

# A CHANGE IS GONNA COME

Primary election delivers new blood in Lane County and Oregon

**R**oarings Rapids might seem a weird place for the Democratic Party of Lane County to host an election watch party. When results came in, however, the cheers rivaled even the loudest whitewater.

The 8 pm announcement of Joe Berney's lead over longtime local politician and current Springfield Commissioner Sid Leiken brought a wave of applause. It wasn't enough for Berney, nervous as he awaited more results, so he distracted himself by talking with supporters.

Later in the night, when his lead widened to 52 percent at 10 pm, chants of "Joe, Joe, Joe" came from the remaining attendees of the DPLC gathering.

Berney couldn't believe he had won the race against Leiken. He kept asking his staff how they knew he'd won, and who called it. When Berney got up to give his victory speech, he, his wife and the campaign staff held back tears.

"Is this real?" he asked before starting his speech. "The voters of Springfield have weighed in. This campaign has upended conventional campaign wisdom. We have won a victory for grassroots democracy for the people of Springfield. We will put public interest ahead of wealthy, private interests."

Berney said he already knows what he wants to do on his first day as a commissioner: He hopes to roll back commissioner salaries to the pre-raise level, unless voters decide they need a raise. He wants to direct county staff to work with citizen initiative groups.

In the meantime, Berney said, he hopes to begin community outreach as commissioner-elect. "I'm going to start organizing groups of people whose voices haven't been heard."

South Eugene Commissioner Pete Sorenson had an optimistic outlook when Berney's small lead was revealed at 8 pm. That's because Sorenson said he's excited to have another Democrat on the Lane County Board of Commissioners.

With Berney replacing Leiken, under the board's parliamentary system Sorenson says he and Berney can make motions, and now get a second, for an item to be placed on the agenda for discussion on things that have been suppressed under the current right-leaning board.

As Leiken finishes his final seven months in office, Berney said he's going to help Heather Buch win the East Lane Commissioner race in the November election. Buch will be in a runoff against the current appointed commissioner, Gary Williams.

If Buch wins, the Board of Commissioners would have a 3-2 tilt to the left, a prospect that will no doubt bring out even more timber and development cash for Williams, as well as union money in Buch's favor.

Unofficial results as *EW* goes to press show Buch has a nearly 100-vote lead over Williams. She leads 31.27 percent to 30.73 percent. Buch said that all the time she and her campaign spent at doors and being active in rural areas made a big difference.

Eugene Mayor Lucy Vinis told *EW* she's happy to hear that the two parks bonds passed. However, she said, the people of Eugene have said they're not ready for the large step of an elected or appointed auditor.

Fifty-three percent of ballots voted "No" on Measure 20-283, which would establish an elected auditor. However, 75 percent of voters rejected Measure 20-287, which would have the city of Eugene appoint an auditor.

"The city has the possibility of contracting an external

auditor in the short term," Vinis says. "So I would recommend to City Council and city manager that they explore contracting an auditor in order to bridge this time. I will look into having a community conversation about both of these that failed and what structure would work."

She said she hopes to sit down with those who supported an elected auditor. Contracting out an auditor in the meantime, she added, is a smaller step of showing voters the importance of an auditor.

Bonny Bettman McCornack, a chief petitioner for 20-283, disagrees with Vinis.

"I think the fact that voters voted it down is going to be interpreted by the city as permission to double-down on their double dealing," McCornack said. "There's no transparency, no accountability and never will be."

The city might realize there is citizen interest in transparency through hiring a contract auditor, but McCornack said that means the city manager would hire the auditor. That, she said, would only be an illusion of accountability.

Meanwhile, Marty Wilde rallied with his staff and other members of the DPLC as results began to confirm that he would go on to face Mark Herbert, the Republican Party nominee for the State Representative 11th District seat.

Wilde said he's where he is today because of the social safety net of food stamps and health care — the benefits that Herbert wants to get rid of.

On the state level, former Democratic Rep. Val Hoyle handily defeated Republican Lou Ogden for the Bureau of Labor and Industries commissioner position. And to no one's surprise, the fall gubernatorial race will be incumbent Kate Brown versus Republican Knute Buehler.

This year, Lane County had a turnout of 83,431 people voting as of 10 pm Tuesday, May 15, according to unofficial results. In other words, 33 percent of eligible voters returned their ballots, one of the lowest turnouts in the state but an increase from the 2014 midterm primary election. ■

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