

Earl Blumenauer: Wunderkind with staying power

No stranger to politics but new to the City Commission, Earl Blumenauer talks about his new job and his plans for Portland.

BY W. C. McRAE

At 39 years of age, City Commissioner Earl Blumenauer is already a political veteran. He chaired the campaign to lower Oregon's Voting age. He was elected to the state legislature for three terms, and was elected to the Multnomah County Commission for two terms. In November, Blumenauer won election to the Portland City Commission. *Just Out* asked Commissioner Blumenauer about his plans and concerns for Portland.

In the most recent campaign for the Portland City Commission, we had a good opportunity to characterize Commissioner Bob Koch, since he and then-Commissioner Margaret Strachan had an adversarial campaign. Since you ran unopposed, you weren't as well characterized in the public mind. How would you describe yourself and your politics?

First of all, I do not feel that, having run in a race with something like a dozen people, and having worked night and day for months and months, that it was somehow unopposed. It's true that I did win seventy percent of the vote, which makes me feel very good, but I never felt that I was unopposed.

I'd like to think that people who work with me think I'm knowledgeable, that I work hard, that I think about the future,

and how to get there in one piece. I listen to a broad variety of information in reaching decisions, but I do reach decisions.

How do you feel about being elected to Mildred Schwab's seat? Does it carry with it any added obligation or prestige?

I think Mildred Schwab left a legacy, a kind of institution. She was one of a kind. I don't pretend to fill her shoes. No one will be quite like her. There are two characteristics about Mildred that I'd like to think have characterized my past service. One is being outspoken and forthright. Mildred had a lot to say. But I don't know if I can do it with quite the same flair. Second, is attention to detail. Mildred did a lot of fly-specking and analysis, and surprised people with what she'd uncovered. I was in the tax committee in the legislature, and I was characterized as the budget expert at the County Commission. I tend to deal with details.

The Oregonian recently wrote about your work on the Central City Plan. Could you briefly tell me what the Plan involves?

First, the Central City Plan is a process of getting a lot of people involved with the sense of what is going to be the direction of the central part of the city. Second is the plan itself, which is an effort to look beyond just the downtown plan to expand it to include areas around the downtown; like Lloyd Center. With MAX and the



Convention Center, it is suddenly part of downtown.

The central east side, the movement of the West Side down toward John's Landing both really affect the city. The plan is an attempt to enlarge the downtown plan to include these hot spots of development, to make sure that the whole central city was being planned for in a thoughtful and wholistic way. The Central City Plan is both a process, and the expanding of the downtown focus.

What hopes are there for the Central City Plan?

There has been over the last three years thousands of hours spent on the planning process. I think that has already been very valuable for our community in terms of planning for the future and involving the community. The problem is that the plan became so elaborate and so many people became involved that the process began slipping. It's six to eight months behind schedule.

I've been trying to move it forward to the planning commission and find ways to streamline it a little bit because now we have budget problems. We have a work plan that calls for it to be turned over to the planning commission in three months. I think we can get the program to the City Council by December in the form that's ready for adoption and do so in such a way that it won't call for extra funds.

You're prepared to advocate for the plan in the face of faltering support on the part of other commissioners?

I don't think there's faltering support. I think they saw the thing getting further behind, and were concerned that nothing was ever going to come from it. They were concerned about what was going on. It's

too early to say what's going to happen to the actual work product. What we're trying to do is get it in a form so people know what it is.

Bob Koch has made the presence of social services downtown a matter of debate. Where do you stand on that issue?

There is no magic solution. What I'm going to be doing as part of the planning project is to look for the best approach, recognizing that the facilities have to be somewhere, and that neighborhoods are all going to have to bear part of the burden. There has to be residential care facilities somewhere.

The ACLU is sponsoring a state-wide gay rights bill in Salem. The City Commission may be asked to vote support for the bill. Can you support the bill at the city level?

As a member of the legislature in 1973 I chaired the first hearing in the state's history on a gay rights bill. It was a very eye-opening experience for me. I was not aware how pervasive the discrimination was. I have had a very consistent record of support for non-discrimination, and every chance I have had to vote on it, I have voted for it.

But I'm not certain that it is the best use of City Council's time, or the people who are organizing around this issue's time, to put together a big hearing before City Council on a resolution, because it gives the other side a chance to organize. [Former Commissioner Gordon] Shadburne got attention and publicity and support because he was given the opportunities. I withhold judgement whether it's a wise use of our time. It might be more effective to make ten phone calls to the legislature.

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