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## Professor Tari Renner Interpreted Election Results in McLean County

Eric Stock

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## WGLT Interview with Tari Renner, Nov. 10, 2022

Charlie Schlenker(announcer): Let's hear from Illinois Wesleyan politics and government professor Tari Renner who talks with WGLT's Eric Stock about Mclean county's political colors and how they've gradually been changing over several decades.

Tari Renner: Quite unusual we briefly had a democrat representing us in 2008 to 2010 with Debbie Halverson but that's you pretty much have to go back to the Roosevelt's landslide of 1930's to have a time where Democrats were represented in this area. So we've certainly seen that um Mclean county has since the 80s has gradually become much more competitive more of a two party system. It still is as a whole leans a little bit more Republican so you might say it's not totally purple but maybe slightly pink but in this particular midterm it's the best the Democrats have ever done in midterms and the biggest advance is over time and in the past had been presidential elections where Clinton came pretty close to winning in the 90s and then Democrats were competitive in presidential races, Obama won here in 2008. But midterms, even good midterms for Democrats, like 2018, four years ago or back in 2006 a very good year for Democrats the party did not do very well in Bloomington-Normal

Eric Stock: Looking at the numbers for Bloomington-Normal is this a reflection of changing voters' minds or just the voters are changing?

Renner: I think it's a little bit of each. Mostly it's because were growing and with Rivian were growing even more we have new people who are coming in and that doesn't mean that the new people were all necessarily democrats but they are more likely to have mixed partisanship and that has over time made us more diverse and made us more competitive. This is not the... I mean... since there was a Republican party Mclean county has always voted Republican they even voted against Adlai Stevenson who was from Bloomington when he ran for president in 1952 and 1956 in fact overwhelmingly almost two to one for Eisenhower over Stevenson and there was very little movement from whether or not the Democrats nominated Harry Truman for president or Adlai Stevenson or Kennedy, or Humphrey uh basically the Democrats were somewhere between 29 and 36 percent for generations and there doesn't seem to be much moving that but now that's certainly a thing in the past

Stock: In this election Sharon Chung in the Illinois house won sixty percent of the vote in Bloomington and Mclean county. Dave Koehler had similar numbers several nearby Illinois house districts that represent rural areas all had uncontested races Bill Hauter, Dennis Tipword, Travis Weaver. Democrats did not even contest these races just as Republicans have long conceded some Chicago area districts, is that the unintended consequence of these new political maps that are really dividing the population?

Renner: I don't know. I don't know that its unintended I think it's quite deliberate actually by the Democrats packed large numbers of Republicans into very, very solid Republican districts so they have a lot of wasted votes –

Stock: -- I guess that it cuts both ways

Renner: Right, right the 91<sup>st</sup> district as it was drawn is a very much a Democratic gerrymander basically you have nothing east of Veterans Parkway in this which is not solidly Republican anymore but certainly the most Republican area of Bloomington and Normal and so they basically took central and west Bloomington and Normal and then kind of followed interstate 74 and connected this with the Peoria state house district by including Bartonville in east Peoria areas that are swing-y swing-ish if you will

Stock: So Chung lost in Peoria, Tazewell and Woodford county what does that signify since that was clearly Mclean county that won it for her I mean this is where she is from but that it where he opponent is from too.

Renner: That's absolutely right it the um but the areas of Mclean county with the exceptions of the few rural areas that are included are the most democratic parts of both Bloomington and Normal and certainly a hefty ISU student turnout was certainly very helpful there but it was about a 1,400 vote margin so it was still comparably close by 50 to 48 percent but it's not at all surprising that the parts of Woodford, Tazewell, and Peoria went Republican.

Stock: And Illinois 17 got a bit more into the national mood prognostication seemed to overestimate how badly Democrats would do uh why do you think that is how is it that Sorenson won is there something bigger here that goes beyond this race.

Renner: Well yeah I think there are a couple things but first of all it's also a democrat gerrymandered district so it goes from Bloomington/Normal again the most democratic parts of Bloomington Normal to Peoria to Rock Island then up to Rockford it uh a very oddly shaped district to try to link as many democratic constituencies together but it's certainly once that was not all safe for Democrats it was definitely in some ways a risk for them to draw this had there been a national wave this race could of easily gone in the other direction. Obviously this was a race that Cheri Bustos used to represent and last time she barely won and it was a narrow Trump district in 2020.

Schlenker: That was political scientist and former Bloomington mayor Tari Renner with WGLT's Eric Stock. Ten democrats also won election to the Mclean county board for the first time. The board is split evenly between Democrats and Republicans.