

Podcast: This Scene
Co-hosts David Rasmussen & Alex Gedstad
Interview of Lena Buggs

Background on candidate:

Lena Buggs is the Green Party Candidate for district 65A. Her platform is based upon a cost of living wage of \$15 per hour, making housing sustainable for lower-income people, and community-based policing. Buggs' district represents the Lexington-Hamline neighborhood, where she lives with her wife and two daughters, and portions of Snelling-Hamline, Summit-U, Hamline-Midway, North End, Cathedral Hill and Ramsey Hill, forming a 2010 Census population of 39,531 people. 27% of 65A's residents receive some form of public assistance, or financial aid. The census As of press time, October 31st, 2014, she is proud that she and her team have knocked on every door in the district four times over. ~Alex Gedstad

Buggs on cost of living wage

Small businesses are what are growing our local economy here, and they pay higher taxes. When I talk to small businesses, they say, "Hey Lena, we'd love to pay cost of living wages, but we simply can't afford it because our taxes are higher and our revenue is than the corporations." A small business is deemed as a gross revenue generating business that's under \$500,000.

Co-host David Rassmussen: You've done a lot of talking to your constituents.

LB: Definitely. Door-knocking, literature drops, parades and fairs, and lots of media bringing this message for the people, to the people, and I'm excited to offer a bill, should I be elected, to get people out of poverty.

DR: And that's by making more jobs available and providing a living wage.

LB: That's correct. It's community-based economics that keeps resources here in the community.

DR: How is it that your bill keeps people employed?

LB: By cutting taxes and having subsidies on small businesses so they can pay people cost of living wages, by investing in renewable energy. Those jobs cannot be outsourced, as well as expansion of broadband. Those are local jobs that will get people in our district and beyond, working those jobs. Gainfully employed jobs that will bring a 40-hour work week. A lot of residents in my district are unemployed or under-employed.

Buggs on housing

LB: We currently have 1,226 vacant homes in this district, and it just simply ought not be. The person who currently represents this district lives next to an abandoned house, and there's three vacant buildings on her block; on her watch. And there was a financial appropriation that passed for housing, for 100 million that went to housing, but it's being held by gatekeepers, if you will, and those resources for housing aren't getting back to the community. so that's a very important issue for residents in my district.

DR: Where should the housing go? Along the light rail, as some people propose, or should it be more broadly dispersed?

LB: It should definitely be more broadly dispersed, but as I had indicated, we have a lot of beautiful homes here that were built in 1939 or earlier. I think those homes should be refurbished, and I think the abandoned homes could house families. I don't think that anyone should be paying any more than 25% of their gross income toward housing expenses.

Buggs on police

LB: I think we all would agree that policing is a necessary evil. We definitely want to make sure that the residents are being protected; however there's a climate now where police brutality is running rampant. I propose that, should I be elected, I will bring a bill that will require police to carry body cameras and liability insurance when they brutalize members of the community, and then, after so many instances or patterns of abuse, they would lose their job.

And that should happen if you're abusing your power and you're brutalizing members of the community. But I also think that we need to get back to community policing. Police should be getting out of their cars, they should be in neighborhoods, they should be walking the beats. They should be more engaged, and I think that there are trust issues, primarily in communities of color, with the police. They come with a militarized force in communities of color.

DR: That was an issue, certainly with the militarization of police, in the Ferguson killing that happened...

LB: You know, all politics are local, so if you just look at the Chris Lollie case, and if you look at North Minneapolis now, Gene Harteau is requiring Minneapolis police officers to carry body cams starting on July 1st, 2015.

Police need to get back to being peace officers, instead of abusing their power.

Buggs on government

DR: So you've described your feelings about the role of police. How is it that we become more of a community? How do we get everyone represented rather than just the people used to having all the power?

LB: First, we've gotta start with our elections. Our electoral politics here is a broken system. Right now we have a two-party monopoly, and you can't tell the difference; they martyr each other. We need to have more ranked choice voting, so that people can really feel that they're represented, and they have more of a choice. I think we need to start there. We only have ranked choice at the city level in Saint Paul, we do not have it at the state level.

DR: So that's no good for you then.

LB: That's why I'm saying we need ranked-choice voting. I eluded at the top of the show that all politics is local. Ranked-choice for the city isn't enough. I also think that this past legislative session we had a supermajority where the democrats controlled the governor's office, the house and the senate, and there was a lot of legislation that got missed, and wasn't enacted. The Toxic-Free Kids Act got missed, Representative Karen Clark's GMO labeling bill only received an informational hearing, the MN Sex Offender Program got missed. E-reader legislation got missed.

There was tons of legislation that got missed, and it's really sad, because it's as though people aren't being represented, but the politicians are being represented in the form of unnecessary stadiums, a \$77 million Senate building that taxpayers got stuck with, \$975 million in corporate welfare to Zygi Wilf and the Vikings, a losing franchise for the last few years, much to the shagrin of Minnesota residents, but we've gotta stop the waste. So I think if people start actually voting their hopes instead of their fears, and this whole lesser of two evils, I think we have a lot of work to do.

DR: It's really hard to get engaged with people, though. You, probably more than anybody I've noticed, have been engaging one-on-one with the community, but how is it that you get them to take action that's in their best benefit?

LB: I think we have to begin talking about issues that matter to people, where they can apply them to everyday life. It's hard to get people engaged when they're hungry. It's hard to get people engaged when they don't have full-fare employment. It's hard to keep people engaged when their children are failing in the public school system. So I think if we start talking about those issues and we actually get out of our cars and our homes and start having more community events, I think that that keeps people engaged. I've been engaged in civic involvement, and civil liberties, and civil rights for the last 9-10 years.

Alex Gedstad: You've mentioned some stuff about the politicians we have in office right now. It seems like they're not willing to pass a lot of the stuff, but generally these politicians will be on their campaigns, claiming that they will do it if they get elected, and at the end of their term, it's still on their "to-do list", which means that it's probably not gonna get done. What would set you apart from these people who's claims or promises don't get done.

LB: I have a strong record of community service in the community, so when we talk about employing people and bringing people from poverty to prosperity, I mean that I have people,

members of my campaign earning \$15 an hour; I'm actually living that. And in addition to the subject of housing I've worked on several housing initiatives. I'm known for participating in police brutality protests and working with advocacy groups such as Communities United Against Police Brutality, Students United Against Police Brutality, so these are issues, long-standing, long-time issues in my community that are relevant and that I've been a part of for a very long time. I think that message is resonating with people. Dave, when you first came in here, you said "hey, I live by Snelling and I've seen you out". It's just about engaging with people. So if you've seen me out and you've worked with me on any sort of community project, the name Lena Buggs comes up.

AG: A lot of campaigns will get money from Political Action Committees and from corporations, right? And if I'm correct you don't accept those offerings?

LB: Correct. I don't accept any financial contributions from corporations, I don't accept any PAC money, my contributions simply come from good people, the working poor, the elderly, the disabled, the disenfranchised. I mean we've got great people in the district, as I indicated at the top of the show, we're a very poor district where people can only afford to give \$5 contributions, \$15 contributions, just because they believe in my candidacy and they believe in the vision that I'd be bringing forth at the state legislature, so I'm very proud of that, I'm very excited. That was another legislative bill that didn't get passed this session either which was the move to amend legislation which basically says that corporations aren't people and money isn't speech, so it was basically a bill to get big money out of politics. I think that's a distinguishing characteristic between my campaign and arguably the incumbent's campaign.