

https://www.rv-times.com/localstate/jackson-county-commissioner-ballot-measures-hit-their-signature-target/article_6d3729c2-cb9a-11ee-9385-533383289101.html

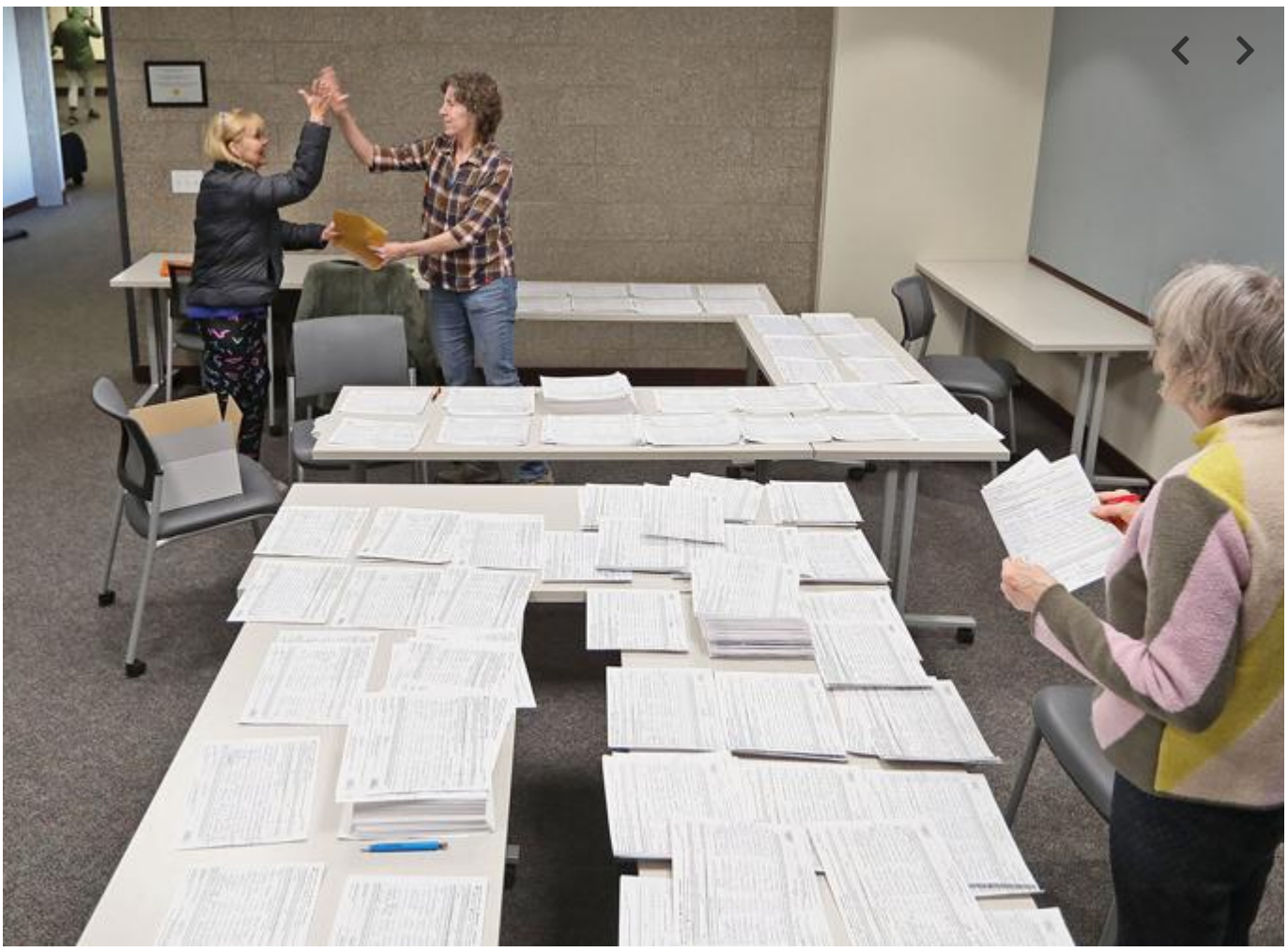
FEATURED

Jackson County commissioner ballot measures hit their signature target

Jackson County for All has gathered enough signatures to qualify for May primary

By DAMIAN MANN for the Rogue Valley Times
Feb 15, 2024

1 of 2



Jeanne Chouard, left, Denise Krause and Regina Ayars — all members of the Jackson County for All campaign — loc signatures at the Ashland Public Library on Tuesday.

Jamie Lusch / Rogue Valley Times

Three ballot measures that could shake up the Jackson County Board of

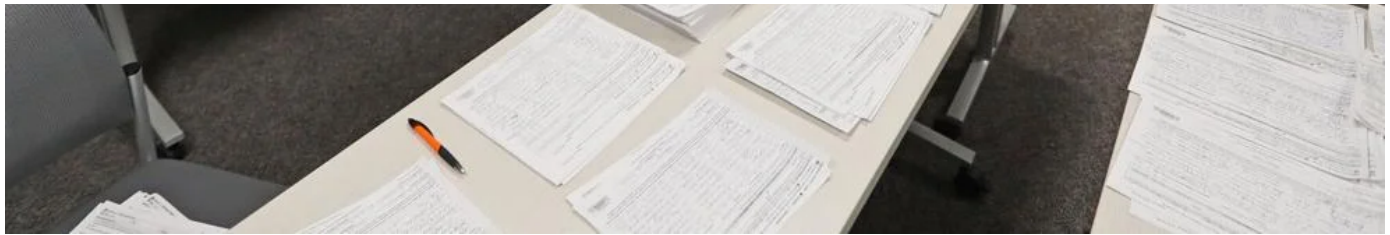
Commissioners have enough signatures to qualify for the May primary election.

Jackson County for All cleared the 10,500-signature hurdle Tuesday that provides a comfortable margin to help qualify the measures for the election.

“We’re at 10,700 and counting,” said Denise Krause, one of the chief organizers of the campaign. “That’s in less than five months.”

The three measures actually need 8,400 signatures, but local election officials told them to get 10,500 in case of duplicates, voters who live outside the county, illegible handwriting or other issues.





Denise Krause, manager of the Jackson County for All campaign, looks over signatures at the Ashland Public Library on Tuesday.

Jamie Lusch / Rogue Valley Times

The measures would change the commissioners from a three- to five-member board, make the positions nonpartisan and take the commissioners' current pay and spread it among the five.

Krause said supporters will gather at noon Tuesday, Feb. 20, at the Jackson County Courthouse, 10 South Oakdale Ave., and walk down to the elections office to deliver the signatures — a day before the Feb. 21 deadline to qualify for the May 21 primary.

“It’s a big moment,” she said. “We will treat it as a moment of respect.”

Originally, Krause and other organizers targeted the November election, but in January they changed their goal to February when they were in sight of the 10,500 mark.

“It took us less than five months to get there,” Krause said.

There are three ballot measures that organizers are asking voters to consider.

The first would change the makeup of the Board of Commissioners from partisan to nonpartisan, allowing nonaffiliated voters, or those who don’t belong to any party, to cast a vote in primary elections.

Out of 36 counties in Oregon, nine, or 25%, remain partisan. Klamath County changed its commissioners to nonpartisan in 2013, while Douglas County did so in 2006.

The second ballot measure would increase the number of commissioners from

Chat

three to five. The three-member board was created in 1853 when the population was less than 4,000. Now it's 223,259, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

The third ballot measure would change the salaries of the commissioners.

Jackson County commissioners have some of the highest commissioner salaries in the state, earning from \$112,382.40 to \$143,416.00, plus benefits. The new salary schedule under the ballot proposal would spread the existing three salaries among five commissioners, lowering each salary to a level comparable to other similar-sized counties, according to Jackson County for All.

Krause said she has asked the county repeatedly for a breakdown of what it costs to run the office of commissioners.

"These are things the public needs to know," she said. "They've got these big palatial offices, for what?"

Danny Jordan, the county administrator, gave a brief rundown on what it costs to run the commissioner offices at a recent meeting, but more information is expected at Thursday's Board of Commissioners' staff meeting.

Jordan said it's likely that more staff would be required to handle a larger board of commissioners, including potentially the addition of an administrative assistant. He also said health insurance coverage is about

\$2,000 a month for each commissioner. New office space and equipment would be needed.

Krause suggested the commissioners could use smaller offices with an adjoining meeting room.

“We would like the commissioners to be outside their current offices and into the community,” she said.

The existing offices, separated from the public by a glass partition, are intimidating for constituents, Krause said.

“When did they decide they need these big inaccessible offices?” she asked.

Krause, who gathered 1,200 of the signatures and also ran for commissioner in 2022, said 180 “circulators” helped with the effort to gather signatures.

She said only a small percentage of voters didn’t sign for all three ballot measures.

While one of the goals is to make the commissioner seats nonpartisan, which would align them with most counties in the state, Krause, a Democrat, said she is fully aware the Board of Commissioners could end up with five Republicans instead of the current three Republicans.

But the nonaffiliated voters, who represent the largest voting bloc in the

county, would finally be able to vote for a commissioner in the primary election, she said.

Reach writer Damian Mann at dmannnews@gmail.com.

Chat