

coverstory

BUTLER V. OSBORN V. BLOOM

Assembly candidates face off for Beverly Hills' support in an election that could go down to the wire

By Melanie Anderson

Though the June primary election is still nearly four months away, Beverly Hills community leaders are actively supporting different candidates in the race for the Democratic nomination in the 50th Assembly District.

Assemblymember Mike Feuer's term is concluding this year due to term limits. Redistricting has changed the geography of Beverly Hills' Assembly district, which now includes Santa Monica and Malibu. In years past, the 405 freeway was the dividing line between two assembly districts. Beverly Hills' former district, the 42nd Assembly District, included parts of Sherman Oaks and Studio City. Mulholland Drive now marks the new district's northern border.

New election rules mean for the first time ever, the top two finishers in the June primary will advance to the November general election, regardless of party affiliation. Assemblymember Betsy Butler, who currently serves the 53rd Assembly District covering part of Los Angeles and the South Bay, and Torie Osborn, senior strategist for California Calls, an alliance of organizations advocating reform of tax laws and budget policies, are considered to be the frontrunners that will advance to the November election. Santa Monica Mayor Richard Bloom is also running for the seat.

In terms of the issues, all three candidates identify public education, the environment, job growth and social justice among their top priorities.

"I think the three candidates' voting records would be less than 1 percent different," said local political consultant Harvey Englander, who is not affiliated with any of the candidates. "I think the differences would occur in the kinds of legislation they themselves champion. Richard Bloom probably would champion more legislation that is environmentally oriented, Torie Osborn might advance legislation on human rights and civil rights, and I think Betsy Butler would advance legislation on consumers' rights. I think all three of them faced with each of the [three candidates'] legislation would cast the same vote."

Osborn has been gathering endorsements from the local Democratic clubs including West Hollywood/Beverly Hills Democratic Club, Malibu Democratic Club, Santa Monica Democratic Club and Stonewall Democratic Club. Betsy Butler is fresh off winning the endorsement at the California Democratic Convention this past weekend in San Diego.

Bloom, who has largely stayed under the media radar, has raised significantly less cash than Butler and Osborn in recent months.

According to the most recent reports filed with the California Secretary of State's office, as of Dec. 31, 2011, Bloom had approximately \$116,000 cash on hand, compared with Osborn's \$443,000 and Butler's \$367,000. In a six-month period between July and December, Bloom raised \$54,000, compared with Osborn's \$246,000 and Butler's \$394,000.

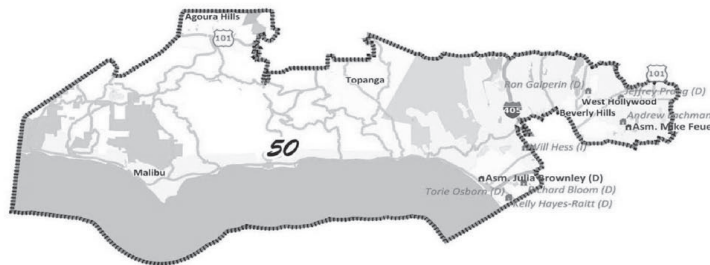
Planning Commissioner Brian Rosenstein has been providing Osborn with advice and support over the last few months. He said he was connected to Osborn, a longtime Santa Monica resident, through mutual friends. Rosenstein attended last weekend's Democratic convention as a delegate and cast his vote for Osborn.

"Torie is the local grassroots candidate who best understands our district and the issues affecting our district and will fight to represent the interests of our district," Rosenstein said.

Rosenstein said it has been encouraging to see Osborn gain the

support of local organizations and local leaders.

When asked how Osborn's campaign would keep the momentum going, Rosenstein said, "From here on out it's going to be reaching out to the community, talking to the residents, listening to what they have to say and really continuing our grassroots campaign. In my opinion [Osborn is] the best and right candidate to represent Beverly Hills in the state assembly."



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Rosenstein said Osborn plans to continue running a positive campaign focused on touting her accomplishments, which include leading the Liberty Hill Foundation, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center. As an advisor to Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Osborn helped establish the Office of Strategic Partnerships, linking government with philanthropic organizations.

Another Osborn supporter is former Mayor Linda Briskman, who met Osborn through Sheila Kuehl, who formerly represented Beverly Hills in the state Senate. Briskman has hosted an event at her home and introduced Osborn to friends.

Before endorsing Osborn, Briskman said she met all three candidates. In a different time or place, Briskman said, she thinks any one of them could do the job.

"I believe that Torie fulfills my expectations in terms of the kind of progressive candidates we need in Sacramento right now," Briskman said. "We need candidates like Torie, who value health care and education and are not afraid to get in there and work to build consensus. Consensus is the one thing the state leaders are definitely lacking right now. They have to win every single issue instead of working together."

West Hollywood/Beverly Hills Democratic Club President Lillian Raffel, who is a former BHUSD Board of Education member, has endorsed Butler. She said she waited to make her endorsement until after the club's endorsement vote, which made headlines when West Hollywood Mayor John Duran, a Butler supporter, stood up and shouted in protest of the club's endorsement of Osborn in a 43-28 vote on Jan. 25. Forty-five new members registered for the club with one check just in time

to be eligible to vote.

Raffel, the club's president, said the new members' registration and vote was within the rules.

"The only thing I did was make sure it was okay to take a check from one person to pay for 45 memberships and I verified it was fine and so they joined," Raffel said. "They were within their rights and the club rules to join and to vote for their candidate. That being said, a lot of people were very upset because they don't like what is called 'club stacking.' I know that the Osborn people felt that the process for the endorsement from the County party and the California state party was stacked against them and so this was how they counteracted."

Raffel said the initial recommendation had been for the club to endorse both candidates "as a reflection of our club."

Raffel said she supports Butler because of her experience. Butler, who was first elected to the Assembly in 2010, serves on a number of Assembly committees, including Budget and Rules. On her website, Butler touts her sponsorship of a bill that was signed into law last October that will ban the use of Bisphenol-A, considered to be a toxin, in manufacturing baby bottles and sippy cups.

Vice Mayor Willie Brien also appears on Butler's list of endorsements.

"[Butler has] passed several laws and has been very helpful and represented the people that she's currently [representing] very well," Raffel said. "You would hate to throw [out] a sitting assembly person who has all that experience [by] not reelect[ing] them. There is so much inexperience in Sacramento right now that we really need to have the most experienced people there."

Raffel said she was not bothered by the fact Butler moved into the 50th District, which was perceived as a friendlier district to Democrats than the South Bay district she is currently representing.

"It's not unusual for people to move a few miles away so they can run for a seat," Raffel said. "That doesn't mean that she can't represent us. She was asked to run in the seat by the [Assembly] Speaker John Perez. He did not want to have a primary race because we have limited funds in the Democratic Party. There were a lot of people that wanted to run for this seat. They deferred because they felt it was the right thing to do."

Englander said it was a surprise Butler moved into the 50th District.

"Her new assembly seat was certainly more difficult than her previous one to win, but she was the best person to keep it a Democratic seat, and it was surprising when she chose to abandon it and run for the 50th," Englander said.

Though Osborn and Butler are currently leading the field, Englander said Bloom should not be counted out.

"I think Torie Osborn is launching an extraordinarily strong candidacy," Englander said. "[Bloom's] name is the only name that has been on the ballot for any office in a substantial part of the district. Betsy Butler has the full force and support of the speaker and will have a substantial amount of money. I think this will be a nine-month death march and the last candidate standing will be the one who wins."

Mayor Barry Brucker said he has endorsed Bloom and former Mayor Steve Webb is listed on Bloom's website as an endorser.

"I've worked with Richard Bloom with respect to the mutual aid cities [Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Culver City and West Hollywood] and how they function together," Brucker said. "We've always had a wonderful working relationship. I think Richard would represent this district in a fair and balanced way."

Bloom, a family law attorney, has served on the Santa Monica City Council since 1999. He also serves on the California Coastal Commission, and chairs the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission and the Westside Cities Council of Governments. Brucker described Bloom as having strong business sense and being fiscally responsible.

Englander said he expects the race to be contentious.

"I think it already is contentious," Englander said. "I think there's a tremendous amount of animosity, particularly between Torie Osborn's campaign and Betsy Butler's campaign. I think that is what Richard Bloom is hoping for, that the two of them do destroy each other in the primary, that he's able to get into the runoff and that changes the equation."