

Position 5 Ben West

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?

West: Outside factors like inflation, federal policy, and state mandates undeniably drive our cost of living. As a Clackamas County Commissioner, I focus on what we can control: our budget, taxes, and regulations. I was elected in 2022 partly due to my opposition to tolling on I-205 and I-5. I got to work and was instrumental in stopping tolling. Some called tolling inevitable, and my current opponent voted for tolling, but when I got elected, we won that local fight and saved working families and small businesses thousands of dollars annually in extra commuting costs. I also oppose the new \$4 billion gas tax increase that Clackamas residents can't afford. While Portland and surrounding counties ran up massive budget shortfalls and mismanaged taxpayer dollars, Clackamas stayed in the black.

As I seek re-election, I will continue to prioritize core services, cut waste, and reject tax hikes to hold the line on housing, gas, and daily costs for every family and business here. I govern for results, not rhetoric.

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?

As a registered nurse, this question's subject matter is incredibly important to me. We have taken action to hold our ambulance service provider, AMR, accountable, and we are now consistently meeting response time goals. To maintain this improvement while prioritizing affordability, I implemented a Nursing Navigation Program. This allows 911 callers with chronic but non-urgent medical issues, or frequent callers, to be triaged by a registered nurse. This program has relieved pressure on paramedics and first responders by freeing up bandwidth for actual emergency calls. Furthermore, we established a hardship fund to provide direct financial support for residents who need ambulance services but face financial binds or lack adequate insurance coverage.

OPB: As for CCSO, the county discovered some questionable financial 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 financial management and fiscal responsibility?

Fiscal management and public trust are top priorities and they often go hand in hand. We recently held the CCSO finance department accountable for questionable management and for failing to adhere to independent audit recommendations. I am fully committed to a professional, well-funded CCSO. Although Clackamas County is the safest among Oregon's large counties, securing sustainable funding remains a challenge. To ensure fiscal responsibility and to address this, we must implement transparent budget tracking and line-item budgeting to end waste. It is also essential that voters pass the public safety levy on the ballot this May.

I am proud to have the support of law enforcement in this election and I'm grateful for their confidence in my ability to secure sustainable funding to meet the expectations of Clackamas County residents.

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?

It is critical that we drive down the cost of housing while increasing production and that starts with modernizing land use laws. We also need a climate where builders don't feel overly regulated and make it impossible for them to deliver units.

I led Clackamas County to abandon the failed "Housing First" model for a Recovery-Oriented System of Care (ROSC). I am the architect of this pragmatic approach, which recognizes that housing must be paired with services to address addiction and mental illness. Our system now provides a full continuum: prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery.

I am leading the opening of a new 6+ acre Recovery Campus. This cornerstone facility will offer withdrawal management, residential treatment, transitional housing, and job training, helping people become stable and return to our communities. This strategy works, contributing to a 65% reduction in homelessness and preventing nearly 4,000 residents from falling into crisis. By prioritizing sobriety and self-sufficiency, we save both taxpayer dollars and lives.

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?

No. Clackamas County should not declare itself a sanctuary jurisdiction.

As a Clackamas County Commissioner my top priority is to keep our local residents safe. When our officers hold someone who is here illegally and who faces federal warrants—sex crimes, human trafficking, drug trafficking, assault, and more—we have a duty to share basic information. This allows balanced, common-sense cooperation among local, state, and federal law enforcement so federal agents can take custody at the jail door rather than hunting these individuals on our streets later. We already follow state law. Last year, Clackamas joined a dozen other counties in seeking federal-state clarity because legal uncertainty helps no one. Public safety and the rule of law are not optional.