

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." ✪

SPECIAL REPORT

Garcia stomps Motal, while Mitchell slips, and Zuniga soars

The voters of Austin have spoken, and they have said we're not going to waste a beautiful, sunny spring day by finding our way to the polls and worrying about which candidate to elect. But the 62,840 people who did go to the polls on May 3 spoke with a clear voice. They gave the liberal-environmental candidates consistently strong support. They nearly handed attorney Kirk Watson the keys to the mayor's office despite the fact that he was running against both two-term council member Ronney Reynolds and former three-term council member Max Nofziger. Headed into a runoff and trailing Watson by 39.9 percent to 48.5 percent, Reynolds folded May 5, handing Watson the victory on a silver platter. (See story, page 1.)

The Cost of Votes

Among the leading spenders in the mayoral contest and three council races, the cost of a vote varied widely.

Table with columns: Mayor, Votes, Money, \$/Vote. Rows include candidates like Becker, Blanchette, Gale, Johnson, Kircher, Nofziger, Reynolds, Watson, Currie, Garcia, Gonzales, Motal, Enriquez, Hadden, Peña, Spelman, Zuniga, Lewis, Mitchell, Samson.

* Note: Candidates who agreed to limit their campaigns to a maximum of \$500 did not have to report actual contributions and expenditures.

Sources: Votes are based on the official election results reported by the city clerk. Money is the total of contributions, loans and personal funds available to the candidates in this election cycle, based on totals for all the contribution and expenditure reports filed through April 25.

Place 2. As predicted by In Fact, voters elected mayor pro tem Gus Garcia in Place 2 without putting him through a runoff. They soundly rejected his chief rival, Becky Motal, for the second time. Motal managed to pull only 39.1 percent of the vote against Garcia, down from the 44.6 percent she got last year running against Place 3 incumbent Jackie Goodman. Motal had new political consultants this year, The Strategy Group, instead of Weeks-Correa & Co. But Motal's spending plummeted from nearly \$127,000 in 1996 to only half that this year, \$63,000. (This year's figure may climb, however, when after-election reports come in July 15.) Motal attacked Garcia for his stance not to widen the Lamar Street Bridge. She attempted to tie his desire to leave Capital Metro alone to the political contributions he had accepted from Capital Metro officials, like \$500 from board chairman Michael Von Ohlen and \$25 from general manager Justin Augustine III. The attacks proved futile. Garcia pulled 53.1 percent of the votes, despite the fact that Laurin Currie drew 5.5 percent and Joe Gonzales got 2.3 percent.

Place 5. Business man Manuel Zuniga and UT LBJ School associate professor Bill Spelman will lock horns in the May 31 runoff, as predicted by In Fact. Zuniga's huge lead in the general election, 43 percent vs. Spelman's 28 percent, is likely to erode badly. For one reason, environmental activist Karen Hadden pulled 12.2 percent and says she is endorsing Spelman. There was to have been a rowdy victory party at the politically historic Moya House on election night but instead there was a wake. Bobbie Enriquez, who pulled 10 percent of the Place 5 votes, told In Fact she was going out of town for a few days and would be thinking about her next move. Who to endorse will be a tough decision, she said. She does not want to endorse Zuniga because she does not feel the millionaire shares her deep concern for the "forgotten agenda" of women and children. But the pressure from Hispanics is enormous for her to endorse Zuniga anyway. Zuniga's victory would put two Hispanics on the city council for the first time. Not to endorse Zuniga, she says, might be to forever lose the Place 5 seat, which has been held by Hispanics since 1975. Gus Peña, president of East Austin Concerned Hispanics, pulled 6.8 percent of the votes in Place 5. He could not be reached about who he will endorse.

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