

Unionist running for seat in Oregon Legislature

Scott Mills isn't your typical progressive labor Democrat. He's a blue-collar farm boy who likes his guns. But he's union through and through — and he's running for the Oregon Legislature in House District 18.

A 36-year member of Sign Painters and Paint Makers Local 1094, Mills, of Aurora, has taken on the difficult challenge of trying to unseat state Rep. Vic Gilliam, a wealthy Republican who has held the office since 2007.

House District 18 — a historically safe Republican seat — covers portions of rural Clackamas and Marion counties, and includes the towns of Silverton, Molalla, Hubbard, Mt. Angel, Donald, Aurora, and Scotts Mills (his personal favorite), to name a few. It's a commuter district, with most residents traveling to Portland, Salem, and other nearby cities to work.

As of June 2014, there were 32,503 registered voters in HD 18, including 14,132 Republicans, 9,887 Democrats and 6,956 non-affiliated.

In the May Republican primary, Gilliam easily defeated Tea Party challenger David Darnell. Darnell, who is chair of the Marion County Republican Party, received \$100,000 in campaign contributions from two wealthy businessmen who had labeled Gilliam as "not conservative enough." [Gilliam was endorsed in the primary by Oregon AFSCME Council 75 and Service Employees Local 503.]

Despite the voter registration disad-

vantage, Mills says no one should write off the general election as an automatic win for Republicans.

He said the Great Recession of 2008 forced a lot of residents out of their homes, so there are a bunch of new voters. And a larger portion of the constituency is comprised of retirees. (In Silverton, 40 percent of the population is retired, he said.) Throw into the mix a third candidate in the general election — Libertarian Braden Nelson — and Mills believes he can pull off the win.

Mills, 56, won't have a huge amount of money to spend, but he has a slew of support from organized labor, including the Oregon AFL-CIO, the Oregon Education Association, the Oregon School Employees Association, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, Teamsters Joint Council No. 37, the Oregon Steelworkers Legislative & Education Committee, and the Oregon State Building Trades Council, among others.

"Organized labor was one of the building blocks of this country," he said. "Without unions you would have no middle class, and without a middle class, there is no democracy."

Mills works as a paint inspector at Daimler Trucks. He has been at the company (formerly Freightliner) for his entire career, progressing up the ranks as a painter, foreman, lead man, and now inspector.

"I was fortunate. I learned a trade that put me and my family in the mid-



Sign Painters and Paint Makers Local 1094 chairman Scott Mills of Aurora is running for the District 18 seat in the Oregon House of Representatives.

dle class. Back then the deal was, if you worked hard, got a good education and played by the rules, you had a shot at the American Dream. I worry that our children won't have the same opportunity unless we make some changes."

Mills is active in his union, serving as chair (the equivalent of president). He has been a shop steward, a member of the contract negotiating steering

committee, a pension fund trustee, and he served as political coordinator for all crafts at Daimler. Last year he helped coordinate outreach and research during a 22-day strike at Daimler.

Mills currently serves as a delegate to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, and he recently completed the Oregon Labor Candidate School, a program that prepares union members to run for political office. Another recent graduate of the Labor Candidate School is Rob Nosse, who now serves in the Oregon Legislature representing Southeast Portland's District 42.

For much of his adult life, Mills has been involved in politics. He has served in Aurora on the City Council, on the Public Works Commission, on the Planning Commission, on the Budget Committee, and on the Traffic Safety Committee.

He also is active in the Oregon Democratic Party. He and another party activist recently wrote the Business and Labor plank of the Democratic Party Platform. "It made it through the convention without any edits. That's a ma-

jour coup," he said.

During his campaign, Mills has knocked on thousands of doors in his district. As he visits with constituents, he says three issues rise to the top:

- People want a pay raise.
- People want their home equity back.
- People have a lot of anxiety about retirement security.

"The key to growing jobs and creating a sustainable economy in Oregon includes an investment in state and local infrastructure and targeting state resources to support small businesses," he said.

Mills was born in Silverton, Oregon. He graduated from Canby High School, and worked summers on his grandfather's dairy farm. He spent four years as a medic in the Air Force, and went through a trade program at Clackamas Community College to learn auto body painting. He and his wife Cherene have been married for 33 years. She is a teacher in Woodburn and president of the Woodburn Teachers Association.

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