

Riemer upsets Trachtenburg

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By Paige L. Hill

There could be two new faces on the Montgomery County Council in 2011, but that's about it, with the victories of challengers Craig Rice (D) for the District 2 seat and Hans Riemer (D) for an at-large position. Riemer beat out one-term Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg (D) in her bid for re-election Tuesday night, earning more than 15 percent of the vote for one of the four at-large seats on county council in the democratic primaries. Riemer beat Trachtenberg by nearly 3 percent. Marc Elrich (D), George Leventhal (D) and council President Nancy Floreen (D) were able to hold on to their seats, though Elrich was the only incumbent to beat Riemer in the numbers.

"What can I say? I'm really excited," Riemer said Tuesday at his victory party at Jackie's Restaurant in Silver Spring.

Elrich led in votes with 17.1 percent; Riemer came in second with 15.2 percent, Floreen in third with 14.6 percent and Leventhal in fourth with 14.4 percent. Their fellow council incumbents who ran for re-election all won their primaries, many of them uncontested.

Of the county's 569,204 registered voters, 105,986 voted in Tuesday's primaries according to Board of Elections spokeswoman Marjorie Roher. That means just 18.6 percent of the voters turned out for the primaries. Results from absentee and provisional ballots will not be known until Sept. 22.

"That is when we can make it official," said Roher, who added that historically, those votes have been consistent with the numbers from election-day voters. Roher said 133 provisional ballots were cast in early voting Sept. 3 through Sept. 9.

"My main goal as a resident of the county is how to make our area an appealing place to live and conduct business," Riemer said. "I realized if I wanted to make it happen, I had to become a part of the process."

Riemer, who moved to Silver Spring in 2004, ran for the council's District 5 seat in 2006, but was defeated by Valerie Ervin (D), now council vice president, in that primary. Riemer has been outspoken and confident in his campaign for the seat, saying "when I am in office" instead of "if" for the months leading up to September.

"We don't have time to push our own political agendas; I want to be part of a council that works together," Riemer said. Though he refused to be specific, Riemer cited the lack of unified leadership and a "failure to work together" as the county council's major disappointment to their constituents.

Last-minute endorsements and donations from public employees unions turned out to be a good indicator of the impending at-large seat victories. Firefighters from across the state dumped thousands of dollars into Elrich, Leventhal and Floreen's campaigns in recent weeks, according to financial disclosure forms. The county's police force and general government employees gave incumbent candidates as much as \$6,000 each, which is the maximum contribution allowed by political action committees. Despite the council's decision to impose furloughs,

freeze salaries and reduce budgets to historical lows, the unions stood by the at-large council members.

“I want a clean sweep of the whole council, but that’s not business, and that’s not our reality,” said Gino Renne, president of Montgomery’s Municipal and County Government Employees Organization, which gave \$6,000 to Elrich, \$3,000 to Floreen and \$6,000 to Riemer.

Riemer easily unseated Trachtenberg, who chairs the council’s Management and Fiscal Policy Committee. Challenger Becky Wagner (D) followed closely behind Trachtenberg’s 12.8 percent, with 12.1 percent of the votes. Trachtenberg’s campaign was not helped by the fact that she has been at the center of two public controversies over the past two months.

In early August, the Ethics Commission began an investigation into the councilwoman’s office after Maryland Citizens for a Responsible Government filed a public complaint against Trachtenberg’s aide, Dana Beyer, for hindering a signature-collecting event to put a referendum on a bill Trachtenberg was pushing at the time. The councilwoman countered with a letter to U.S. Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez, saying that she had “lost confidence in the oversight function of our county government.”

On Sept. 9, the county police union asked the state Attorney General Douglas Gansler to investigate “potential financial improprieties” involving Trachtenberg from when she served as treasurer of the Maryland chapter of the National Organization for Women. Though Trachtenberg denied any wrongdoing, the group did not endorse their former employee for county council. Phone calls made to NOW were not returned.

Phone calls made to Trachtenberg on Tuesday were not returned.