

## **National Republican Wave Once Again Misses Oregon**

While Donald Trump enjoyed an easier than expected return to the White House and Republicans took control of the Senate (with control of the House also still a possibility), not much changed in the Oregon political landscape. Much like in 2022, when Republicans had an excellent election night nationally, the red wave crested at the Cascade Mountains. The election results here generally upheld the status quo but that doesn't mean there weren't interesting races and issues being voted on. From a new adventure in the structure of the City of Portland's government to a massive proposed corporate tax hike to three statewide offices on the ballot, there is plenty to unpack from the election. Below is a summary of some of the key races:

### **Federal Races**

All of the U.S. House of Representatives races went about as expected, with four Democrats winning relatively easily, one Republican also winning easily and the anticipated close race in the 5th Congressional District between incumbent Lori Chavez Deremer (R) and Oregon legislator Janelle Bynum (D) being exactly that, in fact it remains too close to call at the time of writing this recap, though Bynum maintains a slim lead. The 4th District race between incumbent Val Hoyle (D) and Monique DeSpain (R) and the 6th District race between incumbent Andrea Salinas (D) and Mike Erickson (R) both ended up as fairly comfortable wins for the two Democratic incumbents. The 1st District, 2nd District, and 3rd District races were all blowouts, comfortably won by incumbents Suzanne Bonamici (D-1st District) and Cliff Bentz (R-2nd District) and newcomer Maxine Dexter (D-3rd District). Neither U.S. Senator in Oregon was on the ballot this year.

### **Oregon Legislative and Statewide Races**

The balance of power in the state legislature didn't change appreciably although the Democrats did manage to flip Senate District 27 in Central Oregon, where a combination of redistricting, demographic changes and the familiar name of Tim Knopp not on the ballot led to a somewhat surprisingly easy win for Bend City Councilor Anthony Broadman. That win propels Democrats to an 18-12 edge in the Senate, enough to give them a supermajority and the ability to potentially raise taxes without needing a single Republican vote. However, the Oregon House was one net pick up seat for Democrats away from also becoming a supermajority and it didn't happen. Despite millions of dollars pouring into a handful of contested races, neither side managed to break through anywhere in the state. Republicans had to defend seats in four districts where they faced registration deficits and they managed to hold all four, with only House District 52 in Hood River County truly being in doubt until current House Republican Leader Jeff Helfrich pulled away by a couple hundred votes late in the evening. Republicans took a swing at flipping a half-dozen seats but also came up empty handed.

Three major statewide offices were on the ballot as well, and all three were won by experienced Democratic policymakers. Current State Treasurer Tobias Read moved up to Secretary of State, convincingly defeating outgoing Republican State Senator Dennis Linthicum. Former Speaker of the House Dan Rayfield defeated Republican attorney Will Lathrop by almost seven points to become the next Attorney General. Finally, former Senator and Ways and Means co-chair Elizabeth Steiner defeated outgoing Republican State Senator Brian Boquist by less than five points, as that race was slightly complicated by Steiner dealing with a third-party candidate who ran to her left.

### **Statewide Ballot Measures**

Five measures made the ballot this year but voters ultimately passed only two of them. Measure 115, which allows for the impeachment of statewide officials with a two-thirds vote of the legislature, had

the easiest time, winning by a 62%-37% margin. The other to pass was Measure 119, a cannabis worker unionization measure, which passed by about eleven points. The highest profile measure to go down was Measure 118 and it went down in a big way, with nearly 80% voting no. This measure proposed the largest tax increase in Oregon history in order to then rebate money back to citizens; however, voters seemed to grasp that the costs would just be passed onto them in the form of higher prices and that the state would actually lose money to provide basic services. And despite a multi-million dollar campaign in support, Measure 117's call for ranked choice voting to be implemented also went down hard, by almost twenty points. Finally, Measure 116, which proposed an independent commission to set salaries for legislators and other officials, also lost.

Speaking of ranked choice voting, the voters in the City of Portland got firsthand experience using the process to decide the Mayor and city council races. The city council races were also a new frontier as Portland's new governmental structure required the election of twelve new councilmembers. It will be interesting to see voters' opinion on utilizing ranked choice voting vs. the traditional method of simply voting only for your top preference. But now, with the election still fresh but behind us, it's time to look forward to mid-January and the beginning of a lengthy legislative session, with funding for transportation, health care, education, housing and wildfire as headline issues. In conclusion, while it was a wild ride at the top of the ticket this year, in Oregon it was a relatively quiet, status quo election further down the ballot.