

Multnomah's five elected officials gather for legislative town hall

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

On May 9, a legislative town hall was held at the Multnomah Arts Center. In attendance were Sens. Richard Devlin (Senate District 19) and Ginny Burdick (SD-18), and Reps. Margaret Doherty (House District 35), Jennifer Williamson (HD-36), and Ann Lininger (HD-38)

All are members of the Democratic Party.

Why so many at one meeting? District lines cut right through the heart of the Multnomah neighborhood. One may have a different legislator than their neighbor across the street.

"I had no role in redrawing the district lines," Sen. Burdick began with a chuckle. Her district is right across the street north of Capitol Highway extending beyond Hillsdale.

A graduate of Wilson High School, Burdick has been serving in the Senate for the last three terms.

As co-chair of the House/Senate conference committee on implementing Measure 91, the senator said she is working to ensure that Oregon sets a national example on implementing recreational marijuana use.

The senate has been struggling with legislative directives on medical versus recreational marijuana this session.

"We're trying to strike a balance," she said, "without interfering with access to medicinal cannabis."

She has been working on some other contentious issues.

"Passing universal background checks was a massive deal to get across the House floor," Burdick confessed. "I have been grateful that my constituents have my back when it comes to gun safety."

Sen. Devlin is co-chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee where appropriations are sorted out. His district is south of Capitol Highway.

A former Metro councilor and park district commissioner, Devlin has been an avid environmentalist and social justice crusader.

"I just had 85 visits in three weeks," Devlin said, "with 90 requests!"

Over 3,400 bills have been proposed this year. Devlin has been sorting about 90 with the highest priority.

Rep. Lininger's district also cuts through the middle of Multnomah. Similar to Devlin's district, the dividing line is Capitol and she represents the south portions.

Lininger just began her second term. A public interest lawyer and former Clackamas County commissioner, her priorities are strong schools and affordable college.

"We're looking at strict rules for tax credits and electric vehicles," Lininger announced firmly. "There's no money to spend on these services if we keep providing attractive credits."

Lininger stated that there needs to be new revenue sources which are not too popular with many of her colleagues, but she said she will support it nonetheless.

Lininger also sits on the conference

committee for Measure 91 and relayed that she is working on a fair process as the voters intended.

Rep. Doherty was up next. She attended Multnomah School and graduated from Wilson. Doherty has been a lifelong educator, teaching locally and then as an administrator. She is the chair of the House Education Committee.

Doherty said, "All of the chairs of the various education committees are educators. This is a first." The audience of almost 200 citizens expressed their delight.

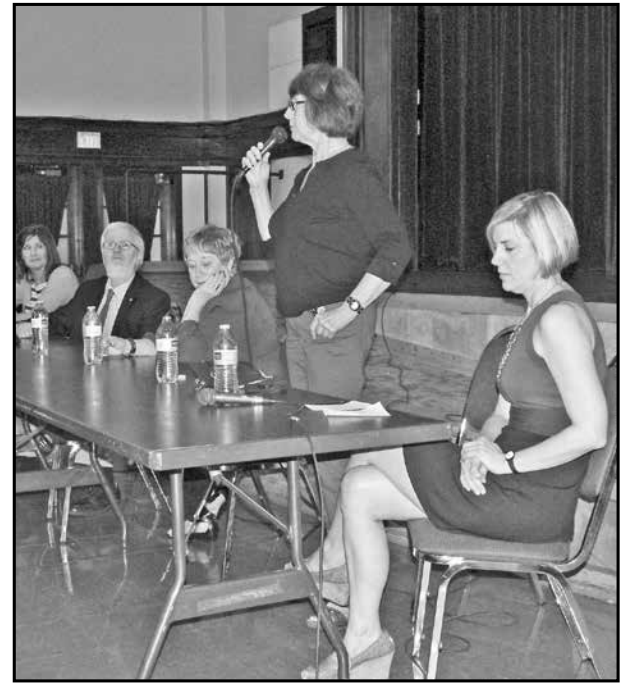
"My highest priority is child nutrition and free lunch, not reduced lunch!" Doherty stressed.

The last to speak was Rep. Williamson [who also represents part of Multnomah].

Williamson sits on the judicial and higher-education committees. She also chairs the House Ways and Means Committee.

Williamson, a lawyer, is a big advocate for public safety but wants to cut the Department of Corrections in order to fund higher education.

"We need to look upstream," Williamson said. "We're close to opening another women's prison. We need to look at alternatives to community corrections."



Sen. Ginny Burdick greets a crowd of 200 people on May 9 at a legislative town hall at the Multnomah Arts Center. Rep. Lininger, Sen. Devlin, Rep. Doherty, and Rep. Williamson join her. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Questions were organized by theme and facilitated for the sake of time. These included the recent Oregon Supreme Court ruling on the Public Employees Retirement System and how it might affect the state budget.

"Would there be a need to raise taxes?" added a member of the audience.

Devlin replied that the ruling would certainly increase the state's expenses including Obamacare costs.

"It will be difficult to fund," Devlin (Continued on Page 6)



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