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ALERT FEATURED TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

Where the Linn County sheriff's candidates stand on guns, the jail and more

Maddie Pfeifer

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The Linn County Sheriff Debate between Jon Raymond, left, and Michelle Duncan was held Friday, Sept. 30, 2022, at Kylie Graham, Mid-Valley Media

Maddie Pfeifer

Candidates for Linn County Sheriff, incumbent **Michelle Duncan** and Deputy **Jon Raymond**, verbally sparred at a debate Fright night, Sept. 30, in response to 20 questions on a variety of topics, including gun laws, the role of sheriff,

the jail and staffing concerns.

Among the revelations was that Raymond said he would violate health rules if necessary to keep the jail at full capacity.

More than a hundred community members gathered at the Linn County Fair and Expo Center to watch the **two** go back and forth for two hours.

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Audience members were able to submit questions to a panel that narrowed the selection to the most requested topics. The Linn County Republican Party hosted the event.



Linn County Sheriff Deputies wait at the intersection of Second and Main during a shooting investigation in Lebanon on Sunday, Sept. 11.

Opening the jail

Getting the Linn County Jail to full capacity following the COVID-19 pandemic came up repeatedly throughout the night. Raymond claimed that Duncan keeps saying the jail is “open,” but in reality, getting it to full capacity is the priority.

Raymond said looking at the root of the jail capacity problem is the best way to attack the issue

“We’ve let the Oregon Health Authority run our jail and make a lot of decisions for us without us standing up against them” he said. “The sheriff has to run the jail. ... If the sheriff has to fight a few lawsuits here and there — I hope we don’t have to — but we need to stand up and fight or we’ll be overrun.”

As a state administrative agency, when the Oregon Health Authority enacts restrictions, they are rules, not laws. However, the rules have the force of law and subject rule-breakers to potential fines, as ordered by an independent administrative judge, per the OHA website.

Protecting tax payer dollars is critical to Duncan. She said disobeying guidelines or restrictions can lead the agency to expensive lawsuits. There are still some Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-ordered limitations, she said

She added that there are plans to add more beds for women to the jail, which should help maximize jail space.

The Second Amendment

Both candidates are strong supporters of the right to bear arms. They were asked what their stances were on Measure 114, also on the Nov. 8 General Election ballot, which would require a permit to purchase a firearm.

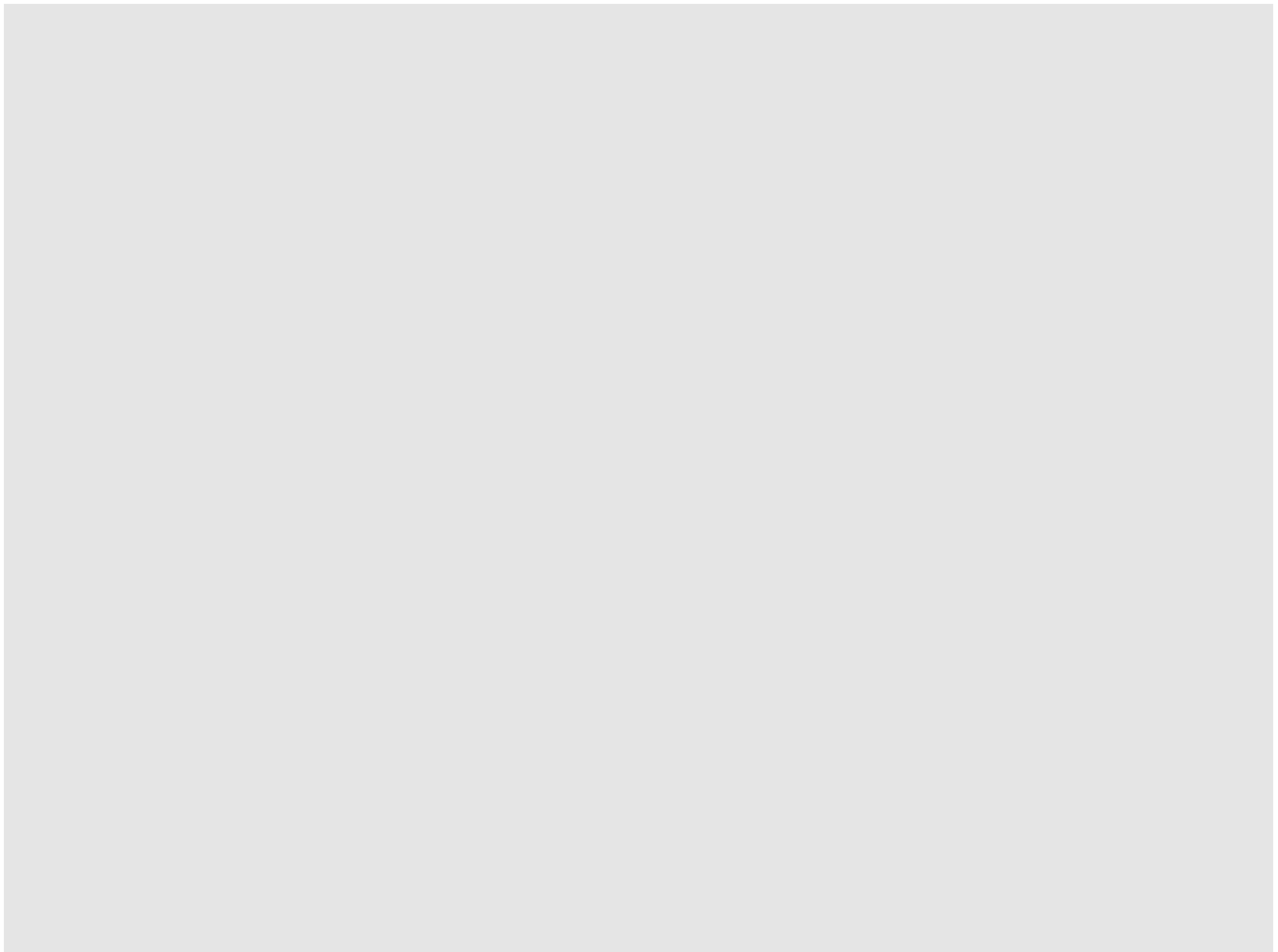
Duncan said she doesn't agree with the permit requirement, but she wants to keep in mind gun owner's best interests.

"I don't agree with the permitting, but I have to think about it very thoughtfully," Duncan said. "If I don't comply with the permitting, it's going to end up unfortunately harming gun owners. If I don't comply with issuing permits and you're unable to get a gun because I wanted to take a stand, then that's not helping you as a gun owner."

Duncan added that she's been very vocal about fighting back against Measure 114.

Raymond believes the duty of the sheriff is to protect constitutional rights and the Second Amendment falls under that.

"If there is something within that law that makes it so we have to issue a permit, we will find the quickest, easiest, simplest path to get there because we are not going to violate your Second Amendment rights," he said.



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Staffing shortages

A big topic during the debate was staffing shortages. The responses led to questions about employee morale, retention efforts and hiring methods.

Raymond said retention is the best tool the sheriff's office has when it comes to staffing levels.

"We can hire and train and let go as many people as you can find, and it's not going to serve the citizens of Linn County," Raymond said. "We need retention. We need happy employees who are not out looking for work. We need to retain staff."

Raymond said it's time to let employees have a voice in the sheriff's office.

Duncan recognized the importance of retention but added that there are some reasons people leave the agency that are out of her control. She said staffing has been one of her main goals since assuming the office in January.

"I've hired more people since I've taken office than the previous sheriffs before me, and we're not stopping," Duncan said. "We're hiring great individuals that have a commitment to community."

Duncan said she has organized team-building activities for employees to boost morale, and that the election has unfortunately created a natural division among employees that she hopes to address.

Leader versus manager

In an interview with Mid-Valley Media this week, Raymond said he thought Duncan was a manager and not a leader.

Multiple audience-submitted questions focused on this topic.

Raymond said he gained leadership experience from working in corrections because he had to lead inmates as opposed to simply tell them what to do. He also said his experience working in the community and on the streets has earned him respect as a leader from voters and from peers.

“The word ‘I’ isn’t something I say a lot,” Raymond said. “It’s we. And that’s because I’m a leader. I know it takes a team. I’m not the one and only.”

Although Raymond continually spoke on the sheriff needing to be a leader, Duncan emphasized that the sheriff has to also wear the hat of manager. She’s held every rank at the sheriff’s office and said this has taught her both leadership and management.

“My work ethic has been a part of my leadership skill,” she said.

Duncan said managing a budget and nearly 200 employees is a crucial part of the job that can’t be ignored.

Other topics of concern for community members included addressing the intersection between homelessness, drug abuse and mental health issues, upholding the Constitution, managing budgets and passing the law enforcement levy.

To watch a recording of the full debate, go to **www.bit.ly/3ComJ2d**.

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Reporter
