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Votes on police services prove to be unpopular

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Times are about to change on the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners.

Three longtime incumbents lost their re-election bids in Tuesday's primaries to candidates who made public safety a centerpiece of their campaigns. And that might lead to a new approach on the controversial police services issue.

Ousted Commissioners Stephen Solowczuk, R-Saline, and Martha Kern-Boprie, D-Superior Township, consistently voted with commissioners from Ann Arbor and Pittsfield Township to eliminate general fund subsidies for communities that contract with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department for police patrols.

Ousted board Chairman Wes Prater, D-Saline, endorsed the contracts that phase out the funding for patrols, but generally stuck with three commissioners who sided with the townships, leaving most of the decisions in a 7-4 vote.

All opponents to the current board's philosophy needed was to swing two votes. Now, they potentially have three.

Former Ypsilanti Township Supervisor Karen Lovejoy Roe took all but one of the eight Ypsilanti Township precincts in the district, three in Augusta and two in York Township on her way to 55 percent of the vote to Prater's 36 percent, according to unofficial election results. William Cullen Riney rounded out the field with 9 percent.

Roe faces Republican Mitchell Gasche of Saline in the November election.

"I'm feeling pretty good right now," Roe said after running out to view postings in York Township around midnight. "People are really upset over paying more for police services and they're just fed up with taxes. They're struggling and just can't do it anymore."

Prater did not return calls from The Ann Arbor News.

Roe said she'd like to reverse the path the current board took toward phasing out funding for communities that contract with the sheriff's department for police patrols. She also said another priority would be to broker some political peace between the townships and the county over the process, a goal she shares with Ken Schwartz, who unseated Kern-Boprie with 53 percent of the vote. She received 47 percent. Barring any write-in or minor party candidates, Schwartz will run unopposed in November.

Schwartz, a former Superior Township trustee, credited his victory to a campaign that included environmental and development issues in addition to

police patrols. He also had a strong showing of volunteers donning hats and T-shirts at polling locations across the district.

Kern-Boprie said she was surprised to see the support Schwartz displayed at the polls and described the Schwartz campaign gear as "largesse" as opposed to effective Election Day organization.

She defended her position on the police services issue and her overall record during a tenure that started in 1996.

"I always tried to take a long-range look and make dispassionate decisions about what's best for the county as a whole," she said.

Political newcomer Jessica Ping Mills handily beat her three Republican opponents, sweeping the city of Saline and Saline and Scio townships on her way to 46 percent of the vote.

David Little, Mike Radzik and Solowczuk finished with roughly 18 percent of the vote each.

Ping Mills will face Manchester Township Democrat Wendy Burkhardt, who defeated Tom Partridge in the primary.

"I'm honored to be my party's nominee and now my focus is on carrying this momentum to November," said Ping Mills, who credited her victory to the county Republican Party's early endorsement and her strong emphasis on better representation and absentee voters.

Like Kern Boprie, Solowczuk stood by his votes on police services even though they angered constituents.

"We had a lot of hard decisions to make, and they were the right decisions, but it looks like it's going to take its toll on us," Solowczuk said, speaking of the other incumbents who were trailing early this morning.

Commissioner Ronnie Peterson, D-Ypsilanti, nearly became the fourth incumbent to lose Tuesday, but held off challenger Mark Namatevs for the second straight primary election with just 21 votes. He faces Republican Kurt Koehler in November.

Rolland Sizemore, D-Ypsilanti, also survived a scare, outlasting Tony Martin with 53 percent of the vote.

Incumbent Commissioners Mandy Grewal, D-Pittsfield Township (70 percent); Barbara Bergman, D-Ann Arbor (69 percent); Leah Gunn, D-Ann Arbor (62 percent); and Conan Smith, D-Ann Arbor (75 percent) all cruised to victories against a broad coalition of candidates focused on the police services issue.

In November, Commissioner Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor, is unopposed, and Commissioner Mark Ouimet, R-Scio Township, will face Lyndon Township Democrat Frank Grohnert, who won Tuesday's primary with 69 percent of voters in his race against Eric Borregard.

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