

Candidates' Night

April 11 2023

Josephine County Democrats invited candidates for school boards and the Josephine Community Library Board to kick off their campaigns at their April 11 meeting by giving a brief introduction and tell why they are running. All were concerned by a growing partisan effort in the county to get extremists elected to these positions who could undermine progress in our schools and library district.

Rogue Community College, Zone 1 (north of Rogue River to Wolf Creek)

Incumbent candidate **Claudia Sullivan**, who has been on the RCC board for eight years, worked her way up from taking classes in business there to becoming Director of Enrollment Services. When she retired she wanted to continue to support the college so she ran for a seat on the board. Claudia said she's an advocate for the students and the college with a passion for helping the local economy. She believes RCC is a real boon to Southern Oregon because a student can learn a skill at the college, then go out and get a job with a good paycheck, which trickles through the economy as that person becomes a consumer. She said she is always moved every commencement by the students who are so proud to have met their goals at RCC. Some go right from there to employment while others transfer their credits to a university. A good board member, she says, has to have good qualifications and a real heart for RCC.

Josephine County Community Library District (only those who live in the district can run for election to the board or vote for board members)

Pat Fahey began his turn to speak praising Claudia who he served on the RCC Board with. She really knows how the college systems work, he said. He also gave a "shameless plug" for the effort to raise money for the new library building downtown. They need donations by April 30 to meet their goal for a grant, he said. Pat, an incumbent running for another four year term, called the Josephine Community Library a real gem in the community and what really makes it great are the volunteers. He said the library is essential because it's a place where people can learn something new, read for pleasure, and provides a safe place for teens to meet after school. He said he wasn't part of the original district and had to be annexed in so he could volunteer for the board. That was a six month process, he said. Pat says he's fearful for the library now because there are people out there who want to stop it's progress and even try to ban books. If you don't think the library is useful you need to go down there some afternoon and just watch the activity, he said.

Tina Gotchall, the former owner of the Powderhorn Café, said she's running because she always supported the library district and helped raise funds with "cow scrabble" and her "cow pie campaign" at her restaurant. She says if elected she knows the "cow pies" will have to come back in some form (this was where city and county officials served pie and drinks to customers). Tina says she decided to run for the library board because she truly cares and loves the library, wants to stay engaged and wants to use her business experience and years of being a good listener to the board.

Gina Marie Agosta says she practically lived at the library here in Grants Pass while growing up and was involved in the district formation after the county board of commissioners cut off funding. She was a library volunteer, then a board member for the last four years. She said the library does an incredible job of keeping up with the needs of the community and the Board is always looking to provide new services as times change.

Libraries For Our Community PAC

Nancy Hitchcock, a volunteer for the organization that supports candidates, asked for volunteers to help with canvassing and getting out the vote. Donations are welcome too, she says.

Three Rivers School District Board

Susan Fisher-Maki emphasized that children and youth are not partisan issues. She was appointed to the Board a year ago to fill a vacancy. Susan said a school board member is initially hit with a lot of homework in order to become familiar with the rules, regulations and fiduciary responsibilities of the district. She said Three Rivers has an amazing administrative team to work with and helped her along her learning curve. She said what many people don't comprehend is that public schools have to listen to all their student's voices with their best interests in mind. Fisher-Maki said she taught school for a year, then started her own early childhood care center. She has a master's degree in education and has also taught early childhood education courses at Umpqua and Rogue Community colleges. She said as a board member she's really enjoyed listening sessions with high school students and described herself as a voracious listener. Listening and empathy are requirements for a school board member, she says. Recently she's become concerned with a movement bubbling up under the surface that doesn't seem to realize how good Grants Pass schools are.

Jamie Wright was a teacher and school administrator before she left to raise her two small children. She said COVID made educators feel like a match burning at both ends. She taught in private and public schools before becoming an administrator and said schools need to be non-partisan in order to serve everyone who walks through the door and see that they all get the same level of education. She said she's sat in on many school board meetings during her career and sees any school official's job as taking away obstacles in the way of a school's success. Jamie said she's concerned about the movement by some to undermine public education, which is essential to the future of our country. Not everyone has the resources to provide their children with an education. We have to take care of all our children, she said.

Grants Pass District 7 candidates

Juliet Long, Vice-President of Student Learning and Success at RCC. Our schools are doing an amazing job making sure every child gets what they need. Public schools have children with so many different needs. Has had children in schools here and they still use the skills in music they learned to play together. She has a daughter who is a teacher and another daughter wants to be because of the excellent teachers that guided them. Juliet has experience with budgets and joined the district budget committee. She worries about a radical element in our community going after schools now without appreciating just what educators do. She says as a board member she would bring her experience, expertise and passion for public education to the district.

Frank Boothby, He grew up in Medford and has a son at Grants Pass High School. He works for Project Youth and runs grant programs. One reason he's running for the Board, he says, is to protect our schools from those who would radically change them resulting in less accessibility.

Greg Fishwick, Greg couldn't make the meeting but Bob Bath stood in for him. Bob said this is a really big election because there are partisan candidates running as retaliation against the two teachers who were fired earlier for inappropriately using school resources for their political views and the subsequent failed recall of those board members who voted to fire the teachers. Bob called Greg a man of faith, moderate, compassionate who teaches at Umpqua College and has the experience needed to be a great board member. Bob also touched on the possibility, with two good moderates running for the same seat (Boothby) voters may split the vote so the immoderate right-wing candidate ends up winning. Think long and hard about this election because we live in a conservative community with extremist people running. Our mission has to be to get the vote out, said Bob.