

PARTISAN from page 5A

Greene, along with former councilor Susy Lacer, said they became concerned about the partisan nature of Prociw's campaign after they were approached by a former member of the campaign. That individual painted a dire picture of Harvey and Prosser, who she accused of stating that "libtards" weren't welcome in the campaign, and that Prociw was planning on only voting how Henry voted.

The two councilors approached Prociw, questioning her on whether she was prepared to do the job. Greene voiced his concerns in person at Prociw's place of business. Lacer chose to contact Prociw in a personal email sent Oct. 12, 2018, with the subject line "A request." In it, Lacer strongly suggested that Prociw drop out, listing the need for public speaking as a primary reason:

"... I have been told by multiple folks in town that you are struggling with a fundamental requirement of being a city councilor: Public speaking. If that is true, and you are not comfortable speaking to a room full of people, I'm asking that you withdraw from the election now, Geraldine."

Lacer went on to say that, while she believed Prociw cared about Florence and wanted what was best for the community, "It would be a terrible disservice to our citizens for you [to] continue in the election, if you are unable to serve effectively."

Henry found out about these attempts and went public in correspondence with both *Siuslaw News* and KCST, describing Greene and Lacer comments as partisan attempts to influence the election. Henry's supporters, including Beveridge, publicly asked Greene and Lacer to resign, going as far as claiming Greene and Lacer broke the law in attempting to get Prociw to drop out of the election.

When Greene and Lacer spoke on record with *Siuslaw News* at the time, neither went into specific details regarding what was told to them by the ex-campaign volunteer. Instead, after it became known that we were investigating the issue, the volunteer came to speak with *Siuslaw News*. Though it has been suggested that Greene sent the individual to the newspaper, *Siuslaw News* has not been able to verify that accusation.

Though an on-record interview was conducted, it

was decided there were too many credibility concerns, including hyper-liberal partisanship, financial disputes with the campaign itself, and personal issues between the individual and Prociw. The interview was not printed and *Siuslaw News* pursued other avenues for the investigation, including public records and interviews with others directly involved.

The findings of that investigation were included in the series "Chaos in the Community."

After Prociw won the election, the bad blood was never fully dealt with on the council — and continues today.

Henry has publicly blamed Greene's decision to send the former campaigner to *Siuslaw News* as a root cause of council conflict, while Prociw has accused the newspaper of printing "anonymous false accusations," as stated in her recent resignation letter from the council.

While the election and resulting coverage may have stoked tensions within the council, it was the committee selection process that provoked an all-out-war.

As will be discussed later this month, councilor involvement with the selection process was limited. Public discussion surrounding applicants lasted mere minutes in a January work session, and suggestions for committee placements were ignored completely. Instead, multiple partisans and real estate professionals made their way onto the boards.

"Hmmm ... Joshua is the chair of FURA"

"We will hold a second reading of this ordinance at our next meeting, at which time we'll make a decision on it," Henry said in closing the discussion on FURA during the March 4, 2019, meeting.

At this point, the FURA discussion was put out to the general public to discuss the merits of the issue. On that March 6, *Siuslaw News* published an article on the subject, sharing it on Facebook, including on FO. But comments on the article were nonexistent, and the actual discussion regarding a mayor's ability to choose applicants was largely ignored.

Instead, a bigger conversation was brewing in our Letters to the Editor and online.

"I want to express my displeasure at the proposed mural for the CLPUD building," read a letter received on March 5, 2019.

The council had not

openly discussed the mural, even during the FURA discussion, and FURA itself had already made its final approval on funding the project earlier that January. There was a vote to be held by the council on April 1 regarding the mural, but that was only regarding whether or not the mural met city code — not about its design, aesthetics or artistic merit.

In fact, if a council member were to vote based on public opinion regarding the mural, it would have been deemed illegal.

"There are so many different beautiful options that could still be designed, i.e., whales passing by our coast, the dunes, a lighthouse, dune buggies, our state and national park forests, etc.," the letter stated. "If anyone else agrees with me or has an opinion either way, please let the Florence City Council know."

Siuslaw News would later learn that the letter was spurred on by a communication from conservative leaders out to supporters.

On March 7, newly installed CEDC committee member and friend of Henry, David Montes, posted on Facebook a picture of the Quince Street mural on FO.

"I can't visualize wildlife successfully making it across that bridge," he wrote. While Montes said the mural "was not ugly," he made it clear that it wasn't for Florence. "I think in its attempt to be original it became an art concept for a different community," he concluded.

The post generated over 500 comments, with the majority of the comments negative toward the mural.

"The piece is definitely a sharp contrast to 'Old Town,' perhaps too much of a contrast," Sandy Kuhlman commented. "Feels like Florence is having an identity conflict. Also disappointing that local artists were not commissioned."

The next day, Beveridge created her own post on FO, asking for more opinions on the mural.

"Send letters to 250 Hwy 101 or kelli.weese@ci.florence.or.us," Harvey commented. "They read and tally all of them. The council meeting to decide

to permit the painting is April 1 at 5:30 at city hall. Use this to speak www.ci.florence.or.us/council/request-address-city-council-speakers-card."

Beveridge and Harvey work together politically frequently, with Beveridge also being the moderator for Facebook sites like Florence Liberty Alliance.

Regarding FO, she has frequently used the page to support Henry and the city, such as pushing support for the City Hall remodel after some public opinion had turned against it.

But the power of FO can also be used against an individual.

"A post on the Florence, Oregon FB page has generated a LOT of comments," she wrote *Siuslaw News* directly after the mural posts on PO. "It's regarding the proposed mural. It seems like something that is story-worthy. The majority of comments are opposed to the design. The Public Art Committee somehow got a budget for this from Urban Renewal. Hmmm ... Joshua (Greene) is the chair of FURA."

A public discussion about the FURA committee and its selection process suddenly took a back seat — drowned out by an outcry regarding the mural and questions regarding Greene's leadership. The division between Henry and Greene widened from personal to something becoming more and more partisan.

(Note: In the next installment of this investigative series into partisanship impacts on local government on Sept. 16, Siuslaw News explores how, as a social media war against PAC was heating up, a small group of people began writing the City regarding the upcoming vote on the FURA selection process — and how, though there were dozens of letters, all shared similar phrasing mirroring local ultra-conservative Facebook posts.)

To read past installments in this series, visit www.thesiuslawnews.com and click the "Special Investigations" tab on the drop-down menu.)

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