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TOP STORY

Small looks ahead to general election after defeating Foley in Tuesday's primary

Molly Shelly
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Mayor Marty Small Sr. talks with a poll worker Tuesday at Community Haven in Atlantic City before casting his in the primary election.

Edward Lea, Staff Photographer

Molly Shelly

ATLANTIC CITY — As the final mail-in and provisional ballots were being counted, Marty Small Sr. seemed to have secured the Democratic nomination in the mayoral primary and was poised to face Republican Tom Forkin in the general election this November.

In a heated battle Small has called the ugliest campaign he's ever been a part of, Small defeated fellow Democrat Tom Foley 1,828 to 438. All results are unofficial.

John Froomjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, said one of the factors that contributed to Small's success Tuesday was his connection to the resort.

"This is not just like voting for a state assemblyman where Atlantic City voters may not know the candidate. This is someone who has deep roots in the community," Froomjian said. "Small is a graduate of Atlantic City High School and Stockton University. ... He has a formidable following, so he wasn't an easy candidate to go up against."

Now that Small has won the primary, he will continue his day-to-day efforts for the residents of the city while preparing for November, said Robin Wallace, spokesperson for Small's campaign.

"Atlantic City is open for business for the summer of 2021, progress is being made in every direction, and that's because Mayor Marty Small has been a tireless advocate and champion for this city, and that's not about to change," Wallace said.

Forkin, who ran unopposed in the GOP primary, said his team feels confident after Tuesday.

"It's not just about me winning; it's about the entirety of our ticket winning," Forkin said Wednesday. "It is crucial that we sweep and get fundamental change because we need it."

Republicans Matthew James Diullio-Jusino, 30, Maria Lacca, 58, and Rizwan Malik, 57, ran uncontested for three at-large City Council seats and will face Small's slate in November.

Foley's headquarters on Sovereign Avenue was locked with the lights shut off Wednesday afternoon, a far cry from the party that was being set up there the night before. Attempts to reach Foley for comment Wednesday were unsuccessful.

The path for both the Foley and Small teams to the primary was paved with lawsuits, name calling and accusations.

"I'm putting that campaign behind us because that was one of the dirtiest campaigns I was ever involved in," Council President George Tibbitt, a member of the Small ticket, said Wednesday. "I'm happy the voters saw past that stuff and were very supportive of us. It's time to get back to work for the city."

Also on the Small ticket were candidates Stephanie Marshall and Bruce Weekes. The three council candidates were the top vote-getters among seven candidates for the three at-large council seats on the Democratic side.

Weekes earned 1,661 votes, Marshall had 1,615 and Tibbitt had 1,566, according to unofficial poll numbers.

Small became interim mayor in 2019 after his predecessor, Frank Gilliam Jr., resigned after pleading guilty to stealing more than \$80,000 from a youth basketball charity.

Since then, he has had to fight to keep his seat, winning three elections in 2020 alone — defeating a change-of-government effort in May, securing a contested three-way primary battle in July and beating Forkin in the November election to secure a one-year unexpired term as mayor.

Froonjian said another factor in Foley's loss was his support of former Republican President Donald Trump and U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd.

“I mean, Democrats loathe Donald Trump, and in South Jersey, the strong activist Democrats also loathe Jeff Van Drew,” Froonjian said. “The primary is very different than the general (election). The primary is members of a party picking who their nomination is ... basically who turns out is party activists. People who do not just have passing knowledge of politics, it’s people who follow closely, who are connected to Democratic politics and who really care about the organization succeeding. So those are the people who are going to be most upset with Foley being a Trump supporter. ... That could explain some of the lopsidedness.”

Despite his confidence, Forkin expressed concern about Tuesday’s low voter turnout.

“We need to get people participating in the process because the only way to protect the process is to participate in it,” Forkin said. “For Marty, he’s trying to claim a big victory, but you don’t boast about something like that. He got a fraction of total voters in Atlantic City. It’s highly problematic for the system.”

According to poll numbers, there are more than 24,000 registered voters in Atlantic City, but Tuesday’s mayoral race only garnered 2,267 votes.

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