

POLITICS

Oregon primary: Labor wins and losses

By Don McIntosh

Oregon's May 2020 primary proved to be a moderately good election for organized labor. Early results showed labor champion Shemia Fagan coming in second in the Democratic primary for secretary of state, but she pulled ahead and won when all votes were counted. Labor's biggest loss was incumbent Clackamas County Chair Jim Bernard, who was ousted by sometime labor foe Tootie Smith. But at least nine new pro-union legislative candidates won their Democratic primary races and have a good shot at winning in November, including active union members Dacia Grayber and Debbie Boothe-Schmidt.

STATEWIDE

SECRETARY OF STATE

For secretary of state—the office that's next in line to governor—the state's six biggest public employee unions backed **Shemia Fagan** heavily, and she narrowly outpolled Mark Hass, a state senator who voted to cut PERS and is blamed for killing several pieces of union-backed legislation in closed-door Senate caucuses. Jamie McCloud-Skinner, a former candidate for Congress in Oregon's Second District, placed third. Fagan will face Kim Thatcher, a frequent union adversary, in the November general election.

CONGRESS

In Oregon's Fifth Congressional District, incumbent **Kurt Schrader** easily won the primary with 71% of the vote. Schrader is one of the most difficult Democrats in the U.S. House for organized labor, and one of only seven who voted against a bill to make it easier for workers to unionize. Unions didn't support Schrader in the primary, but most didn't really get behind challenger, Milwaukie Mayor Mark Gamba, either. As the results came in, Gamba's campaign made an announcement: He intends to challenge Schrader again in two years.

In Oregon's Second Congressional District, Klamath Falls activist **Alex Spenser** won a six-way Democratic contest and will face Republican Cliff Bentz in the race to succeed Republican Greg Walden, who chose not to run for re-election. No union made an endorsement in the race.



FOUR MORE YEARS? Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, pictured here at a union-sponsored Feb. 18 city candidates forum dipped below 50% on Day Two of the count. Wheeler's campaign for a second term was backed by five unions, the central labor council and the local building trades council. If he fails to top 50%, he'll face second-place finisher Sarah Iannarone in November.

OREGON LEGISLATURE

In state legislative races, the only two incumbent Democrats who faced primary challengers after voting to cut PERS easily defeated their challengers. State Sen. Ginny Burdick won 70% of the primary vote against union-backed challenger Ben Bowman. And State Rep. Rob Nosse outpolled Paige Kreisman, who had the support of four public sector unions, by a two to one margin.

In contested Democratic primaries for open legislative seats, nine union-backed candidates won by large margins:

- Union home care provider **Deb Patterson** in Senate District 10 (Salem)
- PCC criminal justice instructor **Kate Lieber** in Senate District 14 (Beaverton)
- Salem City Council member and former Graduate Employees union activist **Jackie Leung** in House District 19 (Salem)
- Former Oregon Nurses Association political organizer **WLnsvy Campos** in House District 28 (Aloha/Beaverton)
- Former AFSCME Local 2746 president **Debbie Boothe-Schmidt** in House District 32 (Astoria)
- Tualatin Valley Firefighter union activist **Dacia Grayber** in House District 35 (Tigard)
- Clackamas River Water Commissioner **Tessah Danel** in House District 39 (Canby/Estacada)
- Environmental justice organizer **Khanh Pham** in House District 46 (Portland)
- Reynolds School Board member **Ricki Ruiz** in House District 50 (Gresham)

But in two other races, candidates who had little or no union support prevailed when unions split their support among two or more other candidates.

- One example of that was in House District 33 (Portland) in the race to succeed longtime state rep Mitch Greenlick.

Greenlick, in poor health, didn't run for re-election, and died four days before the primary. Union support was divided among four candidates. The candidate with the least union support won, garnering 40% of the vote — physician and former Kaiser Permanente board member **Maxine Dexter**, backed by the Teamsters and the health care union OFNHP.

- And in House District 36 (Portland), where incumbent Democrat Jennifer Williamson declined to run for re-election, union-backed candidates Laurie Wimmer and Rob Fullmer came in second and third place, losing to pediatrician **Lisa Reynolds**.

The Oregon Labor Candidate School, which trains union members to run for office, had mixed results in the primary. Graduates Deb Patterson, Jackie Leung, and Dacia Grayber won their Democratic primary races in campaigns for the state Legislature. But Serin Bussell and Andy Saultz came in third and fourth in the four-way race in House District 33, and Rob Fullmer came in third in House District 36. AFSCME Local 1085 member Vanessa Nordyke won her race for Salem City Council.

METRO

Union-backed incumbent **Bob Stacey** won re-election outright with 71% of the vote.

Union-backed former Oregon House Majority Leader **Mary Nolan** won the most votes in a five-way race and will face community activist Chris Smith in November.

COUNTY RACES

CLACKAMAS COUNTY

Conservative Republican and sometime union antagonist **Tootie Smith** defeated incum-

bent Clackamas County Chair Jim Bernard, who was strongly backed by labor. Smith, who was formerly part of a three-member conservative majority on the Commission, will this time likely be in the minority along with fellow Republican Paul Savas: Of the other union-endorsed incumbents, Commissioner **Martha Schrader** won outright, and **Ken Humberston** (49%) will face runner-up Mark Shull (27%).

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Incumbent **Margaret Magruder** won the most votes for Columbia County Commission Position 1 and will face challenger Brandee Dudzic again in a November runoff.

LANE COUNTY

Union-backed community activist **Laurie Trieger** was the top vote-getter and will face Joel Iboa in November. But incumbent Pat Farr easily outpolled union-backed challenger Andrew Ross.

MULTNOMAH COUNTY

In the race for Multnomah County District Attorney, reformer **Mike Schmidt**, who had most of the union endorsements, beat federal prosecutor Ethan Knight by more than three to one.

WASHINGTON COUNTY

In races for County Commission, labor-supported public health advocate **Nafisa Fai** was the top vote-getter and will face off against Jeffrey Hindley in November, and incumbent **Roy Rogers** won outright with 63% against challenger Ben Marcotte; both had some union support.

CITY RACES

BEAVERTON

Beaverton mayor **Denny Doyle** was the top vote-getter but will face **Lacey Beaty** in November; both have some unions in their corner. Union-backed neighborhood activist **John Dugger** lost his challenge to incumbent City Councilor **Mark Fagin**, who was endorsed by Fire Fighters.

EUGENE

Incumbent Mayor **Lucy Vinis** was re-elected, as was City Council member **Claire Syrett**, both with the support of local labor organizations. Union-backed candidates **Matt Keating** and **Randy Groves** also won their races for City Council, but Tim Morris placed third, garnering 16% in a six-way race.

PORTLAND

Four out of five spots leading Oregon's biggest city were up for

grabs. One race was clinched on Election Night; the other three will be decided in November.

- Unions lined up heavily behind incumbent Portland Mayor **Ted Wheeler**, who on election night appeared to win outright against 18 challengers with just over the necessary 50% of the vote. But he dipped below 50% on Day Two of the count. His strongest opponent proved to be Sarah Iannarone, a fierce critic of Wheeler who garnered 23% of the vote. The two will face off in November.
- **Carmen Rubio** cruised to an easy victory in City Council Position 1, earning 67% of the vote in a nine-way race.
- For City Council Position 2 (succeeding Amanda Fritz), former Multnomah County Commissioner **Loretta Smith** and former Portland School Board member Dan Ryan got the most votes and will face each other in the November general election. That was a bit of a win for UFCW. Fritz had been a close UFCW ally, and UFCW was the only union to back Smith in this race. Julia DeGraw, who had the most union support, had a disappointing fourth-place finish with 13% of the vote.
- Incumbent Commissioner **Chloe Eudaly** won the most votes (31%) for City Council Position 3, but she'll face challenger **Mingus Mapps** (29%) in November; both had a few union endorsements.

SALEM

Union-backed City Council candidates **Virginia Stapleton**, **Trevor Philips** and **Vanessa Nordyke** all won their races, beating business-backed candidates. In Phillips' case that meant ousting a longtime incumbent. And Nordyke, backed strongly by AFSCME, won despite being outspent more than two-to-one.

SPRINGFIELD

Mike Eyster came up short in a union-backed challenge to the incumbent mayor, winning about 42% of the vote. Labor-endorsed City Council candidate **Kori Rodley** was the top vote-getter and will face Johannis Tadeo in November.

BALLOT MEASURES

- Metro voters approved homeless services Measure 26-210 by 58%. The measure is aimed at homelessness, and will raise an estimated \$250 million a year from a tax on high-income individuals and businesses to invest in housing, drug treatment, and mental health services.
- Portland voters approved a 10¢ a gallon gas tax renewal by more than three-to-one margin; it pays for street maintenance and repair and safety improvements.
- Centennial School District bond measure 26-208 for school security and facility improvements passed with 52% support.