

Beavers running again against incumbent Lewin for South Berwick District 148

By Jason Claffey jclaffey@fosters.com Fosters Daily Democrat, May 5, 2008



Courtesy photo District 148 Representative Roberta Beavers, a Democrat who is running against incumbent Republican Sally Lewin

SOUTH BERWICK, Maine — Democrat Roberta "Bobbi" Beavers is gearing up for another shot at the District 148 Representative seat armed with a secret weapon: dog biscuits.

The bone-shaped treats, Beavers said, help break the ice when she goes knocking on doors in Eliot and South Berwick, the towns that comprise the district.

Beavers knows dog biscuits aren't going to be the ultimate factor that determines whether she wins or loses. But when she came within three percentage points of defeating incumbent Republican Sally Lewin in 2006, tossing the family dog a Scooby snack in order to strike up a conversation with its owners certainly isn't going to hurt.

More than anything, Beavers said it will be a commitment to knocking on doors that will decide the race. It was that commitment that almost saw Beavers win a titanic upset over Lewin two years ago.

Soon after the 2006 June primary, when District 148 Democratic nominee Sandy Roseberry dropped out, Beavers, who at the time was lobbying the state Legislature for an adoptee human rights bill, was nominated by the South Berwick and Eliot Democratic committees to run against Lewin. At the time, Beavers had been living in South Berwick for just five years and had not run for office before.

"That was the last thing that ever occurred to me was to run for office," she said.

Beavers accepted the nomination, and after taking a few weeks to become versed in politics, was left with only three months to campaign. So she wrote some campaign literature, stuffed a bag of dog treats in her pocket, and began walking door-to-door.

"I was giving it a sincere effort," said Beavers, who estimated she visited 2,600 homes in three months, an average of 29 homes a day.

"I walked down long lanes, where I met people who said nobody had knocked on their doors in 40 years. They were so appreciative," she said. "Everybody that was home was friendly."

Beavers cited those efforts as the main reason why she only lost to Lewin by 124 votes out of about 3,600. Lewin ended up with 51 percent of the vote, Beavers with 48 percent.

"It was pretty darn close," Beavers said. "I lost by such a narrow margin, and to be so totally unknown, to do that well, it was pretty shocking.

"That inspired me to consider running again."

And so she is. After attending a meeting on the future of the Downeaster passenger train at Dover City Hall Wednesday morning, Beavers said she went out knocking on doors in Eliot — the official "kickoff" to her 2008 campaign.

Tanna Clews, the chairwoman of the South Berwick Democratic Committee, thinks Beavers will be able to close the gap between her and Lewin in 2008.

"I think that Bobbi ran a really strong race (in 2006) and I think with a strong turnout of Democrats in South Berwick and Eliot, Bobbi has a great chance of upsetting the incumbent," Clews said.

Beavers, 65, sees energy and health care costs as two "critical" concerns for Maine residents. She is advocating reducing barriers to renewable energy and having the state run its own electricity system or join the Canadian electric grid. She believes health insurance is in need of "radical" reform by having smaller health insurance companies compete against BlueCross BlueShield, which she labeled a "monopoly."

Beavers has been a staunch advocate of adoptee's rights — in 2007, she co-authored the Adoptee Human Rights bill, which was passed in both the House and the Senate and is scheduled to go into effect in January 2009. She said she "learned the ropes" of the Maine legislature while lobbying for the bill.

Recently retired from years as a research chemist, Beavers describes herself now as a "full-time volunteer." She does work for the Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast, the Senior Leadership Coalition, the Great Works Regional Land Trust, and is member of the Eliot and South Berwick garden clubs. She also spent several years in New Jersey as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for abused and neglected children.

On May 28, the South Berwick Democratic Committee will host a meet-and-greet with residents that will feature Beavers, District 146 candidate Mark Eves, and State Sen. Peter Bowman, D-York County. The event will be held at 6:30 p.m. at the Marshwood Great Works School.

For now, Beavers said she will be back out knocking on doors in Eliot and South Berwick, dog biscuits in hand.