



PROGRAM SYNOPSIS

February 18, 2015

Notes from the W2D Secretary of State Democratic Candidate Forum

By Mary Ratcliff, W2D Program Chair*

The audience and the candidates agreed that the Secretary of State Democratic Candidate Forum held by W2D on Wednesday, November 18th was a very successful event. It was obvious after the program that we would be well served by any of the Democratic candidates and that they too respected the qualifications and capabilities of their fellow candidates. The forum was structured to have an opening statement and closing statement for each candidate and several pre-determined questions and an audience question to be answered by each candidate.

W2D Board Member Denise Frisbee introduced the candidates and stated why the Secretary of State position is such an important role to fill with a highly qualified person. As Oregonians were recently reminded, the Secretary of State is a very important elected position as the office holder is the first in line of succession to the Governor. The Secretary of State is also the chief elections officer, auditor and archivist for the state. Additionally, this official is chartered to promote business opportunity within Oregon and is responsible for auditing public spending for the state. Elected directly in a state-wide ballot, the Secretary of State represents the all citizens of Oregon.

Opening Remarks: Can you tell us something about yourself and why you are seeking to be the next Secretary of State?

Labor Commissioner **Brad Avakian** noted how his grandparents and parents had worked hard in working class positions and they showed him the importance of the right to an education and a job. In his role as the Labor Commissioner of Oregon, he worked to bring shop classes to high schools, fought to make sure that employers were prosecuted for stealing paychecks from their workers, and supported equal pay and clean energy. As Secretary of State he would bring creative ideas for being able to use the State Land Board to grow jobs, audit agencies to make sure taxpayer dollars are well spent and advocate for bringing civics classes back to schools.

State Senator **Richard Devlin** got a round of applause when he started with his being proud for showing Bill Tiernan the exit door in 2002 and a laugh when he joked about his reputation for not being known as a rousing speaker. Devlin said that he wanted to take on the role of Secretary of State to make government work and that he has a long record of success in doing that throughout his career in public service.

State Representative **Val Hoyle** started by remarking on the quality of the candidates on the stage and that she was proud to be there. She stated that she was deeply aware from when she was old

enough to vote that her involvement as a citizen mattered and she believes strongly in promoting citizen involvement. When she and her family moved to Eugene, she started working with the schools, became the Chair of the Lane County Democrats, and then when elected to the House, she was voted by her peers to be the House Majority leader three times. She's proud of getting the auto voter registration legislation passed and now wants to make sure more Oregonians vote and to champion small businesses.

First Question: Describe your experience managing a large and complex entity and how you believe your background has prepared you for this role.

Devlin agreed the responsibilities of the Secretary of State are quite broad and complex, but the agency under the Secretary is not so large as it has around 200 people -- much of the staffing for running elections is being done within the counties by the County clerks and their offices. He noted that as a legislator he had extensive experience as a caucus leader which requires accommodating a number of different personalities to get things done. He pointed out that when operating as the chief auditor, it was important to be knowledgeable about the agencies and how they are budgeted. Devlin described himself as a nerd and said he understands the details pertaining to the budget. He is someone who loves spreadsheets. Devlin's worked both in the minority and the majority, has had leadership positions stretching through his legislative career and has delivered solid results throughout that time.

Hoyle talked about her experience in managing a caucus of 33/34 members where significant legislation was passed. She said that experience was more like herding flies rather than the normal analogy of herding cats. The way one does this is to set clear expectations and to govern on what the caucus promised in the election. She employs a collaborative style to find solutions to problems. Hoyle described her training as from the Soccer Mom School of Management. Her prior experience before her move to Eugene was working for the SEIU in Boston and then in International Sales for Trek Bikes where she was the first International Warranty manager responsible for putting together the first program to manage warranties for the company. To do this, she set up and monitored systems and then used the results to improve and enhance how things got done.

Avakian started with his experience in running his own business where he was responsible for meeting payroll, providing leadership, and building relationships. He noted that unlike his time in the legislature, as a state wide elected official, he doesn't have colleagues to share the work nor spread the blame. He says that his experience as head of the agency and in his prior experience as a civil rights attorney, he shows he knows how to investigate and hold corporations accountable for wrongdoing. In the role of chief auditor, Avakian promises to not just audit state agencies, but to use audits to see how taxpayer funds are being used by contractors who are hired to carry out the work of the agencies.

Second Question: With the new Oregon Motor Voter law which passed in 2015, what do you see your role would be to increase voter turnout?

Hoyle noted that not everyone wants to vote, but the motor voter law means that there is no longer a need to spend time in registering votes and more effort can be put into turning out voters. She represents a low-income district and says that people often don't think about voting because of their busy lives. She takes time to go to schools to talk about politics and expresses to students why their vote matters. She also sees the increased registered voters as an opportunity for the Democratic Party to woo new voters.

Avakian expressed his appreciation of the motor voter law saying it was a very smart move for Oregon and it put Oregon ahead of the nation. He believes that voters need to be inspired to vote. He wants every student to have an education in civics and advocates for returning civics classes to our schools. He proposed a Youth Vote where students were given the same ballots as other voters

and suggested it would be quite interesting to tally their votes post-election to see how they compare to the general electorate.

Devlin strongly agreed that the motor voter law was a good step and then listed the ways he has supported voting and more electoral participation through his service in the Legislature: he voted for Vote By Mail; sponsored the law that lets 17 year olds register to vote if they will be 18 when the election is held; sent letters to all high schools students [in his district] for every election urging them to vote; and engaged citizens in YMCA voter classes. He fully supports increasing voter participation and says that automatically registering people is a great step forward.

Third Question: Describe the role of the Secretary of State in auditing other public agencies and what are the mechanisms that you can call on to make sure the recommendations from an audit are adopted.

Avakian: The audits division is a very well run organization. It has good safeguards and the audits are well-done. But once an audit report is released, it sits on a dusty shelf. Also, agencies hire contractors to carry out the work. We need to follow the dollars to the private sector. We need to make sure these companies follow Oregon's employment laws, environmental laws, etc. Also it is important to watch the spending of taxpayer dollars passed to local governments.

Devlin: The Secretary of State has two principle roles as auditor. The Secretary selects the Chief Auditor for the state when needed and as this year the Chief Auditor is retiring, replacing the Chief Auditor will be of primary importance. State audits track the financial, performance, and technical operations of state agencies. There are some problems found by the audits and some problems identified are not corrected. The audits cannot be allowed to sit on the shelf. It is important to be diligent in following up on recommendations.

Hoyle: Every dollar matters. The audit mission is the watchdog for the taxpayer. Hoyle plans to continue to quantify the importance of the audit, an initiative started by Governor Brown. The budget is about the people – are we getting the value for the dollars. The role is to point out the problems, communicate to people (consistently and persistently) to make sure problems are addressed.

Fourth Question: What could you do as Secretary of State to stop the use of dark money in campaigns?

Devlin: Citizens United and dark money are a threat to democracy. We've been living under that regime (Oregon is the Wild West!) as it is easy to run money through the state. Money laundering can be a problem. We need to correct this decision. What could be done now is to make the campaign financing system in Oregon more transparent and more accountable. Identify the gaps in documenting who is contributing and close them.

Hoyle: The Supreme Court says corporations are people, money is speech. This fallacy leads to the buying of elections. We need campaign finance limits. We need to empower ordinary people to participate. We need to limit independent expenditures where donors are not revealed. We should have a deliberative approach – an initiative or legislative ballot measure – that seeks for ultimate transparency: who provides the money. Then she pointed out that the next election will determine who appoints 2-3 Supreme Court Justices.

Avakian: Citizens United has made the problem worse. We all know that Corporations are NOT people. He believes that the Supreme Court made a mistake and this ruling will get reversed. He advocates contribution limits and Oregon (legislators and the governor) should keep passing limits and sending it to the Supreme Court until it is reversed. Avakian also advocates for the public financing of campaigns.

Fifth Question: What role would you play as Secretary of State to influence other states in taking actions that enhance the right to vote to counter the efforts of many to limit or restrict the right to vote?

Hoyle: I am in a group of state legislators that get together to network and share our best practices and to learn from each other. My South Carolina colleague in the minority expressed her distress about the suppression tactics that have recently been put in place. She said, “We fought so hard and now they are trying to steal our vote.” This is un-American. The goal must be to reduce barriers, make sure that every eligible voter has the right to vote. What can we do? Promote the new motor voter act, engage prospective voters in the process, consider providing postage on the ballots sent to voters, guarantee a fair redistricting process, and count every vote.

Avakian: Within Oregon verify that every county clerk’s office is following the law. Promote campaign finance reform, and not just during elections. And regarding the Governors who want to block refugees, they do not understand the principals of our country. Our duty is to tear down the walls.

Devlin: Lots of states have laws to restrict voting. Oregon needs to continue to be the beacon of how it should be done. It is my belief that liberty demands eternal vigilance. Devlin is known to work with both parties and in particular, he worked with the other side when co-chair of the Rules Committee to protect the rights of the minority. There should not be any question about the legality of the right to vote. There is no record of greater fraud after Oregon made it easier to vote. You must stop suppression when you first see it. Vigilance is required.

Audience Question: What can you do to champion the environment?

Avakian: Protecting the environment is one of the most important values we have. I’d like to expand the renewable energy goals. I’d like to move us toward being leaders in this area by using the State Land Board which manages the state owned forests, rivers, etc. so that it uses a clean energy focus. For example, central Oregon has huge, untapped Geothermal potential, coastal Oregon can lead in developing and exploiting wave technology and eastern Oregon can build out solar fields that can move Oregon forward towards being energy independent.

Devlin: It is important to focus on Climate Change, but one needs to recognize that the Legislature has a more impactful role as it sets state policy. However, the Secretary of State can have a public role. The Secretary is a public official representing all Oregonians. It is clear that young Oregonians want us to do more. As the Scouts say, we should strive to leave the campsite in a better condition than when we arrived. None of us want to be known for not doing something.

Hoyle: As Secretary of State, I could not directly influence policy as much as I could while in the Legislature. However, I am proud of my vote for the Renewable Fuels act which was one the reasons along with my vote on gun control which resulted in a recall petition being mounted against me – fortunately it ultimately failed. I’ve participated in a Climate Change boot camp and have seen how the Legislature can be engaged to move sustainable legislation. I know how to talk with someone who is not on the same side and still have a conversation where both of us hear each other and find our shared values. When Bill Bradbury was Secretary of State, he used his position to talk about climate change. I can do that too. And as a Catholic, I am proud of the Pope.

Closing statements.

Devlin: Thank you. After this forum, you have a better idea about what the Secretary of State does and what we would do in office. I was a child in a large family that was often strapped for resources. Yet I always knew that my family supported me in doing well in school. I was instilled with two essential values: Education is the path to a better future and that in return I had an obligation to

serve others so that others can have a better future. I believe in Government because it can be used to do good and can work for people.

Hoyle: I am proud and honored to be among this group. I want to be a voice for progressive values, protect reproductive support and although I know that sometimes one cannot vote (she told us about a time when she was unable to vote because of unfortunate circumstances), but we need to reduce obstacles to voting. Everyone should have the chance to see that their voice and their vote makes a difference.

Avakian: Public service is important to me. But you don't have to look at how to do things the old way. There can be new ways to achieve better outcomes. I want to put progressive values into policy. I want to help people. {At this point my neighbor at the table was talking to me and I missed his last statements.

**Candidate responses are paraphrased. Any errors or omissions are unintended.*