

Advice for Escambia District 1 candidates



Diane Mack

VIEWPOINT

Thank you, Karen Sindel.

Last August we called for women in Escambia County District 1 to think seriously about running for the commission seat from which Wilson Robertson is retiring. Only four women have served on this powerful legislative body since its inception in the 19th century, and it's long past time for women to be a regular part of a government that shapes their communities and their lives.

As women have a better shot at winning a race for an open seat than trying to unseat an incumbent, this year's election offers an opportunity that comes along only once in a while.

With this opportunity in mind, we wrote in August, "There must be within District 1 a woman who is savvy, well-liked, deeply involved in the community, civic minded, knowledgeable about county and district issues, and ready to offer herself to public service. Whoever that woman might be, we encourage her to enter the race."

Three weeks ago Sindel, vice president for development at the Naval Avia-

tion Museum Foundation, answered the call and prefiled. We won't know until June 24 what candidates will qualify to appear on the ballot, but as things stand now, she will face School Board member Jeff Bergosh and contractor Jesse Casey in the Aug. 30 Republican primary. No Democrats have prefiled to run.

This race will get a lot of attention. The campaigning will be intense. We would very much like to see these (and all) candidates take the high road and each run a clean, honorable campaign. While voters will care more about candidates' substantive positions, character, and experience than the campaign tactics they adopt, the current public mood is such that a clean campaign may in fact provide a competitive advantage.

What should be the elements of a clean campaign? In addition to the New Year's resolutions for candidates which we offered last month, here are excerpts from a pledge developed by a candidate in Ohio in 2013:

» My campaign will be committed to the principles of honesty, fairness, respect for my opponent, responsibility, and compassion.

» I shall conduct my campaign openly and publicly, presenting my record and policies with frankness, and criticizing without malice the record and policies of my opponents that merit such criticism.

» I shall not use, or agree to let outside parties use, subtle deceptions, half-truths, falsifications, or such practices as push polling. If such practices are used by outside parties, I shall repudiate them immediately and publicly.

» Claims made by my campaign about myself and my opponent will be supported by documents provided by my campaign office.

» I shall avoid demeaning references to my opponent and demeaning visual images of my opponent. I shall not use, or allow to be used, personal attacks, innuendo, or stereotyping.

» I shall ensure that my campaign staff and campaign supporters will observe these principles of fair campaign practices. I take full responsibility for all advertising or other statements created or used on my behalf by staff and supporters.

» In the conduct of my candidacy, I shall show compassion at all times for my opponent. I shall remember that the campaign process is fundamental to representative democracy and that my behavior in the campaign affects the integrity of our society.

Diane Mack is president of the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida and offers this viewpoint on behalf of the IWP board of directors. She served on the Pensacola City Council 2009-2010.