

Josephine County Democrats
Commissioner Forum
April 12 2022

Those attending: Mark J. Seligman, John W West, Gary Richardson, Brian DeLaGrange, Mark F Jones, Neigel Von Hruska



Introductions and experience

Neigel Hruska

A soccer coach in Illinois Valley since 2007. Works with kids. Managed the high school soccer team in 2007 and took them to state and says it was the best team Illinois Valley ever had. Also is a glassblower with a business and gives lessons.

Mark Seligman

Gave his background as growing up in New York City. Has a BA in Sociology. Managed a health food store and was a taxi driver in New York. For 40 years, in Northern California and Southern Oregon, he's been the owner of Brush Brothers Service. He's also been involved in county politics since 2008 and says he's been to more meetings than everybody at this table combined. His goal is to see more prosperity here because the more prosperity the less crime.

John West

Born in Grants Pass. Small business owner. Has a forestry degree. His experience in business prepares him to be a commissioner.

Brian DeLaGrange

His family has been here for four generations. Went into the Air Force after graduating from high school. Has a BA from University of Oregon in Business Administration. Worked at family business, DeLaGrange Insurance, now Insurance Lounge in Grants Pass. Currently works with

Energy Trust of Oregon, a non-profit that does energy efficiency for Pacific Power and Portland General Electric. He's been on the Grants Pass City Parks Committee, a current member of the Grants Pass School Board and on the Grants Pass City Council where he says they've been effective at facilitating change and forward progress.

Gary Richardson

Grew up in Josephine County and went to Oregon State a couple of terms. Enlisted in the Air Force, then went back to Oregon State where he completed a degree in electrical and computer engineering. After working in Albany and Redding CA he moved back to Josephine County to work for FW Murphy. Served as board member for Habitat for Humanity, been involved running youth programs for decades and served as a board member for Grants Pass School District No. 7 for 16 years.

Mark Jones

Lived in Josephine County since he was a year old. Grew up in Murphy, graduated from Hidden Valley High School in 1991. He was a night manager for a grocery store in Rogue River. He started his career in fire service which led him to Scottsdale AZ where he retired from the Scottsdale Fire Department in 2018. Has fire service management experience. He said fire service leadership depends on gaining the trust and respect of those below you and actually leading them, not just managing them.

Questions:

Explain your understanding on non-partisan politics. What do you see as the best way to respond to criticism from the media or to a constituent with different perspectives?

Mark S – It's important to be in the middle to justify what you're doing.

John – It's about serving everyone in Josephine County.

Brian – I'm a non-affiliated voter. The Commission hasn't been non-partisan of late. Whoever is elected needs to work hard to bring back a non-partisan state. He says his experience has been non-partisan and would help the current commissioners understand this is a non-partisan office.

Gary – Cites his business experience as bringing groups together to produce a product to sell. Listen to needs and wants get people together for a solution.

Mark Jones – Thinks society has lost the concept of non-partisan. The concept is providing for majority rule while considering minority rights. He says his goal would be to listen non-partisanly.

Neigel – In Cave Junction and Selma we work together as teammates. We know everybody wants the same thing. A basic quality of life.

What do you see as the best solution for providing adequate funding for the sheriff's department?

John – We can do nothing or do some kind of tax, I believe we should go back and continue to fight with O&C board and get money we won in court. We cut waste and spending from county government and move money able to be moved to help pay for sheriff before ever ask citizens to raise tax. believe we're not efficient in departments. When asked where the waste in county government is he said he hasn't had time to look.

Brian – if we do nothing we'll lose entire patrol division. Doesn't consider that an option. There have been tax ideas out there. None are a silver bullet. None will forgo need for some sort of tax on the community. If we want service we won't get for free. We can no longer count on O&C funds. We need to consider we will have to pay for the service we get. Some ideas can supplement but if we want patrol we have to pay for it. I would be for a levy option or taxing district.

Gary – it's a large problem but he says break it up and solve in small pieces. First, solve with a short term solution. Other ideas require changes at state level such as franchise tax. To solve we have to see how much money actually available and try to find 1 million here 1 million there then try find longer term solution.

Mike Joes – There's been different ideas but even if we reach an amount it won't be implemented in time, we'll have a gap. The Immediate solution is a tax or the seasonal tourist sales tax to get us through until other revenue streams could be put in place. In comparing Josephine County to similar counties I don't believe we need 24/7 patrol. It all comes down to what level service community wants and what its willing to pay for.

Neigel – A levy or taxes are tough to push. He wants franchise tax on Walmart because there's a lot of crime there. Put tax on growers who aren't residents. You should be a resident at least 10 years before allowed to grow in our county. Also I think businesses would donate to the sheriff. Maybe we should do like NASCAR does and put a sticker on the sheriff's car so we can see who's actually donating for our town.

Mark S – Like his idea. The best form of law enforcement is prosperity. You do not want to increase the tax burden on most vulnerable. Not in favor of a tax. It's a poor county. That's why have a low tax levy.

Do you see Sportsman Park as an asset or liability? Do you agree or disagree to give the county's land to the sportsman Association?

Brian – I 100 percent disagree with Commissioners trying to give away the Sportsman Park for free. It's a valuable county asset. The system we have now is great. Don't see any reason for county to offload the property.

John – I'm against giving it away. We own it, that's what I'm told. If the taxpayers want to get rid of park it makes more sense to sell it. It's not up to commissioners, it's up to citizens. We don't need three dictators. Let citizens decide.

Mark S – I agree. Should not be given away. This is an asset. Sell it and make money or keep it.

Neigel – No brainer. Keep it. We shouldn't give anything away for free.

Mark Jones – I don't believe we should get rid of that park. I believe it's underutilized. We could make money from it.

Gary – in this area I don't understand why we would get rid of Sportsman Park. Without additional data difficult for me to come down hard on one side or other but in general don't see the need to get rid of it.

What do you see as short term and long term ways for the county to provide fire protection to all county residents? Explain what solutions you would pursue to equity address the thousands living outside a fire district?

Gary – Wow. Here in Josephine County we have our own urban/rural divide. IF you get away from cities here it's very rural. They aren't interested in paying for that kind of service. Get closer in and people are more willing. Possibly we can find areas within the county willing to form fire districts but not necessarily cover entire county.

Brian – Wildfire is a huge risk and the risk is increasing. To not have an independent fire district is totally irresponsible. Having a district provides protection and everyone pays their fair share. If a portion chooses not to pay everyone's at risk. If all pay everyone actually pays a little bit less. It's in everyone's best interest to have a fire district throughout the entire unprotected area.

John – I have 30 years wildland fire experience. I own a company. I don't think anyone opposes a fire district. What they oppose is fire district fees that only go up and they don't want to be forced out of their home over a property tax measure. It does not matter what commissioners think. Voters need to decide. They voted it down because property tax measure attached to district. They didn't vote down the district.

Mark S – I would support whatever citizens vote on. I do not support more taxes for a district unless voters want it. In some cases insurance won't pay if you're not in fire district. Just do what you can to prevent wildfires.

Neigel – I agree with Mark S and John. If voters want it fine but don't shove it down their throats. Get the homeless out of the woods. They like fires. That's a short-term goal.

Gary – Long term, the county should have its own stand-alone fire department. But you're looking at \$40 million to start a department like that. Again, it comes to citizens. They need to decide. With a fire district they can get federal and state grants they're not able to get now.

Do you believe Oregon's vote by mail system is safe and fair?

Mark S – Yes.

Mark Jones – No. I like the old way of going in and putting your vote in. Lots gets lost in the mail. I lose a lot of mail.

Neigel – No it's not fair. I like the old days with everyone standing in line.

John – Vote by mail is convenient but not enough because we don't get a very good voter turnout. I'm not a big fan of it. We had a son in the military that moved on and still got his

ballots for years afterwards. We could have filled out. If we have ballot by mail it needs to be better than it is.

Brian – It's very fair and equitable. A lot of people can't get to a physical ballot box.

Gary – I don't think it is fair. It has the potential for abuse. Have to say not as good as should be.

What is your position on the code enforcement ordinance to be voted on next month?

Neigel – I would say repeal it. I had experience with it. I don't want them to snoop around looking for violations.

Mark S – I don't want government snooping around just because a neighbor doesn't like us. If we get rid of the old trailers and such we will have more homeless. Josephine County needs money and whatever they can do to cite you they will. I will strongly vote to repeal.

John – This should've come to voters to decide to begin with. They should let citizens decide this. I have studied very closely. The ordinance has issues that violate civil and Constitutional rights. You can get a \$1000 fine for researching cannabis. If you get caught on phone they can come after you. Do it right and let voters decide.

Brian – There's a huge issue with illegal grows. Water is being stolen, there's human trafficking, health and safety issues. This ordinance attempts to mitigate this. It has a sunset clause so it's a trial. If doesn't work as intended it will go away. It's something we should try. I haven't heard any better ideas from people against it.

Gary – There are indeed very concerning issues in ordinance. It allows selective enforcement so if I don't like you...and there's no foul on the county if you win. The law can be used to harass people. I'm not in favor of this ordinance but I am in favor of something to address cannabis issue.

Mark Jones – The idea is it provided law enforcement with a way to mitigate grows. It depends on how it's interpreted. I do not support the way it's currently written. I do not support it. But we need something that unties the hands of the sheriff's department so we can take care of illegal grows.

Do you see homelessness as only a city problem or is it shared with the county? And what can the county do to address the issue?

Mark S – It's a city problem. We must have a compassionate approach. We'll have a lot more homeless if we enforce codes with all these people living in RVs.

John – Our biggest homeless problem is in the city but we have some in the county. We have to be careful where we put shelters. Somebody has to pay for shelters. If the federal or state government doesn't then the taxpayers have to. He says the solution is to educate the homeless and make them productive citizens just like us.

Brian – We've been working at the city to meet this head-on. We're working on a managed facility, safe with social services. Outside the cities a lot of homeless live in their vehicles. The

county has an opportunity to facilitate a place where people with vehicles can go. The county can partner with the cities to get them out of the forest.

Gary – There's a concern if you create benefits. Without requiring equivalent responsibility to be a productive citizen we will attract more homeless. One area to work on...one thing is to help kids aging out of foster care to find them help before they get into drugs.

Mark Jones – Hit it on two ends. Start with mental health issues. Create more facilities for these people. The county should utilize land to create small homes and use Section 8 to charge low rent. This would be a revenue stream for the county, it could have a rental property management office.

Neigel – Help people who came here to work in marijuana get home. We have a plague of drugs and honestly some need bus tickets home. It's a double-edge sword dealing with these people.

What is your understanding of the Oregon revised statutes regarding public meetings, in particular the rules concerning executive session? What do you understand is the purpose of these guidelines?

Mark Jones – The rules allow public input in a public comment section. Executive session, my understanding is like deciding county budgets after input from legal and public comments.

Gary – Public meeting laws are so people can see how the decisions in government are made. Executive sessions are for those issues that it would be detrimental to the issue being discussed, like negotiations. Everything else is in public.

Brian – Executive sessions are for legal advice, confidential advice and sensitive personal issues. There's an issue that sometimes something that doesn't belong there gets shoehorned in. We actually just had that at a workshop last week. I was unsure if something was executive session material so I left. That's why we have media there, they are allowed when public is not to monitor.

John – Public meeting are supposed to be posted three times so voters get to know about it so they can't slide it in without your knowledge. They post executive session. They're not going to tell you what said or verdict of it but I really want the people to know. I want you to be informed about every meeting so no fuddy duddy business pulling a fast one.

Mark S – I agree with John on this. There are times when you must have executive sessions but in time the public should know what went on. It's trusting who you elect.

Neigel – I agree with John. Notices need to get put out three times so people know.

Do you think it's important that the Grants Pass City Councilors and Cave Junction, get along and work together with the county commissioners? How would you improve the relationship?

Neigel – Absolutely they should get along. Their all on the same team. I don't see why they don't work together.

Mark S – The commissioners trash the city people.

John – We have a charter that says county commissioners are over all of the county. But we have what we call city government. So we have another layer of government over the top of that. So we have mass confusion. They have jurisdiction inside the city of Grants Pass according to the Charter. Because we have that other layer of government it makes things kinda tough but that doesn't give the commissioners the right to run the whole city. What it needs to be is the commissioners working with the other layer of government for the best of the people because we have the charter and if people don't like it they need to revise and change the charter.

Brian – So the mindset that John just explained is the exact mindset of the current commissioners. They're not interested in working with city council. They're interested in trying to boss the city council around instead of being collaborative. I feel that I am very uniquely positioned being on city council now and being commissioner to help bridge that divide with Grants Pass City Council and to be more of a partnership instead of so adversarial because when it's adversarial we don't get as much done. So if we can partner with the city and county and Cave Junction we're just going to be more effective. We're just going to get more done. I look forward to working with the city and county to accomplish more.

Gary – It comes down to personalities. My experience, building teams from many areas to create a product, it's all collaborative. We aren't always in agreement about where it's going to go but try to come up with an optimal solution.

Mark Jones – It's obvious the two cities and the county need to work together. If they don't they aren't doing the will of the people. While the county is over the city government, they still have to work together to have a working relationship to benefit all of us. Their needs are different but being able to work together and get support from commissioners is the key to getting things accomplished.

What are your plans, if any, to address the deforestation that is happening in this county and do you have any opportunities financially to gain from any increase in mining and logging in the county? Yes or no.

Brian – I don't have any vested interest in any forest or mining operations. Deforestation is up to the state. The only thing the county can control is county owned property. The county has several thousand acres of forestland and it has a county department of forestry. The charge of that department is to maximize profit of the forests they own. It's a pretty narrow perspective of how to manage the forests we have. I would argue it's not appropriate given where we're at in this county right now. There's other opportunities for the forest that we've not looked into. There are carbon credits you can get for not cutting forests down. By allowing the trees to stay there and sequester carbon you can actually earn money from those forests. It's happening all over the country. I've been trying to get the commissioners to look into that for a couple of years but they're not interested. But that is a viable option that could bring in revenue while mitigating deforestation.

Gary – I have no timber or mining interests. He's not sure of relatives. Most of the logging and deforestation issues are addressed at the state and federal level. The commission needs to interface those groups and build relationships with them.

Mark Jones – My experience is from managing wildland fires. I've seen mismanaged forests burn up. On the other side I've seen forests logged all but 100 trees per acre. It made those trees much healthier, created defensible space around city, as far as deforestation there's a way to provide sustainability and still log it. I have no interests in logging or anything.

Neigel – I live near a clear cut. It's in a watershed, then guys go up there and spray with Roundup. We have a lot of private industry logging heavily. But we should use our own O&C timber.

Mark S. – I'm for responsible thinning and management. Clear cuts increase the temperature. Regarding carbon credits if the government wants you to stop using your equipment it should pay for equal. The government should put money where its mouth is. Don't put it all on the taxpayer. Get the government to pay.

John – I guess I'm the only person here who owns a timber company and a mining company. It's not a bad thing. I manage lots of people's timberland for them. I manage one guy in Williams. If you could put your arms all around the tree we didn't cut it down. He's on the third cycle now in the last 20 years because we only cut the big trees and let the little ones become the big trees and the next one and so it's a selective forest. In my timber company I don't gain anything from being commissioner. The county selling timber doesn't benefit me at all. I think it's responsible that we can mine. We need to protect our streams. We have state regulations in mining and forestry to protect our watershed and I think they're expanding it now to 600 feet on both sides of the stream. We need a balance of management in our forests. If not our forest fire activity is not going to get better.

A question from the audience...The sheriff's hands are tied without this (code enforcement) ordinance. My understanding is county would know every grow that's illegal. What I don't understand what is preventing law enforcement from enforcing laws we have already to eliminate grow sites?

Mark S – He says grows are going away because the profit is lowering.

Brian – The sheriff's department has a limited capacity. They can only enforce based on the capacity they have. They partner with local and state agencies. There is a multi-jurisdictional drug enforcement team that addresses illegal grows. That is all existing but one of the problems is that team and its resources are not enough to handle the enormity of the problem. So on the other side you have county code enforcement which is not law enforcement but if they see health and safety violations they can address that with the ordinance. Currently they have no ability to impose any sort of penalties, any sort of fines. If they see something that is a violation they can send a strongly worded letter but that's it. They can send as many letters as they want but they have no enforcement ability right now.

The questioner said she wasn't referring to code enforcement. Gary interrupts...the sheriff has to get a warrant or paperwork to go into an illegal grow. If it's just a greenhouse how does the sheriff know it's a grow? Code enforcement can go to the greenhouse, then other stuff can come.

Chat question –

What would you do about the lack of addiction services?

Brian - The problem is not resources the real issue they can't hire enough people to address the problems. As far as commissioners, they don't have the ability to do that.

Mark jones – It's also a facilities shortage along with the staffing. More of a state issue than a county issue. Legalizing illegal drugs, the money would provide more facilities.

John – It is a lack of people to work in these departments. It doesn't mean commissioners have ability to fix it. It's a bigger problem than we realize. Part of our homeless and crime problems. We need help from state, our state rep and representatives but we need people to work.

Mark S – We need to get more higher income people in the county. Prosperity makes the county prosperous.

Neigel – This problem is just the beginning. All of us guys here are needed to solve it together. The problem is addicts have to say they want treatment. So it needs to change so when they are arrested they go to rehab. We gotta help these people help themselves.