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EXPRESS COUPON

Lee seeks election to city council

■ CANDIDATE: The former ASUO president hopes to win the Ward three seat, which includes the UO

By Abe Estimada
Community Reporter

Perhaps it was just a matter of time before Bobby Lee would end up running for City Council.

"My mom used to say I was born with a briefcase," said Lee, former 1992-93 ASUO president and a graduate student in planning, public policy and management. "My dad is a university president in Korea and I used to attend meetings when I was a little kid. I used to make input and they would laugh at me. I still remember that."

If Lee, 26, ends up winning the City Council seat currently held by Kevin Hornbuckle, he will have plenty of opportunities to give his input for real. Never mind university meetings, Lee will have his say in decisions affecting a Eugene population of 117,000.

Lee made his decision in June to run for the Ward three seat at the urging of friends within city government and University faculty and friends. The University and downtown areas comprise Ward three.

"I wouldn't run for City Council if I didn't feel that I could do the job," Lee said.

Hornbuckle announced Sept. 20 that he would not seek reelection for the Ward three seat next spring. No other candidates have filed for Hornbuckle's seat, although the primary elections are not until May 12. A mayor and five City Council members will be sworn in January, 1997.

Lee is the youngest legitimate candidate to run for a City Council seat in recent memory, said Phil Weiler, spokesman for the city of Eugene.

But Lee said that his age should not be a concern.

"It's unusual and it's different when a student at my age gets elected to City Council," he said. "But I believe we can do it. I believe it's an unusual path, but I believe it is a path that is realistic. I believe I can be an asset to the University, the students and the city."

Indeed, Lee's resume seems to indicate that he has the background to tackle city politics.



LEE

Lee is currently a board member for the Eugene Family YMCA.

As ASUO president, Lee's administration was responsible for drawing record numbers of students to register to vote during an election year.

"He worked very hard," said Karmen Fore, campaign manager for the Committee to Elect Peter DeFazio and Lee's ASUO vice-president. "We were very fortunate to have a great staff. He would stand out in the rain and scream for students to vote. He would yell himself hoarse before students knew was going on. It was great. We had a good time."

Fore said she remembers Lee as being "fast on his feet and creative."

"As an executive, you have to have a vision," she said. "He had a vision and hired a great staff to fulfill that vision. He was very good at providing direction for his staff."

Lee also founded the UO Alumni Mentor Program, the UO Multicultural Center and KWVA radio station.

After serving as ASUO president, Lee was appointed by then Governor Barbara Roberts to serve on the Oregon State Board of Higher Education, the highest governing body of the state's eight colleges and universities.

"I have nothing but good things to say about Bobby Lee," said Robert Nosse, former executive director of the Oregon Student Lobby. "He ran one of the most effective student bodies in the state, if not in the nation. I only had four years to make observations of people, but Bobby seemed to always know what he was talking about. A lot of non-student members of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education have a lot of respect for him."

Governor Roberts also asked Lee to join the Higher Education 2010 Advisory Panel, which is responsible for helping develop educational policy into the next century for Oregon's higher institutions of learning.

The graduate student's political activism includes volunteer work with the Committee to Elect Gov. John Kitzhaber and the Committee to Elect Congressman Peter DeFazio.

Lee said his work with higher education places him in the unique position to develop bridges between the University's talent pool and a Eugene economy shifting to more information-based jobs.

"Our creativity and intelligence will be in higher demand than our hands," he said. "Putting screws together, building cars — all that will be done by computers. It's important to bring manufacturing jobs, but it's even more important to bring in research and development jobs into Eugene."

"They pay more, they're less harmful to the environment and they base their whole enterprise on people's innovation rather than raw materials," he said.

Lee cited shoe giant Nike Corp. of Beaverton as an example of the type of company he would work to attract to Eugene if he were elected to the City Council.

"They don't make shoes, they design shoes," he said. "They use human minds. They think of different ways to do business. Those are the types of companies we want to attract."

Too often the current City Council has failed to grasp the economic and demographic changes in Eugene, and the council's policy decisions reflect this lack of understanding, Lee said.

"Right now, city government has to change the way it operates," he said. "Right now, we're running city government like it's a small town rather than a city. We're running it like it's a city of 50,000 when it's a city of a 100,000."

In place of a clear vision for the city's future, Lee said, the council has descended into "tribal politics."

"People view City Council right now as being stuck in dealing with nitty-gritty power politics rather than finding common ground through common sense," Lee said. "Right now, the public believes the council doesn't make sense. That's one of the aspects I'm coming in with. We're going to bring back common sense to the forefront."

From there to here, and here to there, funny things are everywhere.

— Dr. Seuss

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