

Dems line up behind McClintock challenger

By Susan Wood

More than 60 people packed a Lake Tahoe Community College room Thursday night to hear Bob Derlet, a Democrat running for the 4th Congressional district, provide a better prescription for government.

He's running against Rep. Tom McClintock, an Elk Grove Republican who's been in the seat since 2008 and logged 22 years in the California Legislature before that, having started at age 26 in the Assembly.

When asked by *Lake Tahoe News* how he plans to unseat an entrenched McClintock when others like retired military officer Charlie Brown failed, Derlet amped up his tone.

"I think people are tired of McClintock. It's time for a change. This is going to be the most dramatic election we'll remember in a lifetime, and we're gonna do it," Derlet, 66, of El Dorado Hills said as if he's part of a Democratic movement as a whole.

This race in particular may be difficult. The 4th District is large, encompassing the Sierra Nevada from Truckee to the Sequoia National Forest including Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Mariposa and Tuolumne, with portions of Fresno, Madera, Nevada and Placer counties. The sprawling region can be a bit overwhelming to a Democrat because it's half Republican voters, 35 percent Democrat and 15 percent declined to state.

"We've got to go after that 15 percent," Derlet said.



Bob Derlet wants to represent the California side of Lake Tahoe in Congress. Photo/Susan Wood

There may be a light at the end of the tunnel. The June 7 primary is non-partisan in California, so the two top vote-getters will move on to the Nov. 8 general election – and that will be the real race, Derlet contends. The only other opponent in the primary is Democrat Sean White.

Statistics aside, South Lake Tahoe resident and environmental advocate John Friedrich told Derlet he believes it is “unconscionable” Lake Tahoe, Yosemite and other areas of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range are represented in the federal government by “a Grade A climate change denier.”

To that, Derlet pledged the global warming phenomenon as a larger priority, joining education, wage equity, consumer rights, Social Security protection, women’s issues and especially health care as other focuses. On the latter, the long time physician admitted to *Lake Tahoe News* after the April 21 meeting that more work needs to be done on the Affordable Care Act with a monetary shift from administrative to care, but having millions insured when they weren’t before is testimony in itself to good federal policy.

But he spoke to the core of the Tahoe audience when he lauded climate change as “up there” in priorities.

“If global warming is not a priority, what’s the alternative?” he asked.

The South Tahoe Chapter of the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, Tahoe Area Sierra Club and LTCC Ecology Club sponsored the town hall meeting.

Derlet’s occasional declaration brought out cheers and applause from the issues-friendly audience. The cheerleading session made up for the lack in substance in how to address the change that he believes needs to occur.

Some attendees echoed the passion, with one man suggesting using McClintock’s failed natural resources management policies to edge out the career politician.

Another appeared concerned about the Democratic Party, believing it’s divided.

“I think after the conventions, people will come together,” Derlet insisted.

Albeit friendly to his cause, the audience came across more informed than most and at times pressed Derlet to step up the campaign. One person reminded Derlet afterward that he should have asked for money.

In recognizing he’s a little-known candidate, Derlet told *Lake Tahoe News* his campaign will ramp up soon with signs, more gatherings such as this one and messages in the media.

At age 8, Derlet’s first job involved selling newspapers at the very busy corner of Santa Monica and Vine boulevards in Hollywood. Later in life, he became a physician, eventually leading him to the Me-Wuk Indian Health Center in Tuolumne City. It was there he heard the plights of his patients that prompted him to get into politics.

“I care about people. They need to be protected,” he said.

Derlet comes across with a pleasant, mild-mannered approach. Some would like to see him become a little more aggressive.

"I think he needs to go after McClintock," resident Kim Carr said after the meeting.

She's worried about the traditionally low losing rate of incumbents.

"He's going to have to work hard to get his name out. That's the dilemma we're in," she said.

But there is a bright side.

"I think people are tired of do nothing politics. I think the fact the Republican Party is having a hard time getting behind its candidates with so many factions helps (Derlet's run)," she added.

Most concurred it's an interesting time for politics.

"I think the entire election system could be thrown in the air, and anything could happen," longtime local Laurel Ames said.