



'Long night'

Late lines delay voting, election night results

Around 8:30 p.m. Tuesday night (March 3), as big-screen TVs inside the Butte Creek Country Club displayed Fox News coverage of Super Tuesday presidential primaries, people started growing restless.

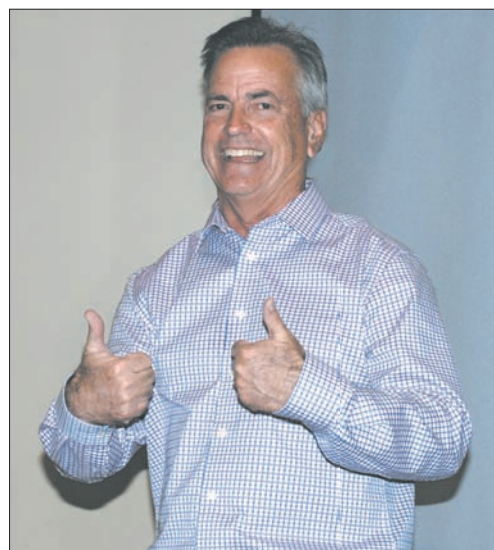
Nearly 100 had come out to support Tod Kimmelshue, a candidate for retiring Butte County Supervisor Steve Lambert's seat in District 4, which runs from southwest Chico through Richvale and Gridley to the county's southern border. Kimmelshue, a farmer and retired banker from Durham, faced Sue Hilderbrand, a political science professor, radio host and documentarian from Chico. Hilderbrand held two election-night events, at a restaurant in Gridley and a home in Chico.

In previous elections, the office of Candace Grubbs, the county's clerk-recorder and registrar, typically released the first batch of results online within a half-hour of polls closing at 8 p.m. But this was Butte County's first election without polling places; voters now mail their ballots or drop them off at 13 vote centers countywide—the spots for same-day registration.

Just after 9, Kimmelshue addressed the crowd: The county would not release results because people remained in line to vote. He thanked supporters, said he expected success—and “a long night.”

At Chico State's Bell Memorial Union, a late rush packed a second-floor room. Anybody at the vote center at the point it officially closed at 8 p.m. was able to stay. Approximately 50 people were still on queue around 10 p.m.

Several people told the CN&R they had been waiting to cast their ballot for almost three hours. One woman said she saw many would-be voters



Tod Kimmelshue celebrates election results in his race for Butte County District 4 supervisor.

PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

leave because of the wait time.

In a phone interview the next morning, Grubbs said three vote centers—all in Chico—had late lines: the BMU, Silver Dollar Fairgrounds and the Masonic Lodge. The BMU “was the worst,” she said, even though it had been open the longest, 10 days total. Her staff will meet next week to determine what happened.

“I think we're looking at multiple factors here,” Grubbs said, “but one of the biggest ones is procrastination.”

The county put its first results online at 10:02 p.m. Half of Kimmelshue's party had trailed away by then, but he announced to loud applause that the count—6,698 votes for him to 3,326 for Hilderbrand—would make it “impossible for her

Two hours after closing time Tuesday night (March 3), at around 10 p.m., about 50 people still wait in line to vote at the Butte County vote center inside Chico State's BMU.

PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

to overcome that lead.” The initial 2-to-1 margin held for the election-night results released at 2:08 a.m., in which Kimmelshue led 6,703 votes to 3,261, or 67 percent to 33 percent.

Grubbs estimated Wednesday that her office had approximately 11,000 ballots to count with 51,000 tallied. She will release the next report Friday (March 6) and the certified results March 27.

Hilderbrand, speaking to the CN&R by phone Wednesday morning, echoed Grubbs' view that the margin in her race will shrink, though “it's a lot of ground to make up.” She expressed pride in her “grassroots” efforts.

“I wish the two campaigns had stayed more focused on the issues facing Butte County,” Hilderbrand added.

Kimmelshue, as his event wound down, acknowledged that the final count might narrow the margin but was “pleased that the voters of the 4th District would have that kind of confidence in me. I'm very humbled by the support.”

Other local races

County supervisor: Incumbents easily kept their seats in the two other districts with elections. Bill Connelly (District 1, Oroville area) won 79 percent of the vote against Ian Joseph Greene; Doug Teeter (District 5, Ridge area) got 65 percent against Henry Schleiger.

District 5, which includes Camp Fire-decimated Paradise and Butte Creek Canyon, drew around 6,200 ballots compared to roughly 16,000 in the 2016 race.

Measure A: Voters rejected the parcel tax put forward by the Chico Area Recreation and Park District, with 55 percent opposed. Measure A would have funded improvements at district facilities but carried annual increases and would have run permanently.

Assembly: Gallagher, the Yuba City Republican whose district covers most of Butte County, already knew his November opponent would be Chico Democrat Jim Henson. Tuesday night, he had a 2-to-1 advantage overall, though that 35 percent cushion was 22 percent in Butte County.

Congress: Doug LaMalfa, the incumbent Republican from Richvale, will face Audrey Denney, a Democrat from Chico, in a rematch of the 2018 general election. In District 1, which spans 11 counties in northeast California, LaMalfa took 58 percent to Denney's 36 percent. In Butte County, LaMalfa led 53 percent to 44 percent.

Ashiah Scharaga contributed to this report.

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