

Democrats want a ‘blue dot’ in Council Bluffs

ANDREW SMITH
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

Iowa Senate District 10 candidate Steve Gorman enthusiastically told room of volunteers that, if door knockers can get enough Council Bluffs residents to vote, they'll do more than secure him a seat in the Iowa Senate.

Gorman, a member of the Council Bluffs City Council challenging Republican state Sen. Dan Dawson in District 10, told the volunteers they could also be the difference in Democratic state Rep. Josh Turek retaining his seat.

Moreover, they could help Vice President Kamala Harris win Iowa's six electoral votes — not just the so-called “blue dot” in Omaha that's making national headlines as the campaigns compete for Nebraska's split electoral vote.

Polling in Iowa suggests Democrats have an uphill climb between now and Election Day for Harris to carry the state over Republican former President Donald Trump. The advantage is enough that U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst told a Trump rally in Pennsylvania last week that “Iowa is in the bag” for Trump.

An average of polls by 270toWin puts Trump ahead of Harris in Iowa by 5 percentage points. ABC News' FiveThirtyEight shows a 7-point lead by Trump in the most recently tracked, sponsored by Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation.

A poll from the Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa released last month showed Harris narrowly Trump's lead to 4 percentage points, compared to “a double-digit deficit” that President Joe Biden had before bowing out of the race.

That same Iowa Poll also found the Democrats across the state are more optimistic since Harris took over the top of the ticket.

Pottawattamie County Democrats — despite western Iowa's reputation as a stronghold for Republicans — are similarly excited.

Lisa Lima, chair of the Pottawattamie County Democrats, told The Nonpareil that people's moods shifted when Harris replaced Biden as the candidate. Lima said their biggest challenge right now is getting people out to vote.



ANDREW SMITH, THE NONPAREIL

Gregory Christensen, vice chair of the Iowa Democratic Party, left, talks with Iowa Senate candidate Steve Gorman, right, at his campaign headquarters on Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024.

“We know people get busy in their own lives, and sometimes they put it aside, but if they actually have a plan ... then they're more likely to get out and vote,” Lima said.

Iowa Democratic Party Chair Rita Hart said the change from Biden to Harris created a level of excitement she had never seen before, even in Iowa's 4th Congressional District, which includes Council Bluffs and Sioux City.

“Here in the 4th District, there's definitely more enthusiasm, more volunteers, more excitement and more hope that that we're going to get a good result here in November,” Hart said.

Ryan Melton is running against incumbent Rep. Randy Feenstra in the 4th District in a rematch of an unsuccessful challenge in 2020. Melton told The Nonpareil that his main issue is addressing population decline which he ties to health care, education, pollution and other quality-of-life factors in Iowa.

Melton has also been running hard on eminent domain, a topic that has divided conservatives over whether carbon dioxide pipelines should qualify. His pitch to voters has been: “Hey, you don't have to change your political affiliation to vote Democrat.”

But Democrats do need voters to turn out for their candidates if they want to overcome the advantage Republicans have in southwest Iowa. Fortunately for them, there are voters on the bench who could be swayed into participating.

More than 69% of voters in Pottawattamie County participated in the 2020 election, but that rate only puts the county in second-to-last place behind Webster County in central Iowa for turnout.

“What we've known from the very beginning is that we haven't been getting out the Democratic votes,” Hart said to volunteers during a recent visit to Council Bluffs. “If we get do a better job this time of getting out that Democratic vote, we're going to have more success.”

Hart said she believes there's an active strategy from Republicans to discourage young people, as traditionally younger voters hold more liberal viewpoints.

Starlyn Perdue, chair of Pottawattamie County Republican Party, described the Republicans as the “party of energy and excitement.” Perdue said that local Republicans are working hard to support all the GOP candidates across the county, state and federally.

“I see all the action and all the work that we're doing statewide to support President Trump, our candidate, and know that it's going to be successful on Election Day because we've been working so hard for it,” Perdue said. “While the Democratic Party may run on joy and feelings, our voters are excited and energized to run on policy.”

Council Bluffs as a ‘western Iowa blue dot’

The Pottawattamie County Democrats want to create their own “western Iowa blue dot” out of the the campaign office for Gorman and Turek.

The idea is a play on the movement created for Nebraska's 2nd Congressional District, which covers most of Omaha. Nebraska splits its electoral votes, so if Harris wins there, she could bank of the state's five electoral votes.

Nebraska's 2nd District has drawn visits from Harris' running mate, Tim Walz, as well as an influx of campaign spending and yard signs. A New York Times/Siena College poll released this week shows Harris has a 12-point lead in the Omaha district.

The campaign office in Council Bluffs hopes to capture the same energy, with a portion of one wall is covered in signed blue dot stickers. Hart added her dot to the wall during her visit.

Iowa is a winner-take-all state for the presidential election, but Hart said the Democrats are in a lot of close races across the state. Votes for president in Council Bluffs count toward the statewide tally and could help push the state back into the blue if Harris performs well enough in central and eastern Iowa.

Realistically, though, Iowa isn't where the presidential race will be decided.

“I think people are pretty realistic. We're not expecting that all Democrats are going to win this election, but we're going to do better,” Hart said. “It's going to set us up for even better times in 2026.”

Voters tired of ‘bomb throwing’ at opponents

Television viewers have likely seen a torrent of political ads lately.

Gorman said people are tired of “bomb throwing” and “polarized parties” at the state level. He said that real people are looking for change because politicians are not having conversations about their problems.

When campaigning on doorsteps people don't agree with using money to fund private school vouchers nor government intervention for reproductive rights, Gorman said. He also said that local control is important and that the state government in Des Moines keeps chipping away at local governments.

“From my conversations that I had up throughout the city and Carter Lake, we're looking for change at the state level,” Gorman said. “I'm your friend, I'm your neighbor and I'm your family member. ... No one's going to take care of us, except for us.”

Turek recently addressed attack ads that favor Republican James Wassell's candidacy for the Iowa House District 20 seat.

Turek said they make false claims, such as one ad that says Turek “voted to keep sexually explicit material in elementary schools” — a reference to his opposition to a bill that restricts what books are available in schools, resulting in the removal of many books from school libraries across Iowa.

“They said, ‘vote against racism, vote against Josh Turek’ and said that I wanted to put drag queens in every school,” Turek said. “None of these things I've ever said, none of these things I've ever weighed in on and, unfortunately, those are the political games they play.”

Turek won his Iowa House seat by six votes in 2022. Turek initially told his reelection campaign to run exclusively positive advertisements, not to disparage somebody's character. He now plans to respond with some of his own, but grounded in Wassell's own words.

“I'd rather win on policy and win on ideas,” Turek said.

Follow these tips for smooth experience at polls

HAILEY PECK
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

As Pottawattamie County residents prepare to take to the polls on Election Day, here are a few things voters should keep in mind.

Voters should plan to ensure that they arrive at the polls on time. Polls open at 7 a.m. on Nov. 5 and close at 8 p.m. — which is earlier than in the past. As long as a resident is in line by 8 p.m. at a polling site, they will still be able to vote.

Early voting

Pottawattamie County residents have had the opportunity to vote early since Oct. 16. The Auditor's Office will be open on Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to give voters an extra opportunity to vote early.

Residents who turned in absentee ballots voting can also track their ballots on the Secretary of State's website by entering their name and ZIP code. Ballots sent through the mail must be received by 8 p.m. Nov. 5 in order to be counted.

Voter education

Voters are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the candidates and issues on the ballot prior to heading to the polls.

Residents can reference The Nonpareil's voter guide — among other resources — to learn about the candidates and issues they may see on the ballot.

Voters can also go to the auditor's website to look up sample ballots as well as information on voting precincts.

What to bring

Voters need to bring a form of proof of identity to the polls. Identification must be current and unexpired.

Accepted forms of proof of identity are an Iowa driver's license, Iowa non-operator ID, U.S. passport, U.S. military ID or veteran ID, Iowa voter identification card or a tribal ID card/document.

Voters looking to register on Election Day — or those who have changed precincts or otherwise moved — must bring a proof of residence if their proof of identity does not contain the voter's current address.

Accepted forms of proof of residence are residential lease, utility bill, cellphone bill, bank statement, paycheck, government check, other government document or a property tax statement that's current within 45 days of final payment day.

Citizenship documents

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate, recently released a list questioning the citizenship of 2,022 registered voters, including 31 in Pottawattamie County.

Pate asked local election officials at polling sites to challenge ballots from voters on the list of possible noncitizens, The Nonpareil recently reported. Some of the people on the list have been identified as citizens with the legal right to vote.

Challenged voters would be able to cast a provisional ballot, allowing time for officials to determine if the voter is eligible. If they are citizens, their votes still would be counted, albeit not on election



JOE SHEARER, THE NONPAREIL

Mike Graham marks his ballot while voting in the Iowa primary election at Queen of Apostles Church in Council Bluffs on Tuesday, June 4, 2024.

night but later as part of the canvassing process immediately following the election.

Pottawattamie County Auditor Melynn Houser said that anyone who has recently gained citizenship is encouraged bring their papers to the polls to err on the side of caution. Doing so could allow them to avoid casting a provisional ballot.

What to wear

Voters in Iowa can wear clothing in support of candidates to the polls. However, if they choose to do so, they are not allowed hang around a polling site or chat with others in line, as political conversations are not allowed at the polls.

Adaptive voting

Voters who may need accessibility accommodations will have a

couple options come Election Day.

Voters who are unable to enter the polling place due to disability have the option of curbside voting. Voters can arrive at their polling site and call the number posted on a sign there to have a Democrat and a Republican come out and assist them with casting a ballot.

Polling sites also have accessible voting equipment for disabled voters who don't want someone to help them.

Addressing problems

Federal law protects voters from crimes such as threatening violence against election staff, intimidating or bribing voters, buying and selling votes, impersonating voters, altering vote tallies, stuffing ballots, boxes, and marking ballots for voters without input.

Voters should be protected from

Updated polling site locations

The following polling locations in Pottawattamie County have changed since the last federal election, according to the auditor's office:

CB13 moved from Union Pacific Railroad Museum to St. John's Lutheran Church at 633 Willow Ave.

CB18 moved from Emanuel Church of Nazarene to Compass Church at 2007 S. Seventh St.

CB19 moved from My Father's House to Creekside Church at 3320 Harry Langdon Blvd.

Garner moved from New Horizon Church/Eastern Hills Baptist to St. Patrick's Catholic Church at 4 Valley View Drive

any interference while voting and any acts used to prevent or discourage voters.

If any type of interference or election crime occurs, voters have a couple of options.

They can contact the local FBI field office at 515-223-4278 for allegations of election fraud and election abuses.

For possible violations of voting rights, claims can be made to the Civil Rights Division in Washington, D.C. via a complaint form on civilrights.justice.gov or by phone at 800-253-3931.

Any crimes of violence or intimidation should be reported to 911 first.

Over 300 of the Nation's Top Artists & Crafters • Unique Handcrafted Treasures

Autumn Festival

AN ARTS & CRAFTS AFFAIR

Liberty First Credit Union Arena
2 miles south of I-80 on 72nd Street • FREE PARKING

Thursday NOV 7 11am-8pm	Friday NOV 8 11am-8pm	Saturday NOV 9 9am-6pm	Sunday NOV 10 10am-4pm
-------------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------	------------------------------

Admission: \$10/Adults, \$9/Seniors, & Free/Under 10
Paid Admission Good All Weekend With Our Handstamp
\$30 Gift Certificate Awarded Hourly

OMAHA
41ST
Annual
Tour
SHOWS • FALLS • SUNDAYS

Bring this coupon for
\$1 OFF
one admission