

OREGON DEMOCRATS TAKE CHARGE

Democratic Party wins big in Oregon, continues liberal platform

Lane County Commissioner-elect Heather Buch says her 5-year-old daughter wants to run for president.

"She says she's going to be the next president all the time," Buch says, adding that she recorded her daughter filming a campaign video in the backyard.

The presidential ambitions are most likely from seeing Buch run for the commissioner position, she adds, because children repeat what they see their parents do.

And that's what Buch wants.

Buch is one of many women elected to office in 2018. She hopes more women will not only run for office in future but also run candidate campaigns.

The Democratic Party "blue wave" didn't really overtake the U.S. — beyond taking back the House — but it sure hit Oregon. The Oregon midterm elections brought a change in leadership at the technically nonpartisan Lane County Board of Commissioners as well as at state level, cementing the Democratic Party platform throughout most of the state.

Marty Wilde will succeed outgoing state Rep. Phil Barnhart.

Barnhart says he was impressed with how well Wilde did in winning the district, adding that Wilde did even better than he himself did in 2016.

"His understanding on the issues are very good for someone who's never served before," Barnhart says. "He already knows the big pieces already. He'll hit the ground running."

Wilde says his win is about continuing an investment in Oregon's future.

"It's not about me. It's the value we share as Oregonians. We care about each other and want the best for our future and that means investing in our people," he says. "Health care, education and housing are the things people told me about, and that's what I hope to work on in the Legislature."

With the Democratic Party's supermajority in both the House and Senate and Gov. Kate Brown's re-election, Oregon can go forward with the Clean Energy Jobs bill.

Brad Reed, communications director for Renew Oregon, an advocate group comprised of businesses and organizations, says they weren't too concerned with the revenue aspect of Clean Energy Jobs bill. He says there is precedent in California establishing that a cap and invest policy isn't a tax.

Reed adds that the Democrats' supermajority means Oregonians are concerned about climate change, especially since some candidates ran on platforms that prioritized bold climate action.

A "blue wave" in Oregon wasn't limited to Salem. Buch's win gives the Lane County Board of Commissioners a more progressive slant, seeing that the Democratic Party of Lane County (DPLC) endorsed Pete Sorenson, Buch and Joe Berney.

This could mean that Sorenson will be elected as board chair. Jay Bozievich is currently the chair, and outgoing Commissioner Sid Leiken is the vice-chair.

Buch's win over former Cottage Grove Mayor Gary Williams brought out a loud chant from her supporters at a DPLC watch party, showing the same excitement for a nonpartisan commissioner race as when Berney defeated Commissioner Sid Leiken in May.

Buch says she was elected because she represents more of what people want their leader to be. Her win also brings in a fresh perspective to the Board of Commissioners.

"We need women at all levels," she says. "Diversity matters. It matters in a big way to make sure we're really serving everybody in our community."

In the House of Representatives, Oregon Democrats picked up three seats and now have 38 seats in the lower chamber. In the Senate, Democrats gained one seat, giving them a supermajority there as well.

Democrats had a 79.8 percent statewide turnout for the midterm, while Republicans — considerably outnumbered in the state — had a 79.6 percent turnout. — *Henry Houston*

DOWNTOWN SHELTER SQUASHED

Eugene supports Lane County's Highway 99 homeless shelter, halting plans for a downtown space

Last week, the Eugene City Council canceled plans to create a temporary homeless day center and dusk-to-dawn site downtown. That site was set to take up a portion of the vacant City Hall lot.

The council voted instead to partner with Lane County and support its new shelter site off Highway 99, while pursuing other options for a day center in the downtown core — though there is no set timeline for that plan.

Eugene City Councilor Emily Semple was particularly torn on the decision.

"I'm very conflicted about it," Semple said at the Oct. 31 City Council work session. "I'd like to partner. I'd like to get more things going out there at 99. It will serve more people. However, not everybody from downtown is going to the 99 site."

Semple argued that many of the homeless people who live downtown want to remain there, so supporting the Highway 99 shelter would not move the homeless population away from downtown.

"I want to support both," she says. "I cannot give up a downtown center somewhere near the core."

Semple moved to support the county's Highway 99 site, but also to look into piloting a downtown day center. Her motion passed unanimously with five councilors present; Councilors Mike Clark and Betty Taylor were absent.

The city will be spending an unknown portion of its budget to support that county-owned site in this partnership, most likely from the \$8.6 million "bridge fund," which is committed to increasing community safety, in its upcoming December supplemental budget.

The decision came swiftly. It took a little more than a week after announcing the downtown site on Oct. 22 for the city to cancel it.

No construction had begun before the cancellation.

On Oct. 27, the county announced its new temporary homeless site near Highway 99 and Roosevelt Boulevard. The majority of the butterfly lot protest campers, and other homeless people, moved to that site over that weekend — there were only a few campers remaining near the Lane County Courthouse after that weekend move.

The city was still planning to create its own temporary site in addition to the county's new site. Then, a few days later, City Manager Jon Ruiz emailed the council that he had been approached by the county to discuss a partnership.

"Yesterday, the County Administrator approached Kristie [Hammit, the assistant city manager] and me to discuss how the County and City can work together to pool our resources to increase services at the site on Highway 99," Ruiz writes in a 6:30 pm Tuesday, Oct. 30 email to the mayor and city council. "Redirecting our efforts to Highway 99 would be in lieu of continuing the development of a dusk to dawn and day center on the city hall site."

The City Council already had a work session planned for Wednesday, Oct. 31, but amended its agenda the morning of that meeting in order to discuss this city-county partnership and cancellation of its own downtown plans.

"We amended the agenda on Wednesday morning based on the manager's conversation the day before about the alternative site at Highway 99. He had emailed the council at about 6:30 pm on Tuesday night," Mayor Lucy Vinis tells *Eugene Weekly*.

Semple tells *EW* the council felt significant pressure from the Chamber of Commerce and downtown business to reconsider a downtown shelter site.

Merchants started complaining when news of the City Hall site started circulating, Semple says. "I don't think that's why Jon [Ruiz] and the city accepted; on the other hand, I don't think it was in a vacuum."

With this partnership between the city and county, the Highway 99 site will now be "semi-permanent," remaining operational until a permanent site is found, Ruiz said in the City Council work session.

As of Oct. 30, the site was already at capacity with "about 100 people there in 70 spaces," Lane County Public Information Officer Devon Ashbridge says.

All of this news comes as the Lane County Board of Commissioners may subject the county-owned downtown butterfly lot to an 11 pm to 6 am curfew, according to the commissioners' meeting agenda. The butterfly lot was home to a protest camp of unhoused people after a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision on a case in Boise, Idaho, ruled it was unconstitutional to criminalize homeless people for sleeping in public when there is no other place for them to sleep.

It's unclear whether the Ninth Circuit Court decision would affect the curfew. Ashbridge says the ordinance will be discussed more in-depth at the Nov. 27 Board of Commissioners meeting. — *Meerah Powell*