



**Amy
Miller**
GUESTVIEW

NW Florida women want to be part of 2018 election

The Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida brought another year to a close last month with our annual meeting, at which keynote speaker Marian Johnson, senior vice president for political operations for the Florida Chamber of Commerce, regaled attendees with stories – and lessons – from the trenches of Florida politics.

She reminded us that one vote, or two, can make a difference, particularly in local elections, and she admonished that if we the electorate are “not involved and not informed, then we get what we deserve” in our elected officials.

All too often, Johnson said, politicians forget where they came from and forget whom they went to Tallahassee or Washington to represent. We must, she insisted, hold them accountable and remind them where their loyalties should lie each and every day.

The 2018 election cycle looms large for the nation, for the state of Florida, and for Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. On the ballot will be one of our two U.S. Senate seats, all 27 of our state’s seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, governor and all elected cabinet posts, half of our state senate seats (even-numbered districts), and all of our state representatives. Closer to home, we’ll elect a smattering of judges, county commissioners and school board members; representatives to various authorities, commissions and districts; mayors and members of city councils. The ballot, the greatest performance evaluation tool ever created, will be packed. And let’s not forget that the Florida Constitution Revision Commission is hard at work and sure to add numerous proposed constitutional amendments.

If ever there were a year for the Institute to be especially active in our efforts to engage women in politics and government through outreach, training, and mentoring, it’s 2018. There will be many opportunities for women – both novices and seasoned politicians – to run for office as incumbents, against incumbents, and for open seats. We are confident that many women will be inspired to do so and we want to do what we can to prepare them to run quality campaigns.

We will kick off our efforts on Sept. 23 with an intensive, full-day campaign school led by professional trainers from Washington, DC. This will be a non-partisan crash course in strategy, organization, and conduct of a campaign. Anyone thinking of running for office or who has already decided to do so, anyone who is up for re-election, anyone likely to serve in a key campaign staff position such as campaign manager or campaign treasurer, or anyone planning an issues-based campaign in support of or in opposition to a ballot initiative or proposed constitutional amendment, will definitely want to attend. Keep an eye on this space, the Institute website, and our Facebook page for details and registration information in the coming weeks.

Our refreshed and restructured working groups are hard at work planning education, networking, and outreach activities for the coming year. With so much at stake, these will no doubt include ample opportunities for candidates and campaigns to hone their skills, craft and refine their messages, and amass support.

The population of the United States is 51 percent female, the population of Florida is 52 percent women, and nationally there are 10 million more women registered to vote than there are men registered to vote. As Marian Johnson reminded us, “Ladies, we could take it over and run it all if we wanted to.”

We’re not suggesting that women could do that in a single election cycle or that they should even ever want to, but the growing membership of Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida remains committed to opening more doors to women who want to do so and to providing those women the tools they need to successfully compete for elected offices and government appointments.

Amy Miller is President of the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida and offers this Viewpoint on behalf of the IWP Board of Directors. To inquire about membership in the Institute, send an email to contact@iwoflorida.org.