

SPECIAL ELECTION: Jackson County voters have less than a week to cast mail-in ballots

Published 12:36 pm Tuesday, May 13, 2025

By BUFFY POLLOCK / Rogue Valley Times



A drop box at the Jackson County Elections Office on West Main Street in Medford. Rogue Valley Times file photo

Election is Tuesday, May 20; contested positions for school boards, special districts are on ballot

Jackson County voters have less than a week to hand in their mail-in ballots for the spring election that covers everything from schools and libraries to sewer, transportation and fire districts.

Drop boxes at libraries in Ashland, Phoenix, Rogue River, Eagle Point and Central Point, and at the Jackson County Elections Office on West Main Street in Medford will be open until 8 p.m. Election Day, Tuesday, May 20. The final day to receive valid postmarked ballots from the postal service is May 27.

The bulk of the races being held include school and fire districts. For school district races, most garnered at least one candidate per available seat while the larger districts in the region — Ashland, Medford and Central Point — bring some competition.

SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARDS

Ashland

For the [Ashland School Board](https://www.ashland.k12.or.us/o/school-board?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555) (<https://www.ashland.k12.or.us/o/school-board?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) position 1, a pair of newcomers — math curriculum developer and school district budget committee member Ann M. Gaffney and Ashland Deputy City Manager Jordan Rooklyn — will run to replace outgoing incumbent Jill Franko.

Gaffney, according to the voters pamphlet, said her “background as a teacher, administrator, union rep, curriculum developer and parent” gives her “a comprehensive view of what’s possible — and what’s needed — right now.”

Rooklyn’s pamphlet submission states that, if elected, she has the “proven skills to protect our District’s budget, to protect our teachers and staff, and most importantly, to protect our students.”

For position 3, a trio of candidates will vie to replace incumbent Eva Skurtowicz, who is not seeking reelection: Retiree Deltra Ferguson, former director of Resolve Center for Dispute Resolution and Restorative Justice; Noelle Christensen, a business owner, community volunteer and district parent; and property management pro and Rogue Events Collective board president Susanne McGraw.

For position 4, three of candidates will run against incumbent Rebecca Dyson, including:

Grant Jolliffe, a family nurse practitioner, who said he would “offer a critical lens when reviewing the current status of the district budgetary concerns and bring fresh perspectives for school improvement.”

Elisa Hawksley, a special education teacher in the Medford School District, said, if elected, she would ensure that “student, parent, and teacher concerns are heard and valued in the decision-making process.”

Alex Sol, not listed in the voter pamphlet, is a retired former artistic director for a theatre company and lists unnamed nonprofit experience on his candidate application. Sol has been embroiled in a battle with the district over safety issues in schools.

Dyson, a physician at Mount Shasta Radiology and current Ashland School Board chair, was elected in 2021 and said she had served during a time of extraordinary challenges — including the pandemic, declining enrollment and financial and political strain — and would bring her experience as the only incumbent seeking to stay in office.

For the Central Point School District Board (<https://www.ashland.k12.or.us/o/school-board?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>), incumbent board members CJ Shipley and Jolee Wallace are running unopposed to retain their seats, while four candidates filed to replace longtime board member Bret Moore, who is not seeking reelection. Candidates for Moore's seat include: Pacific Retirement Services accountant and district parent Jenny Foster, a past Central Point Elementary PTO member and district bond oversight committee member; grant writer and district parent Micah Hillis; social media marketing manager and fitness coach Kellie Hobbs; and April Deagle, a behavioral health program manager for Jackson Care Connect and adjunct professor of social work for UMass Global/Brandman University.

Medford

In a heavily contested race for the embattled Medford School District (<https://www.medford.k12.or.us/our-district1/school-board/about-the-medford-school-board?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>), board, multiple candidates filed for each of three available seats (<https://rv-times.com/2025/04/30/special-election-full-slate-of-candidates-vies-for-3-medford-school-board-seats/>).

For position 1, being vacated by retired teacher Jeff Kinsella, three candidates are running.

Angela Zbikowski, senior manager of supplier relations for Direct Travel, is running against district parent and small business owner Cheyla Breedlove and retired CPA Curt Ankerberg, who is a perennial candidate with no elected office experience.

Position 2, for which board member Suzanne Messer is not seeking reelection, is being sought by Donovan Donnally, an architectural draftsman and small business owner; district parent Logan Vaughan, who ran unsuccessfully for Medford mayor; and Jackson Care Connect community engagement specialist Sandra McHenry.

For position 3, Board Chair Cynthia Wright will be the only incumbent on the ballot. Wright, who has served a number of terms on the board since 2003, will face off against auditing and consulting business owner Erik Johnsen, and Taryne Saunders, a private caregiver and district parent who has been a vocal critic of the current school board.

Other districts in the region boasting, in most cases, a candidate filed for each available seat, include Butte Falls, Eagle Point, Phoenix-Talent, Pinehurst, Prospect and Rogue River.

Available seats for the Rogue Community College Education Board (<https://www.roguecc.edu/>) and the Southern Oregon Education Service District Board (<https://www.soesd.k12.or.us/about/?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>), garnered one candidate per available seat in most instances.

For RCC, three incumbents are running, unopposed, for reelection; Vanessa Jones, Roger Stokes and Maria Underwood.

The race for the SOESD board includes four newcomers — Rhonda Lawrence, Ariel Bloomer, Rebecca Mueller and Mary Barton — all running unopposed. One contested seat, for zone 7, will see a challenge between two candidates, Noel Porter and Richard Owens.

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

A race to replace two candidates on the Jackson County Library District Board garnered two candidates per seat. For position 1, incumbent Viki Brown is not seeking reelection. Voters will choose between retired Medford City Recorder Karent Spoons, who, per the voters pamphlet, would “work to keep costs down and avoid raising taxes” and education; and communications consultant Patty Jensen, who said she will “support our library staff members and volunteers; promote reading and ensure each library’s future viability and success.”

For position 2, incumbent Marta Tarantsey, an analyst for the state, seeks reelection in a race against Oakdale Middle School math teacher Jenny James. Tarantsey said she was committed to “upholding the priorities outlined in the JCLD Strategic Plan and the Facilities Plan while remaining attentive to community input.” Jensen said she would strive to make libraries “a safe and supportive community hub,” require fiscally conservative principles and “help develop the library’s vast resources to help community members thrive.”

Two available seats on the Rogue Valley Sewer Services Board (<https://www.rvss-or.gov/leadership/board-directors?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) are uncontested. Of four available seats on the Rogue Valley Transportation District Board, three seats are uncontested, with incumbents Dan Davis and Karl MacNair seeking reelection and newcomer Tyler Jasper seeking to replace outgoing board member Don Stone. Newcomers Katrina Ehrnman-Newton and Sam Bickel will run to replace incumbent Jenna Marmon.

FIRE DISTRICTS

Note: RFPD = Rural Fire Protection District

Elections of board members to local fire district boards are largely uncontested around the region.

Districts for which only one candidate filed for each available seat include Applegate Valley RFPD (<https://applegatefd.com/index.html?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) (two available, two filed); Evans Valley RFPD (<https://www.evfire.org/?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) (three available, three filed); Greensprings RFPD (<https://greenspringsfire.org/?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) (three available, two filed); Jackson County RFPD 3 (<https://jcf3or.gov/?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) (two available, two filed); Jackson County RFPD 4

(<https://www.jcfd4.com/?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) (two available, two filed); Lake Creek RFPD (<https://usfiredept.com/lake-creek-rural-fire-district-12443.html?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) (three available, three filed); and Medford RFPD 2 (<https://www.medfordoregon.gov/Government/Departments/Fire/Medford-Rural-Fire-Protection-Dist-2?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>) (two available, two filed).

For Jackson County RFPD 5 (<https://www.jcfd5.com/?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>), which serves Phoenix, Talent and rural parts of Ashland, four seats are available. The board faced a slew of changes over the past year, with Jackson County commissioners stepping in to replace board members who resigned en masse after upheaval between district staff and ousted (<https://rv-times.com/2025/03/19/residents-crowd-fire-district-5-town-hall-held-at-frequently-browned-out-station-near-ashland/>). Fire Chief Charles Hanley.

Three board members appointed last year — Medford airport Fire Chief John Karns, former Phoenix Mayor Chris Luz and board chair and ETHOS Academy owner Greg Costanzo — will run to retain their appointed positions. Karns and Costanzo are unopposed, while Luz will face off against newcomer Alfredo Echaide. District residents Eleanor Ponomareff and Jennfer Hadden will run to replace Sam Pare-Miller, who is not seeking reelection.

For the Prospect RFPD (<https://www.prospectrfd.org/?emci=7fb9c63a-15c7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&emdi=b93cb4ba-1bc7-ef11-88ce-0022482a93af&ceid=15555>), four seats are available, and all incumbents are leaving the board. Newcomers Pam Lee, Michael Pearson and Gunner Gibson will run unopposed, while candidates Clay Thomas and Natalie Williams vie for a fourth seat.

Four candidates will contend for three available seats on the Rogue River RFPD board (<https://www.rogueriverfd.com/>); incumbents Willaim “Randy” Cort and Jim Stearns are running unopposed. while incumbent John Foster will race against newcomer Chuck Nagel.

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(https://rv-times.com/2025/05/16/jackson-county-clerk-says-voter-turnout-pretty-dismal-heading-into-upcoming-special-election/?utm_rs=AP_XCO9tXfoSdi9TRDTK4MJOW)



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(https://rv-times.com/2025/05/09/ashland-school-board-candidates-hold-thoughtful-forum/?utm_rs=AP_XCO9tXfoSdi9TRDTK4MJOW)



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