

‘Conservatives may not be the loudest voices in the room but they appear to have turned in their ballots’

Ken Vance

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One of the reasons I’ve been a sports fan all of my life is the ability to play Monday morning quarterback. You know, the art of second-guessing coaches, players and general managers from the safety of our own homes and far away from the actual bright lights and fierce competition.

Well, I’ve also enjoyed that dynamic in the world of politics. As you know, I don’t offer endorsements, or even predictions. I do everything I can to try not to influence elections. But, I do enjoy offering some random thoughts after the fact without attempting to impact the decisions you make in the November general election.

When it comes to Tuesday’s top-two primary election, there is no question that in my mind, the most noteworthy result was that in the race for County Council District 3 where incumbent John Blom failed to advance to the general election. Republican Karen Bowerman received 43.91 percent of the vote and Democrat Jesse James received 33.60 percent. The two will advance to vy for the seat in November. Blom received just 22.49 percent of the vote. I have to admit that I didn’t see this one coming.

Blom had become the focus of an [ethics complaint](#) filed by Portland-Vancouver Junction Railroad Operator Eric Temple in early July, alleging that the candidate, through a campaign staff member, had threatened to “destroy” Temple’s business over a \$20,000 donation to the Clark County Republican Party (CCRP), \$15,000 of which was routed to Bowerman. Blom denied the allegations, and the County Council shelved the complaint over concerns that the process to investigate them was inadequate. A separate complaint filed with the state’s Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) was also dismissed.

I realize some of you many disagree with me, but I don’t think that was the deciding factor in his poor performance in the primary. Complaints against elected officials are not all that rare and I think they’re more about noise than substance in terms of the public’s attention and awareness. Besides, the PDC dismissed the complaint five days before the election.

While running as a Republican, Blom defeated Democrat Tanisha Harris by 1,010 votes in 2016 to gain the seat on the County Council. When he filed to run for re-election this year, he filed with no party preference, or as an Independent. I believe that was the biggest factor in Blom’s demise.

First of all, let me say, the worst-kept secret in Clark County politics is that the CCRP is a split party. There is an often bitter divide between the conservative side of the party and the moderate side, of which Blom was definitely firmly entrenched. I actually thought Blom’s explanation for

stating no party preference made a lot of sense, essentially that he felt local politics should be non-partisan. Former County Commissioner Steve Stuart once told me the age-old line, “what’s ideological about a pothole.”

But, to the conservatives in the CCRP, it was a death nail for Blom. And, Bowerman admitted it provided the impetus for her to file as a candidate at the last minute to give voters a true conservative on the ballot to vote for. Knowing what I know about the division between Blom and many in his own party, I can’t help but think it was the noble, albeit unsuccessful, thing to do.

Conservatives rise up

Some of you expressed agreement with my column last week and some of you vowed never to tune in again. That’s usually the case. This next observation is likely going to do the same thing.

In last week’s column, I shared with you a [new national survey, conducted by The Cato Institute](#). Among other things, the survey revealed that 62 percent of Americans say the current political climate in the United States prevents them from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive. A very interesting result of the survey is that 52 percent of Democrats and 59 percent of Independents are afraid to share their opinions. Among Republicans, 77 percent are afraid to speak their mind out of concern they will offend someone.

Maybe it’s wishful thinking on my part, but I think there’s evidence in the results of this primary, that in Clark County, the conservatives may not be the loudest voices in the room but they appear to have turned in their ballots. Case in point, the race for the Washington State Senate in the 18th District.

Two Republicans, incumbent Ann Rivers and conservative John Ley, faced off against Democrat Rick Bell, who received the most votes of the three with 39.50 percent. However, Rivers and Ley combined to receive 24,021 votes, compared to Bell’s 15,680.

“I’m really encouraged by how many conservative voters came out to vote in the primary,” Rivers said. “It is telling for the general election that people are fired up about what’s happening in Olympia right now between the COVID response and concerns about the economy.”

An argument can be made that Rivers may have crossed over party lines and got some votes from the left. (Some of my conservative brethren have been pretty upset with her since 2015 when she voted for the largest gas tax increase in the state’s history, a \$16.1-billion transportation package.) But, I agree with her assessment that the conservatives turned out for the Aug. 4 primary.

By the way, I believe my point is further made by the fact that the turnout for the primary election in Clark County is now over 50 percent. More than 75,000 ballots were turned in on Monday and Tuesday alone.

Auditor Greg Kimsey said it is the largest turnout for a primary going back to 1997. The next biggest turnout was 43.91 percent in 2005 when C-TRAN had a sales tax increase issue on the ballot.

Ridgefield School District

I can't help but feel some pain for patrons and educators in the Ridgefield School District after voters rejected a \$40-million general obligation bond on the ballot in the primary. I know, as a conservative I'm supposed to rejoice every time an effort to raise taxes is thwarted, but this one included some difficult circumstances.

In February's special election, 59.19 percent of Ridgefield voters approved of a \$107 million bond program, narrowly missing the super majority of 60 percent plus one needed for approval. District officials then decided in March to ask for a modified bond program of \$40.465 million, which seems to me like a responsible effort to respond to the voters. Initially, they considered putting it before voters in April but then elected to wait for the August primary, but voters overwhelmingly rejected that proposition with 52.52 percent voicing their opposition.

The latest proposition would have authorized the district to construct and equip a new K-6 elementary school and accessible, inclusive playgrounds at South Ridge and Union Ridge elementary schools, by issuing \$40,465,000 of general obligation bonds. The district also expected to receive approximately \$12.5 million in state matching funds for the projects. The bond would have also allowed the district to purchase land and begin design of new grades 5-6 and grades 7-8 campuses as well as design of a high school expansion.

I know, I know, like all districts in Clark County, Ridgefield will open the 2020-2021 school year with remote learning. When the district does reopen its school buildings for in-person learning, Ridgefield officials say they will have to rely on the addition of more portables to accommodate an expected 1,760 students over the next five years. District officials say they will need 57 portable buildings with 114 classrooms to serve the increased student body and they say there is not sufficient space for that many portables. Nor does the district have the financial resources to purchase and place that many portables.

If you don't trust the estimates of 1,760 new students in the next five years, consider the fact that Ridgefield has doubled in population in the last 10 years, from 4,763 in 2010 to over 9,700 today. And, city officials are planning for 25,000 residents by 2036.

It sounds to me like Ridgefield voters just kicked the can down the road on that one.

Compelling races for November

Because the primary is a top-two primary, we largely ignore the races with just two candidates until we start working on informing you in advance of the general election. That said, here's some races to keep an eye on for November:

- Governor — Washington hasn't elected a Republican governor since 1980 (John Spellman, served 1981-85). Is a small town sheriff from eastern Washington the one who can break that formidable streak of failed efforts? Gov. Jay Inslee received 52 percent of the primary vote. Culp emerged from a large field of Republican candidates with 17 percent.
- 3rd Congressional District — This is a rematch of what might have been the most hotly contested race of 2018 in the state of Washington between incumbent Republican Jaime Herrera Beutler and Democrat Carolyn Long. In the primary, Herrera Beutler received 49.9 percent of the vote and Long received 46.62 percent.
- State representative (17th District) — Another rematch of a close race in 2018. Incumbent Republican Vicki Kraft will once again face Democrat Tanisha Harris. Kraft defeated Harris by

859 votes two years ago. In Tuesday's primary, Kraft received 52.76 percent and Harris received 47.24 percent.