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Democrats increase their majority on county board

Jennifer Roberts is likely to remain chair. Harold Cogdell and Dan Murrey the other leaders in the at-large races.

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10/7/2008 Harold Cogdell. The county commissioner at-large candidates are taking part Tuesday in the annual WTVI/League of Women Voters debate. TODD SUMLIN - tsumlin@charlotteobserver.com

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Democrats widened their majority on the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday, sweeping all three at-large seats, with about 96 percent of results in.

Still, the three at-large winners promised to work hard to reach out to all of their fellow Republican commissioners to address what they call tough challenges ahead for Mecklenburg.

Incumbent Jennifer Roberts received the most votes, with about 21 percent of ballots cast. Securing the other two at-large spots were attorney Harold Cogdell and surgeon Dr. Dan Murrey, who each secured about 19 percent of votes.

Their win means Republican incumbent Dan Ramirez lost his bid for re-election. He had

served on the board four of the past six years.

"I knew all along the problem is numbers," said Ramirez, who finished fourth. "We are outnumbered by Democrats and it shows there. It's not a question of ideas or philosophy or anything."

Rounding out the at-large ticket were Republicans Hal Jordan and Susan Walker, who each received about 13 percent of the vote or less.

In the other two contested races, Republican incumbent Karen Bentley held on to her District 1 seat, while school board member Vilma Leake was picked overwhelmingly to serve as the board's new District 2 representative.

Tuesday's results mean Democrats would hold a 6-to-3 advantage on the county board, better than the current 5-seat majority the party currently holds. The wider margin will make it easier for Democrats to approve proposals favored by those in the party, a potential advantage during upcoming talks on property assessments and tax rates.

Still, Roberts stressed: "We will have our work cut out for us. I plan to continue to work with everyone on the board to try to do what's best for all of the citizens of the county."

As the top vote-getter, Roberts is likely to retain her position as commissioners' chairman, a role she has served for the past two years.

Cogdell said the new board will need to stay focused on issues and "not allow personalities to dictate the policy discussions." He said important topics in the future will be the economy, education and criminal justice, as well as helping residents who are out-of-work.

"We still have some challenges," said Cogdell, who previously served on the Charlotte City Council. "There are people hurting in this community and we need to stay focused on helping them out."

Murrey, a political newcomer, said he was excited about joining the board, and thankful to all of his supporters.

An orthopedic spine surgeon and CEO of OrthoCarolina, he is believed to be the first sitting physician to serve as commissioner, which is also the board of public health.

In the district races, Bentley was leading with nearly 52 percent of votes, ahead of newcomer Rao Kommareddi, who had received about 48 percent of votes with only one precinct still out.

In the District 2 seat, Leake won about 77 percent of votes, compared to about 23 percent for Republican Tim McLeod.

On the school board, Leake represents the same neighborhoods that she will serve as commissioner. Her win means the school board will have to find a replacement to serve out the remainder of her current term.

Coming into Tuesday's election, there were guaranteed to be four new faces on the board. Democrat Parks Helms and Republican Dan Bishop did not run for re-election, while Democrat

Norman Mitchell lost to Leake in the primary.

Also, Democrat George Dunlap is expected to serve as the District 3 rep replacing Valerie Woodard, who died in October. Woodard had been running unopposed.

Also facing no competition this time around were incumbents Dumont Clarke, a democrat representing District 4, and Bill James, a Republican from District 6; and newcomer Neil Cooksey, a Republican who is succeeding Bishop as District 5 representative.

The new slate of commissioners will be sworn in on Dec. 1.

Register of Deeds

In another county race on the ballot, Democrat newcomer David Granberry was leading in his bid to replace Judy Gibson as the Mecklenburg register of deeds. With about 96 percent of precincts in, Granberry had received about 56 percent of votes cast, compared to about 44 percent for Gibson. Gibson, a Republican, had held the post since 1992.

The register of deeds is as custodian of many county records, including births, deaths, marriages, real estate transactions, and assumed names.



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whysure wrote on 11/05/2008 10:37:09 AM:

I live in a neighboring county and was looking at condos in Charlotte last week. This election has shown me that Charlotte/Meck is headed towards a permanent socialist majority like northern cities. With this in mind I'll deal with the commute, thank you very much.

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