

Women don't fare so well in Oakland races

By WAYNE PEAL
STAFF WRITER

Primary returns are in. Ballots are counted. So, is this the year of women in politics?

For U.S. Congress and state House candidates in Oakland County, maybe not.

For Wayne County judicial candidates, maybe so.

As always, the abortion issue loomed large.

The area's most highly publicized female candidate, former Oakland Circuit Judge Alice Gilbert, finished a surprising third in her Congressional primary.

It was pro-life candidate Joseph Knollenberg, not the pro-life Gilbert or self-styled moderate Dave Honigman, who carried off the GOP nomination in the 11th District, winning votes from Birmingham to Livonia.

"As usual, Dave Honigman muds the waters and that's too bad," said Carl King of the Michigan Abortion Rights Action League.

Of three candidates candidates heavily backed by MARAL, only incumbent state House member Barbara Dobb was a winner, defeating two other female candidates.

Fellow state House hopeful Patricia "Pat" Goldchaux of Birmingham fell short in her bid to unseat first-term incumbent John Janian,

POLITICS

R-Birmingham.

"She ran a good race, but it's very hard to unseat an incumbent," King said.

While King is consoling herself with the victory of Dobb — and of Penny Crissman in the primary race for a Rochester-area state House seat — pro-life forces are ecstatic over Knollenberg's eye-opening victory.

"You hear so much about Oakland County being a pro-choice county yet it does have a sizable number of pro-life voters," said Jane Muldoon, director of the Michigan Right to Life PAC.

One of the primary's surprising female winners was pro-life Megan O'Neill, who defeated three male Republicans in her north Oakland Congressional district for the right to take on incumbent U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee, D-Flint, in the fall.

O'Neill's victory, pro-life supporters believe, is proof that female candidates need not be pro-choice to succeed.

The flip side: pro-choice male candidate Jerry Vorva ousted moderate incumbent Georgina Goss in a Plymouth-area state House race that may have turned more on the incumbent's involvement with a

controversial local sewer project.

Both races beg the question: Is election of a pro-life female a victory for the women's movement? Is election of a pro-choice male?

No such questions need be asked in probate and circuit court judicial races.

There, female candidates did well.

Half of Wayne County's six circuit court nominees are female. Denise Page Hood, Diane Marie Hathaway and Jeanne Stempelen will fight it out with Robert Ziolkowski, Joseph Vincent Brennan and John William Cahalan for three circuit court seats. Hood and Hathaway were the two top vote-getters in the primary. Another female candidate, Deborah Thomas, came within 700 votes of edging Cahalan for the final spot on the fall ballot.

Two female candidates, Cathie Maher and Nancy Diehl, survived the probate court primary.

No Oakland County judges had competition in the Aug. 4 primary.

Then there was the case of Oakland County executive hopeful Philip Marcuse, quoted as saying women "are not leaders."

He lost. To Democratic rival Betty Howe. By a 3-1 margin.

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