

## THINKING ABOUT TOSSING YOUR HAT INTO THE RING?

Being a candidate for any elective office can be overwhelming, confusing and many times not worth the effort. From your locally elective offices to our state and federal offices, the process can be daunting and unthinkable to the faint of heart. Candidates, especially at the state and federal office levels require nerves of steel, the patience of a saint, the omniscience of Oz and skin as thick as an elephant.

My first attempt was in 1992 as a candidate for my county board of supervisors. My second was a failed attempt to qualify for the ballot for the special senate election after the late Senator Dave Cox's death in 2010. My last run was for the 5th Assembly District in 2012 after its newly established boundaries were historically created by an independent commission in 2011 .

County election officials like most county employees come in a wide range of good to bad. In my case the 5th AD included 9 different counties and 9 different county election officials. Whether you're a candidate for the state legislature or running for U.S. President, the election official most important to you is the one in your own county of residence. You probably will pull your first nomination papers in that office, and you are required by law to declare your candidacy right there. Make sure the elections official is knowledgeable about the California Election Code and is willing to help. Quickly, if possible, assess this person's qualifications, or have a campaign staff (including attorneys) at the ready. Small counties typically do not have the resources to hire experienced personnel for these positions. (It is also true of many county departments). After filing my nomination papers I failed to request additional documentation and the elections coordinator, as I later learned, is not required to assist you through this maze of paperwork. My attempt to place my name on the Special 1st Senate election ballot after Senator Cox's death was a disappointment and a painful lesson I will not forget.

As we all know, money is the mother's milk of politics - more specifically, getting elected. If you are not self-financing your campaign, you are using someone else's money. And it all comes with strings attached. Most successful candidates have plenty of friends. Have you ever wondered why candidates name their campaign funding committees "Friends of ..... ". Political parties, the big 2, fund many candidates and expect their chosen will dutifully adhere to their own political ideology, certainly not that of the opposing party or even the ideology of the majority. Last but certainly not least, campaign contributions come from the special interests of businesses, unions, environmental groups etc. Now if you are like me, and find yourself lacking rich friends, a political party you adhere to or a special interest that is particularly enamored of your platform, you will have the challenge and opportunity to develop creative, ingenious and unique ways to sway voters and get your message out. After all, isn't that what we need, independent, money-saving problem-solvers?

Be prepared to travel. And travel. From October to June at least 4-5 days a week I would be in my car, my trusty 2000 Chevy Blazer. A day trip to Placerville and Auburn. An overnighter to South Lake Tahoe. Or 3 days in the southern district of Madera and Mariposa Counties. I would stop in every business whose doors would open. Every gathering was a special bonus. VFW potlucks, pizza parlor birthday parties and more. Barber shops and beauty salons were my very favorite. A lesson for every candidate. If you really want to find the pulse of your constituents, barber shops and beauty salons are the absolute

gold standard. And do not expect a warm welcome. I have been thrown out of numerous places as if I were the carrier of a medieval plague. Expect a neutral, cordial and informative visit. And when you happen upon a supportive, joyful encounter with prospective constituents it makes the task that much more enjoyable. Meeting potential voters was by far the most enjoyable part of being a candidate for the state legislature. I must have met at least 40,000.

The downside? The paperwork itself can scare off the most qualified candidates. For example, after filing the basics, your nomination papers, ballot statements, or Declaration of your Candidacy, there is a state Form 501 on which you express your intention to seek a particular office. Candidates for State office must file this with the Secretary of State's Fair Political Practices Commission - SOS and FPPC respectively. Candidates for county and federal positions have similar reporting requirements. County candidates have some overlap with state candidates.

Your Form 501 "Intention" must be reported before any solicitation or acceptance of campaign contributions. Not doing so will result in a hefty fine from the FPPC. State Form 401 is a "Statement of Committee Organization" for any candidate whose contributions exceed \$1,000, not including filing fees. Not filing this will also result in a substantial fine. Throughout the election cycle you will be required to file Form 460 "Statement of Committee Receipts" (contributions and expenditures). Failure to file by the due date will net you a \$20 a day penalty. Failure to file will result in the heftiest of fines. These reports become public record and are the ones the media usually report on in your local TV stations or newspapers. Then there are Form 461, 462 etc., and this is just for candidates. As a result of the numerous filing requirements, campaign work that used to be performed by volunteers, friends, family or the candidate him/herself has exploded into a multi-million dollar, professional industry.

It is now more common than not to hire a campaign treasurer or company to provide all necessary FPPC filings. And like many county elections offices, the SOS will expect you to consult and hire professionals to assist you through the maze of paperwork. My own experience as a state legislature candidate was that the regulatory agencies were willing to penalize you but showed little appetite for admitting their own failings not to mention correcting them.

If you haven't run screaming from the room yet, here's more sound advice. Be prepared to speak in public before audiences both large and small. Be ready to debate and answer just about any question that could come out of the human mouth. I have studied the biographies of a number of candidates and incumbents. Lawyers, political science majors, communications majors and debate team members seem to top the list for success in these "trenches."

If you have limited experience in such areas, look for venues and situations where you can hone your skills. Be aware that an invitation to speak, debate or answer questions may not be a friendly one. In my case, because I was not affiliated with a political party, I received no invitations to the political party organizations. If you are party-affiliated use each and every county central committee to practice your public speaking and interactions with groups in this supportive setting. I did however attend and speak at a number of Tea Party gatherings. I later realized it was not a good fit with my middle of the road ideology. Usually all candidates for a particular contest will be invited to a forum or debate. Be careful!

They may be skewed toward one candidate or political party ideology. A good indicator of this is if all the questions seem to be fashioned for one candidate to “hit home runs.” Another indicator is that the audiences are all supporters or friends of your opposition. You will sway no votes there. I walked into a couple of those. Spend your time elsewhere.

Preface your remarks at the beginning of the open forum or question period noting that you will answer questions pertaining to the elective office and job for which you are running, (in my case I was a state legislature candidate). Don't get sucked into trying to deal with federal or local issues over which, even if elected, you will have no influence. Gracefully avoid questions pertaining to what is happening in faraway countries, laws that were passed back in the Jurassic period, and personal health or religious information. Most important when invited, and you will get many opportunities, find out about the group, the leader and the theme if not the line of questioning planned for the candidates. Debates we see on TV are highly choreographed with opposing sides fully understanding themes and lines of questioning the moderator is going to propose. Do not walk into a debate or forum without a fair understanding of these two crucial elements - the theme of the debate and the questions you can likely expect. I do not recommend fielding questions from the audience unless they understand what questions would be appropriate for this formal venue.

Candidates for elective offices should be good communicators, have better than average problem solving skills, and be responsible fiscal managers. You must have a super measure of integrity and be ever willing to take personal responsibility when mistakes are made and ensure prompt corrective action. Never repeat! Most important your desire to help and put the needs of your constituents first is paramount. If you fit this type, I highly encourage you, regardless of political ideology, to throw that hat into the ring. It may not be fun at times, and it will test each and every ability and emotion you possess (and you might still lose), but the experience and feeling you get is like no other. And if you are like me and someone asks you “Are going to run again?” “Heck Yea!” will probably be your response. Good luck!

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