

Exposed! Salem's Delicious Secret

Salem has a secret. A hidden identity. A persona that will shock many who believe they know her well. Let's rip off the disguise and reveal the true nature of our town.

Liberal.

Facts don't lie. A fellow political junkie sent me analyses by ward, city, county, and state for several recent elections. The clear conclusion: Salem leans decidedly left.

In the 2012 presidential election, Salem voters favored Obama over Romney by 10%, 53-43. This wasn't far off Obama's statewide margin of 13%, 55-42. Yet Marion and Polk counties went for Romney by three and four percent, respectively.

Likewise, in the 2014 election for U.S. Senator liberal Jeff Merkley beat conservative Monica Wehby 54-38 in Salem. This was close to Merkley's 56-37 margin statewide.

How about Oregon's legalization of recreational marijuana last year?

Again, the numbers paint a liberal picture of Salem. Voters here said yes to legal pot by a 53-47 margin. This was less than Measure 91 won in Oregon as a whole, 56-44, but went against the "no" grain of Marion and Polk counties, as each rejected the measure 48-52.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Sure, there are a few highly liberal parts of Salem that sway elections, just like the populous progressive enclave of Portland does in Oregon, but most of this town leans conservative."

Not true.

Obama won in six of the eight wards in Salem, losing to Romney only in south Salem (ward 4) by 6% and in west Salem (ward 8) by 2%. Merkley won in every ward, a citywide sweep. Measure 91 mirrored the Obama results, with marijuana legalization getting a majority in six wards, losing only in wards 4 and 8.

Each city council ward has about the same population. However, people don't vote at the same rate everywhere in Salem. Turnout is higher in the richer, whiter, more Republican parts of town.

This helps explain why our liberal city has such a conservative bunch of city officials. And why the mayor and city councilors so often are at odds with the will of the people.

They wrongly think that because most of them were elected because of big-money special-interest political contributions, assisted by apathetic voter turnout, a majority of Salemites support their right-wing actions.

Well, they don't.

Salem is a liberal town currently led by City Hall conservatives. Hopefully this anomaly will be corrected as voters become more aware that non-partisan elections in Salem are such in name only.

Meaning, a mayor or city council candidate remains a conservative Republican or liberal Democrat even if the person doesn't have a "R" or "D" after his or her name.

A recently-formed group, Progressive Salem, seeks to educate voters about the true nature of who is running for what in this town. It also wants to recruit top-notch candidates for city elections.

Head to ProgressiveSalem.com and learn more. It's time for this liberal town to be led by like-minded people.

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com