

Position 2

Jim Bernard

OPB: One priority I'm seeing from most of the county commission candidates is to lower costs or increase affordability. Given that there are so many outside factors that influence the economy and cost of living, what will you as a commissioner do to keep costs down for Clackamas County residents?

Bernard: Affordability matters: and while many costs are outside the county's control, the Commission still has a responsibility to act. Clackamas County receives about 14 cents of every tax dollar so even though it's a small percentage, the Commission needs to leverage and use every dollar effectively. The Board must focus on core services, cutting waste, and delivering results. It can also help lower costs by streamlining permitting and reducing unnecessary delays that drive up housing and development costs. At the end of the day, it's about responsible use of taxpayer dollars and making practical decisions that help keep costs down for residents.

OPB: In addition to affordability, several of you have listed public safety and "fully funding CCSO" among your priorities. The county's ambulance service provider, AMR, has historically failed to meet response time goals. The contract the county signed with AMR last summer also included a huge price increase for patients. How do you balance improved response times while also prioritizing affordability?

Public safety comes first and I want to recognize that AMR has done a strong job serving a large geographically challenging county, especially in our mountain community where response times are harder to meet.

That said we still need accountability. Residences deserve both reliable service and fair pricing. As a commissioner, I would focus on strong oversight, clear performance expectations, and making sure we're getting the best value for taxpayers. The goal is simple: quality emergency response that people can count on and can afford.

OPB: As for CCSO, the county discovered some questionable fiscal management within the sheriff's office last year. For those that say they want to "fully fund CCSO" can you clarify, is CCSO not currently fully funded or has that been the case previously? How would you fund the office while ensuring sound monetary management and fiscal responsibility?

That is a good question for the incumbent Paul Savas to answer. If there is a concern about fiscal mismanagement, then he is one of five that is directly responsible for budget oversight. I served on the Commission for 12 years and did not see a discrepancy in the sheriff's budget during that time. I created the County Audit Committee to ensure the

proper use of funds and to promote transparency. We secured a AAA+ Bond Rating. Where the money goes is VERY important to me.

I would need to take a deep dive into the current budget to determine what the true issues are. But, based on my experience, since 75% of the Sheriff's budget goes to personnel, the issue is likely the gap between what was budgeted by the County for CCSO and the true cost of operations, especially for overtime and staffing.

The Sheriff's Office is not currently fully funded. There are more than 40 vacant positions; jail beds remain empty due to lack of staffing; traffic and major crime staffing is down; and supervision of some misdemeanor offenses is reduced. This situation does not make residents safer. As a commissioner, I would focus on fully funding core public safety services while ensuring accurate budget transparency and strong financial oversight.

OPB: Some candidates are saying the county needs to build more homes to lower housing costs and help end unsheltered homelessness. What are your strategies for achieving this? In what ways does protection of rural parts of the county factor into this goal? If you feel building more homes is the wrong solution, what do you propose for lowering housing costs and ending unsheltered homelessness?

We do need more housing, especially affordable housing but it must match what people can actually pay. That means collaborating with developers to allow smaller, more affordable homes and reducing unnecessary costs. One of the biggest things we can do at the county level is to speed up permitting time. Time is money and delays drive up housing costs.

At the same time, we need to protect our rural areas. Growth should happen where infrastructure already exists not by expanding into farmland and resource lands. Building new infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer systems, parks and schools is far more expensive than utilizing existing infrastructure.

Housing alone won't solve homelessness. We also need to coordinate treatment services and accountability to assist people in getting the help they need. There are many nonprofits that can do exactly that. Two great examples that come to mind are Fathers Heart and LoveOne. These partners know what they are doing and can help us achieve our goals more effectively.

OPB: In the past year some Oregon counties have firmly stated their status as a sanctuary jurisdiction and stated their agencies will not cooperate with federal immigration enforcement without a judicial warrant. Is this a stance you think Clackamas County should take? Why or why not?

When you are elected as a county commissioner, one of the first things you do is swear to uphold the constitution of the United States of America, Oregon, and the rules and regulations of Clackamas County.

Clackamas County should follow Oregon law which already limits how local governments engage in federal immigration enforcement. Our focus at the county level should be on public safety; making sure people feel safe reporting crime and working with law enforcement. That trust is critical.

At the same time, we should respect the role of federal agencies' cooperation. That cooperation should happen as required by law such as having a judicial warrant before entering someone's home. This is not about politics; it's about following the law, maintaining trust in our community and keeping people safe.