

Dems

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the voting process,” Hagmeier said. “It does say the PCP appointments don’t take effect till recorded. The problem is that once it was pointed out to us, once we saw it, we couldn’t ignore it.”

But party member Leslie Davis, (unrelated to Colleen) voted at the meeting, and said she too questions the decision.

“I’m not satisfied that the officials have the power to call an election void and call another election,” she said.

In fact, the Democrats have been using the same rules for years. So why did the issue come up now? And why does a volunteer job as a party official matter?

A Powerful Player Behind the Scenes

You might not hear a lot about the Multnomah County Democratic party chair, but the position is crucial for the success of Democratic candidates and policy statewide. Multnomah County voters frequently cast the deciding votes in elections. And although it’s a volunteer job, the party chair has the huge responsibility of leading and energizing the team of volunteers who get the vote out.

“We are the county that’s relied upon to get Democrats over the top in statewide races,” says Carla KC Hanson, who served as party chair for five years.

“The chair position is a difficult position. There’s a lot of work to do. You have an all-volunteer administration that functions like a staff. It’s a heavy time commitment that takes at least 20 hours a week, and as we roll into elections the time increases.”

A longtime LGBTQ activist, Hanson stepped down last year after five years in the job, standing aside for Teddy Keizer.

“He was ready,” she says. But Keizer dropped out to run for state representative in House District 42, with 14 months left in his term. Hanson stepped back up for the job.

Just months away from the upcoming 2014 elections, she believed her experience would help the party. It’s a team effort, but the team depends heavily on the chair.

Hanson didn’t expect anyone to run against her. More often than not in mid-term, the chair’s election is uncontested. If she’d realized she would be opposed, she might have campaigned. Instead of telling people it didn’t matter if they came, she might have told them to be there, she says.

“I was focused on getting the job done. As far as I knew, nobody was running against

me. I should have been more strategically prepared, but I was just focused on getting back into the job.”

A Challenger Emerges

At the Nov. 14 meeting, Lakeitha Elliott was nominated from the floor—as party rules allow. Elliott says she spent weeks reviewing her commitments before deciding to run, because she knows how demanding the job will be.

In the end, she says, she decided to run because the party needs more under-35s and people of color to engage as leaders, and not just as extra bodies to knock on doors or get out the vote.

“I know a lot of people doing a lot of great work in this community, but they won’t engage at the party level,” she says. “I hope to be able to fully engage those folks.”

Elliott says her current priorities include re-electing Sen. Merkley and Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian; supporting drivers’ licenses for undocumented immigrants; marriage equality; and campaigning for jobs.

A single mother, who works for the Urban League of Portland as a community organizer, Elliott is a longtime school volunteer who still serves on Jefferson High School site council. She co-founded Portland’s Black Chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Since 2008, she has

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become increasingly involved in political work.

Elliott attended Wellstone Action Training, designed to train campaign leaders. She was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte. She graduated from the Democratic women’s political training course, Emerge, in 2012. And she has been a key player in the resurgence of the party’s Black Political Caucus.

Last year, her efforts were rewarded when she was named Barbara Roberts Young Democrat of the Year.

Piazza 1960



Longtime civil rights activist Keisha Edwards has opened an antique business at 1960 SE Hawthorne, in an historic flatiron building. Edwards says one of her goals with the new shop is to provide affordable art supplies for crafters alongside classic furniture, jewelry and clothing. Piazza 1960 has convenient on-street parking. Call the shop at 503-444-7186.

“She was very active in the 2008 election,” says Leslie Davis. “And every time I went into the office in 2012, Lakeitha was there working her contacts. People know Lakeitha and they know her work.”

The Election that Wasn’t

The devil, as they say, is in the details. And when it comes to the inner workings of Multnomah Democratic Party, those details are complicated.

Grassroots activists called precinct committee persons make up the Democratic Party Central Committee, which governs party business. Anyone can attend party meetings, but only precinct committee people, known as PCPs, can vote.

PCPs are elected, but they can also be appointed at any meeting. Multnomah County could have between 1200-1500 precinct committee persons. But in practice many of the volunteer positions are open.

“We currently have about 500 precinct committee people,” says Hagmeier.

At the Nov. 14 meeting an unusually high number of people – 36— had turned out to ask to be appointed as PCPs. Among them were: Sen. Merkley aide Courtney Warner Crowell, former Gov. Kulongoski aide, Anna Richter Taylor and housing activist Cameron Whitten. All 36 were appointed as

PCPs, and some of them joined in the voting for party chair.

Before the vote, each candidate was allowed a five-minute speech. Elliott delivered a speech centered on the need for a more diverse activist base. Votes were cast and Elliott won, taking 44 votes to Hanson’s 38.

“It was obvious that KC was not prepared,” says Colleen Davis. “Lakeitha was voted in on her merits. I was excited because it was going to be new blood, new energy, which is what all organizations need.”

Elliott’s win was within party rules, but just as it energized and excited some, others were upset that the new precinct committee people had been allowed to vote.

“It’s actually quite shocking the way the whole thing went down,” says Colleen Davis. “We’ve been doing it this way at least as long as I’ve been involved –which is six or seven years...”

“It got ugly really fast. People were saying really mean things about Lakeitha, and to her.”

Complaints that the election was illegal came with calls for action.

Under the party bylaws new PCPs can

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Breakfast

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Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City and completed his family medicine training at Duke University.

The Skanner News Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast is Monday, Jan. 20, 2014, from

In a departure from our usual format for the event, The Skanner News will take three questions for Goldberg from the floor

7:30-10:30 at the Oregon Convention Center. For ticket information call Jerry Foster at 503-285-5555, ext. 506.

League

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impacted by the increasing knowledge of how racism and racist institutions sabotage lives and communities.

The upcoming report will expand to include more of the experiences of Black Oregonians all over the state, including Eugene, Bend, Coos Bay, Eastern and rural Oregon. The State of Black Oregon 2014 will provide an opportunity for many to tell their story for the first time.

“We want the Black community, our members, and champions of justice everywhere to feel ownership of this State of Black Oregon report,” said Michael Alexander, presi-

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dent and CEO of the Urban League of Portland. “It is a way that everyone can be a part of and contribute to our movement for equity and justice. Our first State of Black Ore-

gon had a profound impact in the State, but there is so much more to do. We believe that the State of Black Oregon 2014 will highlight the creativity and innovation that Ore-

gon has to gain from its Black communities and show how marginalization and underinvestment have diminished the impact of one of Oregon’s greatest assets.”

The effort is anchored by a one-minute video called “I See You” by Portland filmmaker Dawn Jones of Hearts & Sparks productions.

Contribute to the campaign by searching State of Black Oregon at www.indiegogo.com. Find out more about the Urban League of Portland at www.ulpdx.org.