

# Primary includes district leaders

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript

The Orange Democratic Committee elections for district leaders will be conducted as part of Tuesday's primary.

The last time committee elections were held was in June 2008, a month after the municipal contest that ushered in Eldridge Hawkins Jr. as mayor. At that time he completed an upset victory sweep by becoming chairman of the city's Democratic Committee after defeating North Ward Councilwoman Tency Eason in a tight contest.

The outcome of that election was somewhat controversial. Hot weather and a power outage forced the ballots to be cast in a parking lot instead of the indoor site where the meeting had been scheduled. There also were questions regarding some of the votes cast.

Eason lost to Hawkins, 15-14. She questioned the validity of the result and requested a Superior Court review. A judge dismissed her lawsuit.

This year, Eason said she is only running to secure her district leader position after her re-election to the City Council as the North Ward representative in the May 11 municipal election.

"I'm running for my district seat, but I don't know if I will be running for the chairmanship again this year," said Eason. "We've got to get out there and make sure we get new people in those spots."

No matter who has the top spot in the city's Democratic Party establishment, Eason said she wants to make sure that person is doing so for all the right reasons. She said Orange needs its leaders to be the outspoken advocates of the city and its residents in the face of Gov. Chris Christie's budget cuts and the ongoing recession.

The same thing goes for the City Council, Eason said. She asserted it was time to "forget about politics" and start "looking out for the average citizen."

"You have to be a team player and you can't be selfish, just doing what's best for you and not the entire city," said Eason. "We've got to educate our people to keep them informed about what the administration is doing and why they're really doing it." Hawkins concurred with Eason. "These elections are about how to build and maintain the strongest possible Democratic Party in Orange. A strong party means more state, federal and county help for Orange," said Hawkins. "A strong Democratic Party means that when the people of Orange speak, our voices will be heard." Information about candidates who are seeking positions on the Orange Democratic Committee can refer to the sample ballot which was mailed to all registered voters or by calling the Essex County Democratic Committee headquarters at 973-633-8300.