

# WHY DON'T YOU RUN FOR OFFICE?

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

While a couple local positions were hard-fought races in the primary election in May — the Eugene mayor's race and the Ward 1 City Council seat, for example — there were also a lot of candidates running unopposed here in Lane County. Eugene City Council Seats 1, 7 and 8 had no opposition, and neither did Ward 6 in Springfield. The South Eugene Lane County Commission seat was unopposed.

Sometimes a candidate is unopposed because he or she is just that good, and constituents are happy. Other times it's hard to say if it's apathy in the community, lack of funds to run or simply because the average voter doesn't know how to run. Many voters in the county don't realize that under Oregon law, for both nonpartisan county and city elections, if a candidate gets 50 percent of the vote plus one — a majority — then that candidate essentially wins because only that name goes on the ballot in the November election. Write-ins are allowed, but basically, if you want to run for the City Council in November, you needed to have started planning and campaigning for the May primary.

For a healthy democracy to function and to ensure key matters are addressed, having a couple candidates debating and discussing local issues and having their votes and stances questioned is essential.

Jilliane Schoene is the executive director of Emerge Oregon, a nonprofit dedicated to helping Democratic women run for office, get elected and seek higher office. She says part of Emerge's broader mission is to "flood the political market with Democratic women." And she says one of the first things Emerge asks women to do as they prep to run for office is to visit local government websites and look for positions on local boards and commissions.

These positions include spots on planning and oversight commissions, budget committees, diversity and mental health boards, to name a few. "We want women around every public policy and political table in the state," Schoene says. "I would encourage all citizens to do it."

Serving on these boards and committees is a really great background, she says, not only as a precursor to running for office, but for figuring out what sort of political areas you are interested in.

Schoene says Oregon has one of the more accessible legislatures in the country, and some people start off with higher state office. Others start on a local level or on a board of education. Several Lane County commissioners, including Pete Sorenson and Jay Bozievich, got their starts on the Lane Community College board.

Sorenson served in the state Senate before the term limits at the time led him to run for County Commission. Mayor Kitty Piercy also served in the Legislature before moving to city politics. Former mayor Jim Torrey, Schoene points out, is now on the 4J school board.

Outside of Multnomah County, Schoene says that county commissions are the hardest places to run women in Oregon. There has not been a woman on the Lane County Board of Commissioners in almost 10 years.

Thinking about running for office? Go to [goo.gl/VRGpHx](http://goo.gl/VRGpHx) to apply to city of Eugene boards and commissions and [goo.gl/yhsj2U](http://goo.gl/yhsj2U) to see what Lane County advisory committees are open. Interested in learning more about Emerge and its training program? Email Jillian Schoene at [jillian@emergeor.org](mailto:jillian@emergeor.org).

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