working. One thing I would do is not take a pay raise while in office. I'm concerned that unemployment is at least 15% and believe the acreage at the Scappoose Airport is our future. This will benefit the entire county, including Vernonia, because economic growth has a way of expanding.

Luttrell (R) – I have had to deal with budgets many times. There will have to be some tough choices, choices that might hurt the people that need it. I would have a hard time cutting any services to veterans or the handicapped. I have compassion for people who are struggling. I also believe we need permanent funding for the Columbia County Sheriff's Office.

2. Do you think county commissioners should re-



Russ Moon

assume responsibility for departments rather than depending on middle managers to assist department heads?

Heimuller (D) – No. First lots of departments don't think there's a problem with commissioners having oversight during special projects, but there's no way possible that the three commissioners could manage all the departments day to day.

Moon (D) – I think the commissioners should communicate about what they are working on.

Sykes (D) – Tough question because the managers I've met really know their departments. I met with the finance director yesterday and they know where they are with the budget. At the commissioner level, it's difficult to know enough about each department but it might be good for each commissioner to work more informally with certain departments so they have that as a resource.

Taylor (D) – Back to the budget, can we afford to do that? Three commissioners for the entire county is slim pickings. They have to depend on the information provided. But there needs to be an assessment as to whether the current system is working or not and there need to be measurable goals.

Dorschler (R) – Yes, commissioners should be responsible for departments. They should be divided among the commissioners. I'm interested in people, I'd like the departments to know I am there for them.

Luttrell (R) – I see that in some departments things aren't going well. I think we need to be a bit more involved. We need better use of the money, not to take over, but better direction.



Shawna Sykes

3. What do you think the commissioner's job or responsibility should be?

Heimuller (D) – Oftentimes people see commissioners as trying to put out the small fires, like from the citizens. Like Rita

has, I would be out in the community, available. Commissioners have to set clear consistent rules, then follow them. Like, we need a Strategic Plan. Policy making has got to be paramount. I think the commissioners understand that and as a commissioner I would follow through on that, also.

Moon (D) – Budgeting. I have no preconceived agenda. I would come in with an open mind. The main thing is what's best for the citizens, the voters.

Sykes (D) – Ultimately, the commissioners are responsible for all of county government. So no matter what happens or who is directly involved, the commissioners answer to the public. I think it's important for

commissioners to be ambassadors for the county to encourage business development. Commissioners need to set a good example for others – they are representatives of the people. I would take that very seriously, it's a big responsibility.

Taylor (D) – I started looking at what a commissioner does last October/November to see what the position was about. They have to have a handle on the departments to know what are functioning well and be involved in the process. They also need to look at responsible economic growth, be a conduit between the county, the cities, and the businesses so we are all working together or at least reach out a hand in collaboration.

Dorschler (R) – To ensure that the county has economic development and public safety. To be out there with people in the community. They should have regular town hall meetings in each community to hear what people are thinking. Commissioners need to listen, to hear what people want to happen here.

Luttrell (R) – How to overall

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