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By EARL WATT • Daily Leader On May 1, Jim Barnett walked out of his medical practice in Emporia for the last time and began to campaign full time to become the Congressional Representative for the Big First District.



He wasn't the only one. Several others across the district also sought the position, and in a recent Survey USA poll, Tim Huelskamp, Tracey Mann and Barnett were in a dead heat for the seat. The field of six Republicans will be narrowed to one after Tuesday's primary. But Barnett's departure from his practice came out of the disappointment he had with Washington.

"For me to leave medicine was huge," Barnett said in a recent visit to Liberal. "I did it out of frustration, to lead this nation out of the current predicament and over-regulation by government."

Barnett has had a slight lead most of the campaign, and was a former candidate for governor. He currently serves in the Kansas Senate along with Huelskamp. Mann, a candidate from Salina, has not served in the Kansas Legislature.

Having a tight race for the Congressional seat came as no surprise to the physician from Emporia.

"It is a horse race," Barnett said. "We predicted that from the beginning. That's why we are out every day listening to the concerns and the need to cut spending, reduce the federal debt, lower taxes, and reduce the very burdensome regulations that are stifling economic recovery, and to repeal Obamacare."

Barnett has made regular stops in Liberal during the campaign, beginning with meetings with medical professionals prior to the passage of Obamacare and making several more visits since.

Those visits have made one necessity in Southwest Kansas crystal clear to Barnett.

"Believe me it has only solidified my belief that Highway 54 needs to be four lanes," he said. "We followed nine trucks for many miles yesterday, and it emphasized to us how important a four-lane highway is to economic growth."

While every candidate is clamoring to the conservative in the Republican race, Barnett said he had no problem with his record being examined.

"I welcome the scrutiny," he said. "I think a fourth of the voters are undecided. People need to

look at records and past performance. I welcome people to scrutinize my record.”

Barnett is making plans for how he can be most effective after Tuesday’s primary, should he win his party’s nomination.

“If I win the primary, I will commit two days of every week to travel and get involved in 20 to 25 House races,” Barnett said. “I want to develop a conservative coalition in Congress next January. I have a track record to develop coalitions in Kansas Legislature. That is who we need to elect to express the needs of Western Kansas and the entire nation.”

As a physician, he has studied the new medical mandates known as Obamacare, and he has made its repeal his No. 1 national priority and the four-laning of Highway 54 as his No. 1 in-district priority.

“The first thing we need to do for the benefit of the U.S. is to defund Obamacare,” he said. “Ultimately, we need to repeal it. Unique to Southwest Kansas, I believe the priority should be a four-lane highway for Highway 54. I think it benefits eastern Kansas as well. Right now we are diverting traffic to Oklahoma, and as a result, we are losing millions of dollars of investment in Kansas. I want the entire state to thrive not just survive.”

Southwest Kansas is the only quadrant of the state without a four-lane highway, and it is also the only quadrant without a four-year college institution.

Barnett believed the solution was economic growth.

“Economic growth is critical to answering those issues,” he said. “People — young people — follow jobs. That’s why Highway 54 is critical. Subsequently, the potential for four-year institution and turning around brain drain is possible when you have good paying jobs in this area.”

While rural America does not have the votes in Congress when facing urban representatives, Barnett said coalition building is critical.

“A key for coalitions is for the farm bill,” he said. “We need to protect farm programs and expand trade. That is a huge issue for Kansas for agriculture in Kansas. We have to learn how to govern in the minority. Rural Kansas will face this. Coalition building, skill and ability is so important for leadership to be produced and get the job done in Southwest Kansas.”

Barnett said he visited 50 counties in the past two weeks in the home stretch of the primary, and while he said that his hometown of Emporia and Liberal were sister cities (both have meat packing plants and rising immigration populations), he said if there is to be a secure border, responsible spending and a limit on government regulation, now is the time to act.

“I grew up on the farm,” he said. “When we have work to complete, we have to get it done, we can’t wait any longer. This is our Get it Done tour.”

The primary vote will take place Tuesday.

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