

St. Louis American

Voter turnout key for Reed

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16 of 28 aldermen endorse challenger for president

By American staff

Alderman Lewis Reed's bid to unseat the incumbent President of the Board of Aldermen Jim Shrewsbury on Tuesday has received the public support of a majority of his - and Shrewsbury's - colleagues on the city's legislative body.



Alderman Lewis Reed makes a point during a debate Sunday at Beaumont High School. The debate was for the seat of President of the Board of Aldermen for the City of St. Louis. At right is current board president James Shrewsbury. Photo by Wiley Price

A diverse group of 16 of the city's 28 aldermen has endorsed Reed, who has served as alderman of the 6th Ward since 1999.

In what is expected to be a tight race, voter turnout will play a major role in whether Reed's upset bid is successful. Reed supporters say they need the North Side to turn out in large numbers if Reed, an African American, is to win.

Reed opposes Shrewsbury in the March 6 primary. Both are Democrats; no Republican has filed in the race.

"We know that March primaries typically have a lower turnout than August primaries," said 5th Ward Alderwoman April Ford Griffin, who has campaigned for Reed.

"We think this election is extremely important, and Lewis has an excellent chance of winning - but that will only happen if people get out and vote."

Many of the aldermen endorsing Reed are familiar to regular readers of the American, including Aldermen Charles Quincy Troupe (1st Ward), Dionne Flowers (2nd Ward), Freeman M. Bosley Sr. (3rd Ward), O.L. Shelton (4th Ward), April Ford Griffin (5th Ward), Reed himself (6th Ward), Terry Kennedy (18th Ward), Jeffrey Boyd (22nd Ward), Frank Williamson (26th Ward) and Gregory Carter (27th Ward).

Reed also has the endorsement of both Michael McMillan, who vacated his post as 19th Ward alderman to run (successfully) for license collector, and Marlene Davis, who is running unopposed to replace him.

Reed, who hails from Joliet, Ill. and came to the area to study (and wrestle) at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, has a home base in the 6th Ward, a diverse segment of the city covering parts of the Central Corridor and the near South Side. His sources of support also are diverse, as aldermen Stephen Gregali (14th Ward), Jennifer Florida (15th Ward), Joseph Roddy (17th Ward), Kathleen Hanrahan (23rd Ward) and Lyda Krewson (28th Ward) also have endorsed him.

Other key diverse supporters of Reed include Brian Wahby, who endorsed Reed as committeeman of the 7th Ward but also chairs the city's Democratic Central Committee, and Mae Scheve, former Missouri Democratic Party Chairwoman.

Reed's African-American supporters on the Board of Aldermen, such as Troupe and Bosley, have said they support Reed, in part, because as a veteran member of the Aldermanic Black Caucus he is more sensitive to the needs of the North Side and the black community.

"Look at all the development that has been done in the 6th Ward," Bosley told the American. "What if he were able to cause some of that to happen citywide?"

Bosley added, "We need somebody on E&A who understands the needs of North St. Louis."

"E&A" is the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, the city's chief fiscal body, which is composed of the mayor, the comptroller and the aldermanic president.

Reed's aldermanic colleagues from the Central Corridor and some South Side neighborhoods also look to his record of economic development in the 6th Ward as a promising sign for a citywide official.

"Lewis has been instrumental in the enormous success of those neighborhoods -Lafayette Square, Loft District and Compton Heights," said 17th Ward Alderman Joe Roddy.

"He knows how to create change for the better."

Reed says he has been “directly responsible for \$1.7 billion in new economic development initiatives, along with various infrastructure improvement projects.”

Though Reed's supporters mostly have campaigned for him rather than against the incumbent, Roddy - who sponsored the board bill calling for an extension of the Barnes-Jewish Hospital lease on an isolated fragment of Forest Park - seized Shrewsbury's stance against that deal, yet in support of a dog pound in another city park, as a defining issue of the campaign.

Roddy said Shrewsbury “thought a garage roof and dog house were more important than the real needs of people - health care, jobs and taxes. The BJC lease addresses these issues, and Lewis knows this and supports it.”

The lease extension would bring \$2 million to the financially struggling city and create maintenance funds for Forest Park as well as benefits for other parks on the North Side.

“We need that to rebuild our city,” Reed said of the lease deal at a candidate's debate held Sunday at Beaumont High School.

At the debate Reed also was asked about another push-button civic issue, a proposed state intervention in the administration of St. Louis Public Schools.

“I never supported a state takeover,” Reed said. “Somehow we need to move past the politics, and I think that decision only adds to it.”

‘More legislative experience’

Though Shrewsbury has many more years of public service than Reed, 15th Ward Alderwoman Jennifer Florida said that Reed has a more impressive legislative record.

“Reed has more legislative experience than Shrewsbury,” Flowers said.

“When you compare legislative records, Reed has over 270 bills relevant to improving the quality of life for city residents to Shrewsbury's 223 in 25 years.”

Among his legislative accomplishments, Reed's Technology Bill reorganized the technology within the City's departments, decreasing cost and increasing efficiency. He also sponsored and aided in the passage of the first Community Improvement District in St. Louis, which redeveloped Lafayette Square. Reed drafted and worked on the successful passage of the city's first neighborhood-based Tax-Increment Financing in raising almost \$8 million to support neighborhood development plans.

Reed also aided in co-founding Bike St. Louis, which received over \$1.1 million in grants to establish cycling routes connecting Forest Park to the Riverfront and various other parks and points of interests throughout the city.

Reed told the American he did this, not because he is a cycling aficionado, but because urban cycling contributes to the perception of a safer city.

“St. Louis has a crime problem, but it also has a perception-of-crime problem,” Reed said.

According to Flowers, Reed has advanced more legislation than Shrewsbury because he is a much harder worker than the incumbent.

“Shrewsbury runs his law practice in St. Louis County full-time while collecting a City paycheck,” Flowers said, calling Shrewsbury “an election-year legislator, disconnected with the needs of our city.”

“We can no longer afford to waste the resource of the president's office,” Flowers said.

“Lewis Reed is independent, has integrity and will lead this city forward. There is so much more than we can do if and only if we get serious about addressing our city's issues.”

The diversity of Reed's support also indicates the hope held by some city legislators that he represents a new kind of politician in St. Louis, one with the potential to help heal St. Louis' most persistent divide: race.

“In a city that struggles with race in so many major decisions, Lewis is among the most color-blind politicians I know,” Roddy said.

“This is demonstrated by the fact that a majority of the alderpersons have supported him, regardless of the part of town they are from - North, Central or South City.”