



**Diane Mack**

GUEST VIEWPOINT

## ***Running for office is not a leisure pastime***

The 2018 primaries are a year and a half away, and candidates are already pre-filing for two of the local races that are likely to be much contested next year: Escambia County Commission District 4 and Santa Rosa County Commission District 2.

It's unfortunate that of the four early candidates for these seats only one, apparently, is doing what it will take to win: working at raising serious money and spending every available hour in campaign mode.

Unless you grow up in a political or politically active family, no one teaches you how community politics works. If you're a man, if you're lucky enough to get connected with others who are politically astute, you may pick up the necessary knowledge over cigars or poker, golf or fishing, business dealings or community projects. If you're a woman, you acquire that knowledge sometimes from willing connections, but far more often by the seat of the pants and through the school of hard knocks.

In recent weeks several politically astute gentlemen and Northwest Florida leaders have kindly shared with me, in the course of private meetings, their political insights and no-holds-barred advice about running for public office. They were exceedingly gracious in doing so, and I thank them on behalf of the Institute for Women in Politics.

On April 18, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

the Institute will host a free workshop, "Politics 101: Plan Now. Win Later." The objectives of the workshop are to impress upon participants that running for office is a serious business and to give them a jump start on planning if they are considering running at some future date. The workshop is available only to members of the Institute, but anyone who is not yet a member may attend if she (or he) joins by April 12. The only requirements for membership are submitting a biographical information form and paying dues (\$100 per year), all of which may be done online:

<http://iwppflorida.org/membership/>.

Malliga Och, assistant professor in Global Studies and Languages at Idaho

State University, recently wrote: "...actually getting women elected really depends on the availability of open seats....In American politics, incumbency is the most reliable factor for predicting election outcomes: 98 percent of incumbents have been reelected between 1996 and 2016 in the [U.S.] House, with similar rates for the Senate....

"If we want more women in politics, we need to be strategic about where and when we have women run — and most importantly we need to channel our financial resources to female candidates in both Democratic and Republican districts where

they have a real chance of winning. Only then we will translate numbers into success.”

The mission of the Institute for Women in Politics is to work toward getting more women elected or appointed to public office in Northwest Florida. Since our founding in 2013, we have directed our efforts toward increasing the *numbers* of women running for office.

After watching the results of two election cycles, 2014 and 2016, and continuing to follow the research of scholars in the field, we have come to the realization that numbers are not enough. Women who run for office have to be viable candidates and, as Professor Och observed, they must be strategic in deciding where and when to run. To that end, we are working on developing a formal process to identify such candidates.

We look forward to unveiling that project in the coming months.

*Diane Mack is a former Pensacola City Councilwoman and was the founding president of the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida. She currently serves as treasurer. This Viewpoint is offered on behalf of the IWP Board of Directors.*

**“If we want more women in politics, we need to be strategic about where and when we have women run — and most importantly we need to channel our financial resources to female candidates in both Democratic and Republican districts where they have a real chance of winning.”**

**MALLIGA OCH**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN GLOBAL STUDIES AND LANGUAGES AT IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY