

NEWS

West Side residents reflect on historic election

Mayor-elect Lori Lightfoot's rise to office prompts praise, questions from residents



by Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago April 8, 2019



Terreal Townsend, of Austin. | MAYA HORTON/Free Spirit Media



Local news, straight to your inbox! Sign up for our newsletter.

RECENT POSTS

At Restorative Justice Court Graduation, Young Men Caught In The System Get A Second Chance



Jonathan Eig Chronicles Trials and Tribulations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fellow Civil Rights Movement Demonstrators

A look at Austin's growing Hispanic population

A Beloved Community: West Side Arts Culture Nurtures Artists

A Lotus Blooms in Austin

Days after last week's historic election, many West Side residents were still processing the fact that Chicago will get its first African American female and first openly gay mayor.

Donna Thadison said that she supported Lightfoot over her challenger, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

"[Preckwinkle's] a good candidate," Thadison said. "But she should let somebody else get a chance to get in office. That's my opinion."

"I was surprised [by the election results]," said Jeff Stiers. "I guess I'll say I'm pretty proud of our city for electing a black woman as mayor. I think that's pretty fantastic. I don't think I followed it too closely enough, because I thought Toni had the advantage as more of a career politician. So I definitely didn't see the Lori tsunami coming."

Despite having won all 50 wards and 74 percent of the overall vote, the 56-year-old Ohio native and political outsider has never held public office. Preckwinkle, in comparison, has had a long career in Chicago politics, serving on the Chicago City Council for 19 years before becoming the Cook County board president and head of the Cook County Democratic Party. For some voters it was this long history in politics that made Preckwinkle seem to be the less appealing candidate.

"Lightfoot should have won, because no one wants the normal politician anymore," said Austin resident Jerard Jackson, owner of Jay's Barbershop on Austin Boulevard. Jackson said that he believes Preckwinkle's support for the controversial soda tax and her reputation as a "machine" politician ultimately cost her the election.

"People just want something new and fresh," he said. "I mean, give Lightfoot a try. Everyone else has tried."

Stiers said that Lightfoot will confront some challenges once she gets into office.

"I think it's going to be challenge for her to keep all of the business support the previous administration had," he said. "She needs to reach out to parts of the city that have not had the kind of support that they need."

For some West Side residents, the election wasn't on their radar at all, a reality that translated into 30 percent turnout across the city, which was up slightly from the 24 percent voter turnout for February's election.

Jamar Thorton, a resident of Austin, said he noticed the low numbers when he went out to vote. He said it's a shame more people didn't vote.

"We're one of the biggest cities in the country and just to have that small of a turnout ..." Thorton said. "You really can't say anything if you know things don't get done; you know, there's no comment for you."

Thadison said that it's important for members of the black community to exercise their right to vote when they can.

"I vote every time," Thadison said. "I teach my kids to vote. Our ancestors, you know, they fought for us to vote. I always teach my kids that. Give some back and always vote. Because if you don't vote you can't say anything."

Many people like West Side resident like Rosie Burg, of West Garfield Park, didn't vote or know which candidates were running, despite several campaign posters for Light foot lining West Side streets for miles.

"I was doing something else," Burg said. "I was at work, but that's good [Lightfoot won], as long as she does what she needs to do for us. If she's not going to do nothing for us, then there's no reason for her to even be in office."

Some West Side residents offered a litany of issues that they want the new mayor to address once she gets into office.

"Better housing, jobs, daycare for people that need daycare," Burg said.

Austin resident Barbara Staten-Carr had some priorities of her own.

"There are so many people who have not had the chance to have a job," said Staten-Carr. "Even though they have their degrees they're working at McDonald's and that's not cool. So we need more jobs and more communication with the young folks, because I'm 73. I'm thinking of the future."

"I think we're backed up in finances and what we owe," Thorton said. "We're behind in pensions and schooling and housing homeless. So there's a variety of things that need to be done. But to me it all starts with money."

CONTACT: michael@austinweeklynews.com

