



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

POSTED: Saturday, Oct. 17, 2009

Editorial board offers its recommendations for this fall's general election

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD EDITORIAL BOARD - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Whatcom County election officials sent out general election ballots last week.

We urge citizens to vote. We are in a time of economic malaise. At the same time important discussions about growth, the environment, public safety and many other issues must continue. There hasn't been a more important local election.

Our editorial board met with candidates for several of the most-important positions and offers these recommendations based on those conversations.

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

DISTRICT 1, POSITION A

Dan McShane was a leader in his eight years on the council from 2001-2008. Among his most important proposals were several to limit growth in the Lake Whatcom watershed as a way to help protect that valuable resource, and a couple that helped purchase development rights to help protect farms.

Then McShane sought the office of Bellingham mayor, losing to current Mayor Dan Pike. He calls the decision to run for that office a mistake. He now wants to return to the position where he did so much good.

Should voters across the county give him that chance? We say "yes." We find McShane extremely knowledgeable about county issues and willing to make tough decisions. His experience is perhaps more important now, when it has become clear the county must continue to cut its budget in the face of our struggling economy while still dealing with critical issues.

Kathy Kershner is refreshing U.S. Navy veteran who now runs her own business. She strikes us as a person who will listen well, and has the capacity to make smart decisions. But in our conversation it was clear she still knows too little about the issues in the county. Electing her now, when the county budget is in crisis, would be a mistake. The county can't afford to wait while she learns about all of the issues being considered.

We suggest McShane is the smarter choice at this time.

DISTRICT 2, POSITION A

Of all of the candidates we interviewed this fall, Ken Mann was the one to offer new ideas.

For example, when asked about what the County Council can do to help improve the local economy, Mann suggested the county should partner with the Port of Bellingham to provide facilities where small businesses could start up with subsidized rent. He called the idea an "incubator park." It will be hard to pull off something like this, but it is an idea worth exploring.

Mann also suggested the county can save money by really attacking two of its less transparent funds, including the administrative services fund. He said that there is some \$35 million in that fund and another one that few people seem to understand where the money goes. Even if it means taking on administrative costs and working with unions and such, Mann said he's ready to lead the charge.

Mann ran for election to the council two years ago and lost to Sam Crawford. His opponent this time is Mary Beth Teigrob, a rural county resident who counts her lifetime of living in Whatcom County and her experience running a small business as her chief attributes. We were impressed by her commitment to listening to county residents, particularly farmers and rural residents, and her promise to represent what she hears on the council.

But Mann, more than any person running for countywide office this year, represents new thinking and new approaches to our long-standing problems. We suggest voters choose him for the council.

DISTRICT 3, POSITION A

Carl Weimer is perhaps the elected official who most reflects the balance our community tries to keep between protecting what we love about this place and respecting the rights and abilities of every citizen.

His work with ReSources and the Pipeline Safety Trust also represent his understanding of what is important to Whatcom County citizens.

We have disagreed with Weimer about some of his decisions over the years, particularly when he has voted to raise taxes. But he has also led the way with smart decisions too, such as pulling the plug on the too-expensive plan to buy a new ferry to Lummi Island.

That decision is what got Michelle Luke interested and involved in politics, and made her decide to challenge Weimer in this election. Luke said a new ferry should have been purchased. And she says that process led her to believe the county is not doing a good job listening to citizens.

Unfortunately, Luke couldn't back up her complaint with a lot of specifics on the big issues in the county: growth, for example, or Lake Whatcom. She didn't seem to understand, for example, that the county is being forced to deal with the issue of growth in rural areas because of a

decision made by the state growth management hearings board. The county must control growth in rural areas, whether some citizens want them to or not.

We congratulate Luke for getting involved, and want to encourage her to continue to be a part of the process. But Weimer is clearly the superior candidate for this seat on the council.

LYNDEN MAYOR

Lynden has been lucky in recent years to be served by a professional, hard-working mayor who understands how to run an organization. But Jack Louws has decided not to seek re-election this year.

We find Scott Korthuis the most logical replacement. Korthuis was a partner in Korvan Industries, which revolutionized mechanical harvesting of berries, particularly raspberries, in the 1980s and helped make our county the raspberry capital of the United States. The company is now owned by Oxbo and Korthuis works there. His experience in creating and building Korvan is important because it shows that, like Louws, Korthuis knows how to manage a large group of employees, including layers of management.

Korthuis faces Gary Bode in this election. Bode has served on the City Council for the past 10 years and, by all accounts, served well. But serving on a legislative body and leading a city are very different things. Bode owns a small business, but he has never run a concern as large as the city.

We focus on management abilities in recommending Korthuis because we found the candidates shared very similar ideas on the issues. On Lynden growth, for example, they both favor standing up to the county and pushing for growth boundaries on about 170 acres near town. Some county officials have said Lynden should not grow. Both also favor expanding retail offerings and other business in town to better serve citizens.

Given the similarities, it's Korthuis' experience in management that really stands out in this race.

REMINDERS

We made the following recommendations before the primary election. We stand by those choices in the general election:

- Whatcom County Council, at-large seat - Choose Laurie Caskey-Schreiber over Bill Knutzen;
- Port of Bellingham, District No. 1 - Vote for John Blethen over Scott Walker;
- Port of Bellingham, District No. 2 - Vote for Doug Smith over Mike McAuley.