

Meet the women running for Congress



Diane Mack

VIEWPOINT

The contest to replace U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller is already getting the usual celebrity-style play in the media now that state Sen. Greg Evers has entered the race. Florida News Service came out with an article April 19 that positioned the race as a showdown between young big dog (state Rep. Matt Gaetz) and old big dog (Evers). James Zumwalt, as the grandson of a celebrated admiral, got a mention. The eight other announced candidates as of that date, including three women, were accorded the status of chopped liver.

To be fair to political journalists, we concede that candidates do carry the burden of establishing their bona fides and demonstrating their fitness for the office to which they aspire. However, we also contend that the media, as the fourth estate, bear a responsibility to the republic and its citizenry to facilitate informed voting. Every candidate who establishes her bona fides and demonstrates his fitness for office should be thoughtfully

written about and presented to the electorate.

As difficult as it is for male candidates without name recognition or connection to a community powerhouse to achieve public notice and gain respect, especially in a crowded field, it is much more difficult for women candidates of the same circumstance. Even in 2016 reaction to women's candidacy is generally dismissive. It takes courage and some chutzpah for a woman to enter a major race like the District 1 U.S. House contest, and yet three women to date have done so. We are grateful to the Pensacola News Journal for this opportunity to introduce them to you (in alphabetical order):

» **Rebekah Johansen Bydlak** (R) has deep roots in Escambia County as a descendant of the Bonifay and Gonzalez families. She has a master's in political science and public administration from UWF. In 2013 she moved to Washington, D.C., to take the position of director of outreach for the Coalition to Reduce Spending. She continued working for the coalition as she returned to Pensacola last year.

» **Amanda Leigh Kondratyev** (D) grew up in a Navy family and has lived in Pensacola for 15 years. She has a B.S.B.A. in management information systems

from UWF and is enrolled in a M.Ed. program in science and the public at the University of Buffalo. She works in information technology.

» **Elizabeth Anne Schrey** (No Party Affiliation) has lived in Pensacola most of her life, both grandfathers having been stationed at Pensacola Naval Air Station. She has a B.S. in political science with a minor in international affairs from Florida State University and a master's in public administration from Troy University. She is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, working in land-use and transportation planning for nearly 10 years.

The remaining candidates who have filed to run thus far are: Democrat Steven Specht of Pensacola and Republicans Chris Dosev (Pensacola), Brian Frazier (Gulf Breeze), John Mills (Miramar), and Mark Wichern (Miramar Beach).

We look forward to learning more about all the candidates in the coming weeks, and we urge our fellow citizens and voters, who bear the ultimate responsibility for casting informed votes, to do the same.

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.