

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Berman with news and commentary for Tuesday, October 15, 2024.

The Jefferson County Auditor, along with other auditors throughout the state, will mail out ballots for the November 5 General Election tomorrow, in advance of what many people expect will be the most consequential election of our lifetime. The auditor will mail out 28,132 ballots, which are due by 8pm on November 5. Ballots postmarked by November 5 will be accepted, even if they arrive a few days later. Online voter registration is open until October 28, after which time you can register in person at the auditor's office in the Jefferson County Courthouse, again up until 8pm on November 5.

We don't want to rush anyone who may be undecided. But those who have made up their minds should vote early. Elections Coordinator Quinn Grewell said that early ballots help the efficiency of the voter count. The initial count will be posted on the auditor's website shortly after 8pm on Election Day.

Another reason to vote early is that you are removed from voter solicitation lists. Anyone who does not receive their ballots by next Monday, October 21, should contact the elections office directly at 360-385-9117.

Port Townsend exists in a Blue Bubble, so it's pretty much assured that Jefferson County will support Democrats in national, state, and local contests. But Jefferson County is part of larger districts with a more conservative leanings, so contests for congress and state legislature could be close. Here are some of the races to watch:

Democrat Emily Randall has gained momentum in her race to succeed retiring US Representative Derek Kilmer, especially after she defeated Hilary Franz (who had Kilmer's endorsement in the primary). If elected, she would be the first "queer Latina" – as she identifies herself – in congress. And this identity could draw her some national attention right away, similar to that for the so-called Squad. But you can't count out her opponent, Drew MacEwan, a Republican who said he does not actively support Donald Trump.

There are two contests for Jefferson County Commissioner: District 2's Heidi Eisenhour, a Democrat, is running unopposed as Republicans declined to field a candidate. In District 1, Democrats Heather Dudley Nollette and Ben Thomas seek to replace the retiring Kate Dean. Thomas has not really campaigned for the office, with no road signs or fundraising pitches. Dudley Nollette has blanketed the county with her signs, becoming the most visible candidate. So Dudley Nollette will most likely prevail.

I will address other election contests on next Tuesday's news broadcast.

State Senator Kevin Van De Wege resigned his seat this month, capping off a political career that encompassed eighteen years in the Legislature. He declined to seek another term in the senate in order to run for state lands commissioner. Although he did well in Clallam and Jefferson Counties, he placed sixth of the seven candidates seeking the position. The top two candidates are Democrat Dave Upthegrove and Republican Jaime Herrera Buetler.

Van De Wege, a member of the Democratic Party, will not endorse either candidate for the position. He told KPTZ news that he has called both candidates to wish them luck. Van De Wege resigned two months before the end of his term in order to do some contract lobbying, which is not allowed if he is in office. He plans to still work as a firefighter, serving as a captain for the Clallam County Fire District number three.

There is a complicated replacement process when a legislator resigns. This process will be abbreviated and will begin after Election Day. The winner of the election – either Democrat Mike Chapman or Republican Marcia Kelbon – will be sworn in when the election is certified in late November. This will give them a slight seniority over other newly elected legislators. The Democratic Party replacement process will give the candidate another five days of seniority, but only if Chapman prevails. This seems like a waste of time and energy, but we'll all want to keep busy after the election, however it rolls.

KPTZ 91.9 FM provides local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Charlie Bermand. Thanks for listening.