

# THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

## FLYING LOW

A U.S. Navy F-18 Demo Team pilot performs low altitude maneuvers Saturday for the crowd gathered during SkyFest at Fairchild Air Force Base.

COLIN MULVANY/  
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

While inclement weather grounded the Thunderbirds, roughly 25,000 people still were able to enjoy other aircraft flying and get an up-close look at SkyFest. **NEWS, 5**

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Spokane, Washington

# SPOKANE-AREA MEN JOIN THE FIGHT IN UKRAINE

By Eli Francovich  
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

**WARSAW** – On March 20, Chris Warren was talking to his mom on the phone and paying the utility bill for his Spokane apartment half a world away when a Ukrainian soldier barged into his Kyiv hotel room.

Get dressed, he told Warren, the Russians are dropping paratroopers into Kyiv.

“We threw on our kit and headed down and the commander who doesn’t speak English was getting the machine guns and snipers to the roof and prepping us to start moving south,” he texted that night.

At the same time, Ukrainian anti-aircraft guns opened fire, lighting up the night sky and sending explosive

echoes through the capital city. Warren dressed and raced down to the hotel lobby to join a dozen or so other foreign fighters all waiting nervously.

In the earliest days of the war, Russia had dropped paratroopers into Kyiv, but since Warren arrived in Ukraine on March 6, he’d felt safe in the capital city. Although there was regular bombing and shelling, they weren’t close to where he was staying.

“It feels normal, man,” he said in characteristic non-chalance.

He went out for breakfast sometimes with his fellow fighters, and they watched movies in their hotel room, which had a view of Kyiv’s iconic independence statue.

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Chris Warren stands on top of a wrecked Russian tank on April 2. Warren, an Air Force veteran, wasn’t in combat in Ukraine but did help the Ukrainian military take inventory after a battle north of Brovary, Ukraine.

COURTESY OF  
CHRIS WARREN

## Trump’s pick to beat Newhouse sparks debate

Former president backs Culp for state’s 4th district

By Orion Donovan-Smith  
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Five Republican candidates stood at the front of a VFW post in Yakima on the first Saturday of May. One by one, they made their opening pitches for why the voters of Central Washington’s ruby-red 4th district should send them to Congress.

Brad Klippert, a seven-term state representative from Kennewick, cited his decades in law enforcement and the military, an “A+” rating from the National Rifle Association and an award for “conservative achievement” from the Conservative Political Action Conference.

Army veteran Benancio “Ben” Garcia III talked about his family’s long history of military service, from the great-great-grandfather who served in an all-Black “Buffalo Soldier” regiment in the 1800s to his father’s time as an Army Ranger in Vietnam and his own service in Iraq.

Corey Gibson, who moved home to Selah after a marketing career took him around the world, touted a nationwide network of “America first” candidates he

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## MASS SHOOTING IN BUFFALO LEAVES 10 DEAD, 3 HURT

Police arrest 18-year-old in what authorities described as “racially motivated violent extremism” at grocery store. **NEWS, 3**

## GARLAND DISTRICT SEEING POST-PANDEMIC REBOUND

New businesses are flocking to the retro avenue in north Spokane with more on the way. **BUSINESS, 1**

## ‘HAMILTON’ COUPLE HAPPILY LIVES LIFE ON THE ROAD

Donald Webber Jr. and Rebecca Covington have been traveling with their son, now 15 months old, since he was an infant. **TODAY, 1**



# ‘WE’RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE’

Planned Parenthood rally draws hundreds in support of reproductive rights

By Emma Ledbetter  
FOR SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Nearly 1,000 people gathered Saturday evening in Spokane’s Riverfront Park to protest the Supreme Court’s expected reversal of Roe v. Wade.

Spokane’s “Bans Off Our Bodies” rally, which was organized by Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho, was one of nearly 400 events across the country Saturday as part of a nationwide day of action in support of a constitutional right to abortion. Protesters held signs with phrases like “my body, my choice” and “abortion is health care” and chanted “the people united will never be divided.”

Several speakers, including Planned Parenthood staff and



COLIN MULVANY/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Hundreds of abortion rights supporters gather at Riverfront Park Saturday for a “Bans Off Our Bodies” rally organized by Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho.

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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

TRUMP

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founded and warned that God-given freedoms are at stake in the election.

Former NASCAR driver Jerrod Sessler launched into a “full-throttle” run-down of a life that took him from a rough childhood to a successful career he attributed to the American dream, “made possible because of our great Constitution.”

But Loren Culp, the former small-town police chief who ran unsuccessfully for governor in 2020, held the Trump card. After name-dropping Fox News host Tucker Carlson and citing the number of votes he received in his losing bid for governor, Culp delivered what may prove to be the most important line in the race.

“I am the only candidate up here that is endorsed by President Donald Trump,” he said.

Trump, who has dubbed himself “the king of endorsements,” has used his imprimatur to influence races across the country – at least 145, according to Axios – to an extent never before seen after leaving the White House. But his endorsement of Culp, who didn’t live in the district when he declared his candidacy and has been the subject of multiple lawsuits, has frustrated GOP leaders in the district and the other Trump-aligned candidates who sought the former president’s backing.

“That felt like the most important thing in the campaign, for all of us,”

said Gibson, who traveled to a rally in Arizona and to Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida to try to meet the former president. “It really seemed like getting the Trump endorsement was going to be the key to winning the race.”

The only GOP candidate not at the debate hosted by the Republican Liberty Caucus of Washington – a group described by its chairman as “the surgical strike team of the Republican Party” – was Rep. Dan Newhouse. The four-term congressman from Sunnyside has had a target on his back since he voted to impeach Trump for inciting a riot at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The former president has thrown his support behind primary challengers to the 10 House Republicans who voted for his impeachment, four of whom have chosen to retire rather than face a Trump-backed opponent in Republican primaries. But Washington’s unusual “jungle primary” system, in which the top two finishers advance to November’s general election regardless of party, makes the 4th district race a unique test of Trump’s influence.

Despite most of the county GOP leaders in the district calling for his resignation after the impeachment vote, Newhouse has stayed in the race, betting he can hang onto the seat he won with two-thirds of the vote in 2020, outperforming Trump by more than eight percentage points in the district.

The sole Democrat in the race, Yakima-based businessman Doug White, also



Source: Washington Redistricting Commission  
MOLLY QUINN/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

participated in the May 7 debate and is likely to capture a significant minority of votes in the primary, further complicating the seven-man race. If the Trump-aligned candidates split Republican voters angered by Newhouse’s impeachment vote, the top two vote-getters could advance to November’s general election with unusually small shares of the electorate.

“We’re going through a fundamental realignment in our politics right now,” said Cornell Clayton, professor of government at Washington State University. “I’ve never seen something like this in my lifetime. ... I think it’s really difficult to predict how they’re going to shake out.”

Wary that too many similar candidates could split

the pro-Trump vote, the Benton County Republican Party kicked off a “pre-endorsement” process aimed at winnowing the crowded field. A five-person nominating committee held two-hour interviews with each of Newhouse’s five GOP challengers, then made a recommendation to the party’s precinct committee officers at a Feb. 3 meeting.

After the board recommended Klippert, a Benton County Sheriff’s deputy, 58.1% of the 74 officers voted to endorse him. Sessler placed second with 27%, followed by Culp with 6.8%, Newhouse with 5.4% and Garcia with 2.7%. Gibson received no votes.

“The reason we did that was we were trying to tell the Trump people, from the grassroots, who we

wanted,” said Benton County GOP Chairman Mike Massey, who provided the vote results to The Spokesman-Review. “Brad Klippert has a lot of goodwill with the voters, and that’s the thing that the Trump camp could never see.”

Less than a week later, Culp took to Facebook Live to announce he had received Trump’s “Complete and Total Endorsement.”

Klippert said he traveled to Trump’s rally in Arizona in January and “was supposed to have a face-to-face meeting” with the former president, but after the meeting didn’t happen, he chose not to travel to Mar-a-Lago for one of the frequent fundraisers where candidates clamor for Trump’s attention.

“I wanted to earn his endorsement rather than beg for it, which I had heard that some others had done,” Klippert said. “Obviously, President Trump does not have the time to personally vet each of those candidates. He counts on others. I think if he knew the true character and the true history of all the candidates, he might change his mind.”

Christopher Gergen, Culp’s campaign manager, said neither he nor Culp ever appealed directly for Trump’s endorsement.

“There was no real ‘process,’” Gergen said. “We made exactly zero phone calls to Mr. Trump’s team or staff or anything. We never went to Mar-a-Lago until February, after Mr. Culp got the endorsement.”

In the video announcing Trump’s endorsement, Culp described sitting at home with his wife and getting

an unexpected call from Trump. Sessler, who said he met with Trump informally at the Palm Beach resort, called the Culp campaign’s claim that Culp didn’t lobby for Trump’s endorsement “a lie.”

“That’s not how it works,” Sessler said. “I didn’t get to go to Mar-a-Lago just because I called the right person. I got to go to Mar-a-Lago because I was invited by the right person. That’s the only way you get there.”

After Culp got Trump’s endorsement, Sessler said, part of him wished he had been “more aggressive” in courting the former president’s support, but that would mean spending more money to attend fundraisers. Federal candidates and committees have spent \$1.3 million to hold events at Mar-a-Lago, The New York Times reported.

“I just didn’t think the endorsements were for sale,” he said. “I don’t think Trump is selling them, per se, but the people around him that are allowing people to get there are not doing things the way I think they should.”

Despite missing out on the big prize, Sessler has secured endorsements from other prominent figures in Trump’s orbit, including former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn and political consultant Roger Stone, who sent a pair of his favorite Italian sunglasses to Sessler’s teenage son, Sessler said.

Gibson said he went to Mar-a-Lago last November as a guest of Rick Grenell – who became the country’s

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UKRAINE

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Department doesn’t know how many Americans are in Ukraine and wouldn’t comment on American deaths and how that could impact the politics of the war.

“Russian forces frequently report the false deaths or capture of U.S. citizens for propaganda purposes. We urge the public to treat any such stories with caution until verified by the United States government,” according to the statement. “Due to privacy considerations, we have no further comment at this time.”

...

Back in the hotel lobby on March 20, Chris Warren waited nervously with roughly 15 other soldiers. He’d spent more than a month staying in the hotel, which he’d been told was a four-star, although by his estimation it was a “borderline Holiday Inn.” Still, nice for a war.

Unlike Smith, Warren was not part of the Foreign Legion and had attached directly to a military unit after entering Ukraine just days after the war started. He’d reached out to some buddies in the U.S. military who in turn put him in touch with some Ukrainians and a veteran of the French special forces.

He traveled to Kyiv with 150 pounds of medical supplies. Living in the Ukrainian capital, he’d grown accustomed to the sounds of bombs and artillery.

During most of his time in Ukraine, Warren trained Ukrainians, teaching them how to use American-made machine guns or helping them learn the basics of clearing a room. He trained Ukrainian supreme court justices in first aid and taught them how to clean



ELI FRANCOVICH/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW  
Jeremy Smith sits in a Warsaw hotel wearing a uniform he was issued while fighting in Ukraine. Smith spent nearly a month fighting in Ukraine.

an AK-47. He emphasized that, by American-military standards, he was hardly qualified for this work. But the training he’d gone through in the Air Force was more than most Ukrainians received, even in the military, and he estimates he trained about 300 people while there.

“The shelling is getting pretty normal,” he said one evening. “We just sleep like babies right now.”

Still, he was in a warzone and during late March and early April when it looked as if Russia might fully surround Kyiv, Warren became less cavalier.

“I made the mental decision before I even left, ‘Hey, I might not come back,’” he said in late March.

That evening – March 20 – as he waited to repel Russian soldiers, that possibility seemed more likely.

But then after about 30 minutes poised to fight,

their Ukrainian commander told them the aircraft was a drone, not paratroopers. They went back to their rooms and Warren went to sleep, just another night in Ukraine as a foreign fighter.

“It’s been a constant up and down,” Warren said. “They get us all geared up and ready to go, and then all of a sudden it’s not happening.”

...

If nothing else, that seems to be the common denominator amongst foreign fighters and mercenaries in Ukraine, a frustrating lack of consistency in direction and goals. Like the Spokane doctor who was turned away at a military hospital, Ukraine’s initial call for volunteers and fighters seemed to overwhelm the country’s ability to process and integrate that help.

That’s not to mention that some of the volunteers were little more than grifters who used the war to boost their own social media followings and didn’t bring any discernable skills to the conflict. Warren saw plenty of that and was even stationed with a Canadian who posted frequently to Twitter and garnered a large social media following. The man dramatized his experience, Warren said, and was one of the least effective foreign fighters he met, none of which you’d know by looking at his Twitter.

“They let way too many hens and not enough wolves into the country,” Warren said. “What we’ve heard is they’re trying to filter them out.”

Warren spent plenty of time sitting in a hotel room waiting, but in addition to the training, he got into the field more than many oth-

er foreign fighters he met. Notably, he was near Bucha shortly after the Russians withdrew. Although he wasn’t there documenting Russian atrocities, he heard radio chatter about the bodies Ukrainian soldiers were finding and passed several bodies off the side of the road. The thing that struck him the most, he said, was realizing just how small the town of Bucha actually is, a fact that makes the reported number of civilian deaths even more horrendous.

“That’s one thing we saw when we were in Bucha and Brovary, all the Russians, wherever their control posts were, wherever their bunkers were, it was littered with booze,” he said.

...

Both Warren and Smith are now safely back in the United States and both

have conflicted feelings about their time in Ukraine. During interviews in Poland after they returned from Ukraine, they talked about the stark difference between wartime life and normal life. The lights in cafes and restaurants and the sounds of people eating and drinking in Krakow, were particularly jarring after spending two months in a city under siege, Warren said.

“Kinda strange being home,” texted Smith after getting back to Washington. “Was strange to see planes in the sky and not thinking it’s Russian. Waking up at 4 a.m. and not having to go stand guard. Having lights on at night that are not red.”

As for how effective their trips were? Smith said if he’d known what would happen in Ukraine he wouldn’t have gone and said the disorganization of the Ukrainian Foreign Legion neutralized any good he did do.

“There was so much stuff that was just a complete junk show,” he said. “The whole time I’m thinking what the heck am I doing. The right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing.”

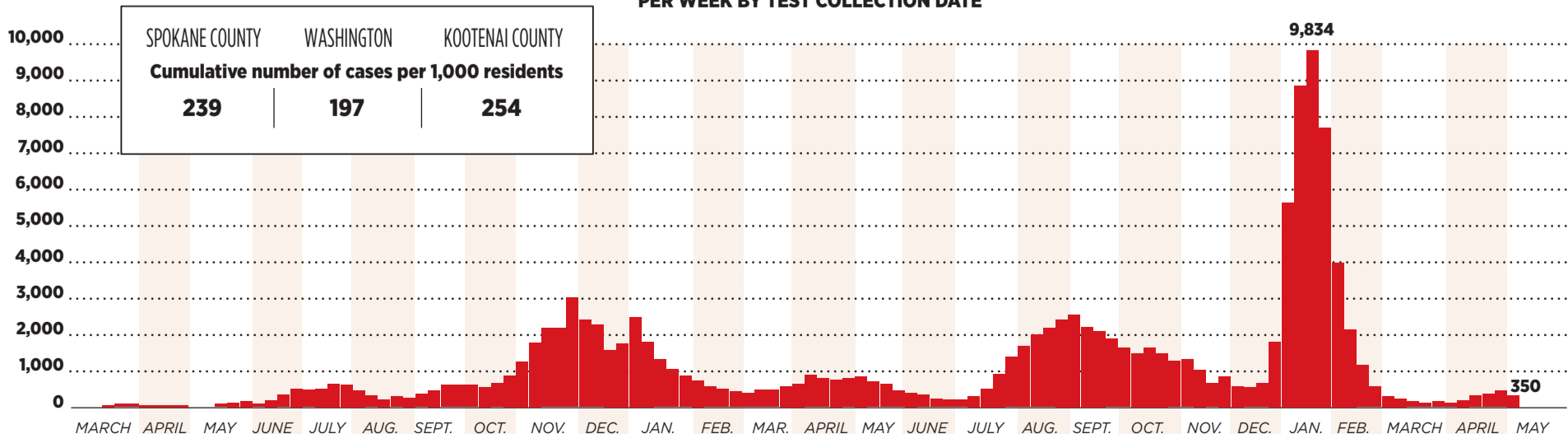
Warren’s experience was, on the whole, more positive even if he also saw the disorganization. He pointed to the Ukrainians he helped train as one of the most useful things he did.

And he urges any military veterans who might be interested in fighting in Ukraine to represent themselves, and their experience, honestly.

“The timing was right for me to come over here and help in any way possible,” Warren said. “And I felt that calling to come here and do that.”

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SPOKANE COUNTY NEW CASES OF COVID-19 PER WEEK BY TEST COLLECTION DATE



Sources: Spokane Regional Health District, Washington State Department of Health, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare