

Never Give Up!

A POLITICAL NEWCOMER REFLECTS ON HIS DECISION TO FIGHT FOR OFFICE

It's been nearly four months since I was elected to represent Springfield on the Lane County Board of Commissioners. Though the race is now uncontested, I still need to win the vote in November's election and won't officially take office until January.

I've been spending virtually every day since May's election reaching out to constituents, continuing to listen, to learn and to understand the issues that concern us all. The entire experience has been and continues to be humbling, motivating and reaffirming of our democratic ideals.

At 65, it's the first time I've ever run for public office. The learning curve has been steep, but well worth it. Upon reflection, the campaign's most important takeaway is that it's never too late to attempt to make a difference on behalf of the issues and people you care about. I've also learned that, as a community, we have much more in common than the divisive national political rhetoric would suggest.

Since I took that first step last November and filed to run, the voters of Springfield took an even bigger step and voted for competent change and against the status quo. My opponent had been mayor for 10 years, and county commissioner for the past eight. I was given virtually no chance to win a race against an entrenched incumbent who polled with name recognition of 80 percent to my 13 percent.

It was an uphill battle from the start. We had less than four months from our campaign kick-off in January to the election, a very short time to put together a dedicated team, raise money, refine our message and garner support. Along the way we fought against misleading propaganda and dark money advertising. But on May 15 our efforts paid off.

I've learned that if you speak genuinely and listen with respect, both the dignity and the voice of the people will emerge. Apathy doesn't have to rule the day. And while the economy may be strong, too many of us still feel insecure and unsure about the future.

We want to trust in our institutions and leaders. We want honesty, transparency, ac-

countability and — perhaps above all — a voice, the assurance that our vote matters.

This happened in Springfield. No-nonsense, grassroots American democracy worked, as 60 percent more residents voted in this race than four years ago. We flipped five precincts, winning six of eleven total in what some might call a gerrymandered district.

Finally, through this process I've learned that a growing number of concerned citizens are willing to work hard for democratic change. In just a few months' time, hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life helped me spread the vision of a viable alternative and more optimistic future for the county.

They knocked on a record number of doors and made thousands of postcards and calls to get out the vote. Hundreds of lawn signs went up all over small neighborhoods in our city, and our positive message of opportunity and improvement for all went viral via social media and word-of-mouth. The energy and conviction surrounding the campaign was, for this political newcomer, truly extraordinary and absolutely heartwarming.

Perhaps my improbable election will be motivating to others contemplating a run for political office. There are so many ways to get involved, and at so many levels.

But above all, inform yourself of the issues that matter to you and your family. Find candidates and causes you can believe in. Be bigger than those who seek to divide us and, by all means, keep our country great by voting this November — it's the only way we can really begin to roll up our sleeves and deal with critical issues facing us like health care, affordable housing, robust local business and community development, clean energy and the constant work toward equal opportunity.

Take advantage of this moment. My personal experience shows that it's never too late to make a difference. Your voice and your actions matter. Vote on Nov. 6.

Joe Berney was elected to the Lane County Board of Commissioners in the May primary election. His name will appear alone on the ballot for the Springfield seat. The voter registration deadline is Oct. 16.

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