

ELECTIONS 2019

Fire District 3 candidates talk call load, staff funding

BY MICHAEL DASHIELL
Sequim Gazette

An incumbent fire commissioner and his challenger are looking at different ways to help a fire district that is seeing call volumes rise and a hard ceiling on state funding.

Two-time incumbent James Barnfather and challenger Bill Miano are vying for Clallam County Fire District 3's Position 3 on ballots this fall.

While both candidates have family roots in the trade, they differ on what tack to take on solving some of the district's challenges that includes a steady rise in emergency aid calls.



BARNFATHER

Barnfather, 68, said he's banking on his 12 years as a commissioner and connections he's made to earn re-election, while Miano, 48, a relative newcomer to the Olympic Peninsula, has the backing of International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 2933, the local firefighter union.

Battling the call load

Miano, a Fire District 3 volunteer and substitute bus driver for the Sequim School District, said he wants to see more staffing added through grants (see below) and spending money from what he sees is an overabundance of reserves, along with a fully-staffed 24-hour fire engine crew.

"It (additional staffing) isn't going to happen overnight," Miano said last week.

The former Utah firefighter said he is concerned that local firefighter crews on an aid call would have to come back to the fire station to retrieve an engine if, for example, they received a structure fire call.

"If you're paying firefighters to be on 24 hours a day, you should at least have a fire engine (ready)," he said.

Fire District 3 Board of Commissioners

Note: This is a non-partisan position

Duties: Pass a general fund operating budget (\$10.1 million in 2019), levy taxes, propose levies and bonds for voter approval

Term: Six years

Compensation: \$128 per meeting up to \$12,288 annually

Meeting: 1 p.m. first, third Tuesdays of month at FD3 headquarters, 323 N. Fifth Ave.

Election boundaries: From Deer Park area in Clallam County east to about 3 miles east of the Jefferson County line, including Gardiner, Port Discovery

Voters: 27,500 in Clallam County, 400 in Jefferson County

Number of board members: Three

Barnfather said Fire District 3 responds well to the growth in aid calls but the increase in calls year to year put stress on a junior taxing district that can't raise its budget more than 1 percent annually.

"Our call population (is) going up, up, up; if we don't have any more money, we'll have to get creative," he said.

A retired firefighter-EMT and senior engineer for the Seattle Fire Department, Barnfather said the district should consider a part-time paramedic car to help handle the bulk of non-emergency aid calls between 8 a.m.-8 p.m.

"That's one way to reduce our response (times) and have enough people on hand to respond to real emergencies," he said.

Miano, who recently resigned from his position as an Olympic Ambulance paramedic Sept. 27 because of the workload of campaigning, said staffing can be added from reserves.

"Local taxes need to go toward providing service, not sitting in reserve," Miano said in the Peninsula Daily News' 2019 General Election Voter's Guide.

He said he would push for a cost-benefit analysis for every project or request for money to move the fire district closer to meeting National Fire Protection Agency and the National Institute of Standards and Time recommendations — both of which require larger crews than what District 3 currently has available, he said.

In the PDN's Voter's Guide, Barnfather notes that "to keep up with the rising call volume,

additional personnel are needed. However, this needs to be implemented through measured budgetary means rather than done hastily."

SAFER grant decision

Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants are federal funding that pay a portion of the cost of additional firefighter positions. In the fall of 2017, Fire District 3 commissioners turned down an approved grant to add positions.

It would have given the fire district a little more than \$1 million over three years to cover 75 percent of wage and benefit costs in 2018 and 2019 and 35 percent in 2020. It would have cost the district about \$1.1 million over three years through a cost-sharing requirement, staff said.

It would have been the first time the district added to its workforce since 2008.

"To me, this presents more like a loan with an immense balloon payment with no additional revenue source to support it," Barnfather said at the time.

The grant didn't include funding for overtime, training and equipment that the district will need to pay, district officials said at the time.

Barnfather said then that accepting the grant would create more of a burden even with the unknown outcome of the department's still-pending collective bargaining agreement. While both he and fellow commissioner Michael Gawley said they recognized a future need to add firefighters, they rejected the grant (commissioner Steve Chinn was absent).

That decision sparked Miano's campaign run. Having moved to the peninsula in 2017 and volunteering with the district, he learned

through the media and other District 3 employees about the commissioner's decision to decline the grant.

"When you apply for a grant (like SAFER), it's for a purpose. It's how many people a fire district needs to do their jobs in a certain amount of time, based on population," Miano said. "You have to prove (the need) in the application.

"Either the (grant application) plan was wrong, or they shouldn't have applied for it," Miano said. "That's what got me motivated, to find out what happened."

Miano said he had experience writing a SAFER grant during his time with the West Valley City Fire Department in Utah in 2007. With major growth in subdivisions with that fire district's boundaries, staff saw a need for staff and a new station. Miano said he helped earn the district through a successful grant process that was set to bring in partial funding for 15 new staffers. That was, Miano said, until the economy dropped off in 2008, forcing a modified grant that reduced the number of staff added to four.

West Valley City's fire department has grown in recent years and now has a new station, Miano noted.

Barnfather said last week that while the SAFER grant would have brought six more staffers, "it required matching funds which we did not have at the time."

After the three-year grant ran out, he said, the six new staffers would cost nearly \$1 million each year.

Trying to get quality staffers to sign on for just a three-year stint without confidence they'd have a job afterward wouldn't draw quality applicants, Barnfather said.

"We would have had to fire them," he said. "It's supposed to be a career, not a part-time job."

Fire District 3's funding is more secure after voters approved a levy lid lift in November 2018.

"We would have to drastically cut service (without the levy lid lift)," Barnfather said.

Union backing

In late June, IAFF Local 2933 President Chris Corbin announced the union would be endorsing Miano for the commissioner position.

Local 2933 represents all

firefighters, paramedics, officers, and mechanics that work at District 3, Corbin said.

"The first time I met Bill he asked me why I thought the fire department was turning down a SAFER grant for more staffing," Corbin said in a press release. "I was impressed he was able to pick up quickly why this mistake won't pencil out."

The decision to endorse Miano was nearly unanimous, according to IAFF Local 2933 Vice-President Kolby Konopaski.

"Bill truly has the best interest of the taxpayers and the firefighters responding to 911 emergencies every day in mind," Konopaski said in the press release.

Barnfather said he was surprised at the endorsement.

"I think it's very shortsighted on their part; they don't know how the financing works," Barnfather said.

He said in this campaign he's relying more on connections he's made over two six-year commissioner terms.

"I'm hoping they know who I am and what I've done," Barnfather said. "I've been here a long time ... and established good relations. He hasn't earned their respect."

Miano said it's encouraging to get the support from other firefighters.

"People are fired up," he said. "I wish it wasn't necessary."

Background

Barnfather grew up in the Seattle area near Ballard. His father was a firefighter.

After earning an associate's degree at Shoreline Community College, he started what turned out to be a 31-year career in Seattle fighting fires.

"That's what I wanted to do," he said. "This might sound kind of corny (but) you get such a wonderful feeling helping people."

Barnfather's dad was with the Seattle department long enough to see his son join the staff.

"We were on the same rig once in a while; the funny thing was I had more training (so I) had to give the old man an order or two," Barnfather recalled.

Following retirement, he and his wife Linda started looking for a place to escape the I-5 corridor population and building boom. Linda's

parents had property in Sequim, and in 2004 they made the move west.

"We knew this is where we wanted to settle down," Barnfather said.

In 2007, Barnfather ran for the first of his two terms as fire commissioner.

"I just couldn't sit still," he said. "I love being in the fire service (but) now I don't have to hump hose anymore."

"It definitely helped to see how the other side works."

Miano was born and raised on long Island, New York, but moved a couple of years before graduating high school to Park City, Utah, about a half-hour's drive east from Salt Lake City.

His father was a volunteer firefighter in New York, Miano said, where everybody except the New York City firefighters were volunteers.

It wasn't until Miano was living in Utah before he learned that fire districts in smaller communities like Park City had paid staff (or a combination of paid and volunteer staff).

Miano got hired part time in Park City from 1991-1996, then as a full-time crew member in Ogden, Utah, from 1995-2000. He took a brief leave to pursue a physics degree, but less than two years later he was back with the Ogden department.

Miano then took a job with a fire department in West Valley City, closer to Salt Lake City, where he worked between 2005-2013.

Asked what kept him in the line of work, Miano said, "(It's) the teamwork, the environment ... it's another family. You get paid to hang out and do crazy stuff all day.

It's also a service. You're helping people all day."

Miano said he injured his back and took a medical retirement. After moving to California for time to help his mother-in-law, he and his family started looking at places to settle. In 2017, they moved north.

"Sequim kept popping up on web searches; it was serendipity," Miano said.

For more

Contact Barnfather at barnfatherforfirecommissioner@gmail.com; he does not have a campaign website.

Miano's campaign website is www.facebook.com/Elect-BillMiano.



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County seeks volunteers for boards

OLYMPIC PENINSULA NEWS GROUP

Clallam County is seeking volunteers to fill 105 vacancies on 25 advisory boards and committees.

The deadline to apply is the close of business Friday,

Nov. 22.

To apply, call the commissioners' office at 360-417-2233; visit their office at the Clallam County Courthouse, Suite 4, 223 E. Fourth St.; or download an application from the county website, www.clallam.net.

Descriptions of the advisory panels — and the application form itself — are available under the "Boards, Committees and Groups" link on the county website. Current members with

expiring terms who wish to retain their position are asked to provide a written statement to the commissioner's office: by fax at 360-417-2493; by mail at 223 E. Fourth St., Suite 4, Port Angeles 98362; or by email at mhalencak@co.clallam.wa.us.

Vacancies exist on the following advisory panels, with specific categories listed where applicable:

- Agricultural Commission (6 vacancies)

- Behavioral Health Advisory Board (6)
- Board of Health (2)
- Boundary Review Board (3)
- Building Code Board of Appeals (6)
- Carlsborg Community Advisory Council (6)
- Clallam Bay/Seki Community Action Team (3)
- Clallam Bay/Seki Sewer Advisory Committee (3)
- Crescent Community Advisory Council (3)
- Developmental Disabilities Advisory Committee (5)
- Fair Advisory Board (2)
- Heritage Advisory Board (4)
- Homelessness Task Force (10)
- Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (2)
- Marine Resources Committee (3)
- North Olympic Library System (1)
- North Pacific Coast Marine Resources (2)
- Olympic Area Agency on Aging (O3A) Advisory Council (2)
- Peninsula Housing Authority (1)
- Permit Advisory Board (10)
- Planning Commission (3)
- Port Crescent Pioneer Cemetery (2)
- Sheriff's Citizens Advisory Committee (9)
- Solid Waste Advisory Committee (8)
- Trails Advisory Committee (3)

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