

# GUN RIGHTS LOBBY TOOK AIM AT VAL HOYLE

A recent vote by the Lane County Board of Commissioners to fill Sen. Chris Edward's seat in the Oregon State Legislature drew comment from the governor, the Democratic Party and, most vociferously, the gun lobby.

Before the Dec. 14 vote, the County Commission received several hundred emails from gun-rights activists weighing in against former state representative and Oregon secretary of state candidate Val Hoyle, who was the Democratic Party's top pick.

The commissioners voted 3-2 to buck the Democrats' choice and select James Manning for the position. The vote came after 400 to 500 emails came to the commissioners, "dominantly from outside of Lane County," Commissioner Pete Sorenson says.

Manning lost in the Democratic primary race in May against Julie Fahey for Hoyle's seat in the House.

The County Commission's vote made Manning the first black senator ever to represent District 7, covering Bethel, Junction City and much of Eugene, but the controversy over the selection process has somewhat overshadowed that historic moment.

Oregon Firearms Federation led the charge against Hoyle, asking its members on its website to "contact the Lane County Commissioners and tell them 'ANYONE BUT HOYLE.'"

wing of gun owners, and they don't represent the feelings of the majority of gun owners in Oregon or in this country."

One email sent to the commissioners from Gaylin Vergin of Grand Ronde says, "please receive my opposition to the appointment of val hoyle to state senator. she needs to leave oregon and go work for her sugar daddy mike bloomberg!!!!!!!!!"

Another email follows the party line to the letter, writing, "Dear Board, ANYONE BUT HOYLE. Respectfully, Steven Kendall."

OFF members may be surprised to find that Manning is also in favor of gun control. He tells *EW* he supports background checks, and "as a former police officer, I want to keep guns out of the hands of children, I want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and I want to keep guns out of the hands of the mentally challenged."

Manning cites accidental gun deaths resulting from children with access to firearms, saying, "The issue is how do we keep children safe."

Sorenson, who voted for Manning, says of OFF, "Anyone can start an email campaign like that." Sorenson says the emails had no influence on his vote because very few messages were from South Eugene district and that he voted for Manning because "he's a good person who's well versed in the problems the community faces. I

*'The hundreds of emails sent by Oregon Firearms Federation members raise the question of how much time, money and effort the gun lobby will put into this legislative session.'*

The OFF website calls Hoyle an "anti-gun extremist" who "rammed through the worst gun bill in Oregon history, SB 941." Senate Bill 941 closed a loophole in gun safety laws by requiring a background check for all firearm sales, even those between private parties.

As far as firearms go, Hoyle says she supports the Second Amendment. "I have a district where they hunt and they fish — I have no problem with people owning firearms," Hoyle says of her previous seat in the Legislature. "Rights come with responsibilities, and it does say in the Second Amendment 'a well-regulated militia,' so having regulations like background checks which are known to save lives is not at odds at all with what is written in both the Oregon and the U.S. Constitution."

OFF claims on its website that Hoyle flipped her stance on gun control because of a quarter-million dollars in campaign donations from Michael Bloomberg, though Hoyle disagrees with that assessment, pointing out that Bloomberg's donation would not benefit him or his position on gun control.

"In the secretary of state seat there was literally nothing I could do to help Michael Bloomberg," Hoyle says, adding that Bloomberg's campaign supported her not for her influence but because they see her as an important and honest leader who is worth supporting.

The hundreds of emails sent by OFF members raise the question of how much time, money and effort the gun lobby will put into this legislative session.

After the vote, OFF used a Facebook post to target commissioners Jay Bozievich and Sid Leiken, who voted for Hoyle: "To Bozievich and Leiken, who have both sought help from OFF in the past, rest assured we will do all we can to see that you are replaced."

OFF says it influenced the commission vote, though the group did not respond to questions with any detail before deadline, telling *EW* that "All staff authorized to speak to the press have left for Winter Solstice" until Jan. 6.

*EW* called the executive director of OFF, Kevin Starrett, on Dec. 22, but he said he was Christmas shopping and hung up.

Hoyle says OFF is "a group that represents the most extreme

think he'll do very well in the senate."

Commissioner Pat Farr, who put Manning's name up for vote, says his vote was for Manning, not against Hoyle—and when it comes to the emails, Farr says, "I didn't read them."

He says he was surprised by the outcome of the vote, even though he supported Manning. "When I made the nomination of James I did not expect to get a second," Farr says. "I was surprised, quite frankly."

Sorenson was the surprise vote who seconded Farr.

Sorenson is the only Democrat on the nonpartisan Board of Commissioners, so his vote for Manning surprised many fellow Democrats because Hoyle was the party's top pick.

"The bottom line was that the governor called, the senate president called, the speaker called, Ron Wyden called, Merkley called, Peter DeFazio called," and all of them said that "we need you this session to help navigate some really difficult things," Hoyle says.

Though the other two commissioners who voted for Manning had different motivations, commissioner Faye Stewart may have been influenced by the emails, according to Hoyle. "He indicated that he was intending to vote a different way, and so that a little bit surprised me," she says of Stewart's apparent change in direction.

"He will deny that it was the gun lobby," Hoyle adds.

Stewart says his vote was most influenced by his fellow commissioners, especially the two who had served in the Legislature previously — Farr and Sorenson. "I felt it was important to listen to Mr. Sorenson since he's the lone Democrat on the board."

Though Stewart says he received all the emails relating to the upcoming vote, he only paid attention to the ones from his district, which he says he felt were split between Hoyle and Manning.

Stewart denies any OFF influence on his vote, saying, "I just felt that a lot of them were just cut and paste emails that made some simple statements that didn't have a lot of information on the candidates."

Hoyle says she supports Manning and hopes to see him succeed. "He benefited from the fact that there were votes against me, but that's no reflection on him really," she says. "He has a different set of qualifications and experiences that are exciting to see in the Legislature." ■



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