

VIEWPOINT

Let's have some clean political campaigns

**Diane Mack**

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Is it really any wonder that a nation forged by revolutionaries, hard-scrabble pioneers, frontiersmen, rough-and-tumble immigrants, and fortune seekers engages in politics as if it were a blood sport? Donald Trump may be the first in a while but not the first in U.S. history to shoot from the hip — or in his case, the lip — and thereby bring out the ruggedness of spirit that underlies the American character. In these unsettled times his poll numbers should be no surprise.

As we step into this new year, our wish at the Institute for Women in Politics is that at least in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties the practice of political campaigning may become more mannerly and less of a blood sport.

In one of his radio broadcasts of the late 1970s, soon-to-be President Ronald Reagan said. "In spite of all the inokes

men like to tell about women ... almost all men know in their hearts that women have been the single most civilizing influence in the world." Women who have run for office know firsthand that campaigns need civilizing.

As of mid-December, seven women and 32 men had prefiled to run for office in the two-county area in this year's elections. Many more will add to their numbers by the end of the qualifying period in June. We encourage all 2016 candidates to make these New Year's resolutions — and abide by them:

» I will be truthful in everything I say or write about myself. I will not exaggerate nor mislead.

» I will be truthful and fair in everything I may say or write about my opponents. When I offer criticism, I will not misrepresent facts. I will not engage in gossip nor make derogatory personal remarks.

» I understand that I am fully responsible for the behavior of my campaign workers and volunteers. I will have a written code of rules and conduct which each worker and volunteer will be required to read, understand and sign.

» I will make certain that every worker and volunteer understands that defacing or stealing an opponent's campaign signs is a criminal act and that such action will not be tolerated.

» I will be meticulous in abiding by city and/or county political sign ordinances.

» I will not accept campaign donations that have strings attached.

We are not naïve. We anticipate most of the male candidates will not have read this column much less pledged themselves to the resolutions. But if even a handful are moved to conduct a better campaign because of what we have written, the community and political process will be the better for it.

The institute will be monitoring the races in which there are women candidates. Any dirty campaign tactics directed against these women will be brought to light. We do hope, however, that this will not be necessary.

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.