

SPECIAL REPORT

Reynolds shocks the city by stepping down from mayoral runoff

Reynolds at the Polls

Ronney Reynolds' quest for office began in 1988. He challenged incumbent Smoot Carl-Mitchell:

Carl-Mitchell	31,287
Reynolds	24,167

In 1991, Reynolds' second run at office was to fill a vacant seat. He and Ginny Ballard survived a field of 12 for a head-to-head runoff:

Reynolds	30,389
Ballard	24,031

In 1992, Reynolds brawled over the Save Our Springs Ordinance, offering a substitute ordinance to replace the citizens' initiative:

Citizens'	Reynolds'
Yes 46,246	Yes 24,140
No 26,187	No 44,556

In 1994, incumbent Reynolds faced four challengers, beating all of them without a runoff. The only close candidate was Mary Arnold:

Reynolds	39,980
Arnold	32,168

Reynolds reelection in 1994 was boosted by the conservative turnout that rolled back insurance benefits for domestic partners. He had voted against the benefits:

For	51,475
Against	31,082

In 1995, Reynolds was the poster boy for a new baseball stadium to house the Phoenix Firebirds. Voters didn't want to pay more taxes to repay a \$10 million bond:

For	18,019
Against	30,910

In 1997, Reynolds placed second among eight mayoral contenders:

Kirk Watson	30,278
Ronney Reynolds	24,915

What was supposed to be a routine rubber-stamping of the May 3 general election results turned into a jaw-dropping experience unprecedented in Austin electoral politics when **Ronney Reynolds** conceded defeat in the mayoral runoff election still 26 days away. The media were not tipped in advance about Reynolds' May 5 surprise announcement, and only one television reporter was on hand when the council member read his brief, nine paragraph speech, at 10:03 a.m. "I felt that I could, with a reasonable mandate from the voters, lead this city into the 21st century better than anyone else," Reynolds said. Neither Reynolds nor his chief opponent, attorney **Kirk Watson**, got a mandate in the general election. Only 17.1 percent of registered voters cast ballots. Reynolds ran hard to win the job, and tried to paint Watson as an extremist. Right before the election, for example, Reynolds mailed a piece that proclaimed, "Austin can't afford to let Kirk Watson's extremist friends like (former council member) **Brigid Shea** and the council majority control the mayor's office." The piece showed a photo of Shea and Watson together beside a huge headline that screamed, "Say no to Kirk Watson and Brigid Shea." But in stepping down from the runoff race, Reynolds swore-off the nasty stuff. "I do not believe in negative campaigning and I'm not willing to give up my principles just to win a political race," he said. When Reynolds invited Watson to comment, the somber looking next mayor said of the concession, "It's one of the classiest acts I think I've ever seen in politics."

"It takes someone with concern about the community to withdraw from something he worked so hard for," said mayor **Bruce Todd**. Of Reynolds' six years on the council, Todd said, "You have said what you thought and you have voted your conscience. You can't ask much more than that from a public official." After a brief council meeting to confirm the election results, council member **Daryl Slusher** said, "Council member Reynolds' bowing out like this contributes to healing some of the divisions in this city." **Don Martin** of **Don Martin Public Affairs**, who ran Todd's 1994 reelection campaign in which Slusher came within an eyelash of beating Todd, quipped "Why couldn't Daryl have done this in 1994?" Council member **Beverly Griffith** said, "I think it's a very statesmanly act. I have always had a great deal of respect for Ronney, and even more now." Mayor pro tem **Gus Garcia**, who just won election to the Place 2 seat vacated by Reynolds, said, "For him to say Austin is more important than Ronney Reynolds is courageous." Council member **Jackie Goodman**, who missed the council meeting do to a scheduling mix-up, later told *In Fact*, "I was shocked and speechless and amazed when I heard...I think this shows he is a man of integrity." **Eric Mitchell**, who teamed with Reynolds against an often hostile council majority, said, "I'm very disappointed and feel bad for Ronney because he's worked his butt off and has truly been sincere on the council." As for healing the rift between warring factions, Mitchell was pessimistic. "I don't feel like this will stop any divisiveness because the far left feels empowered now," he said. "I don't think that serves the future of Austin." ✱

