

Elections and Campaigns

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, August 2006

Campaign time is upon us again. Californians have had more elections than usual these last few years with the recall of the Governor, the State special election with its half-dozen bond measures, primary elections, and general elections-- including one this coming November. Additionally, some cities in our region have had special elections on local bond measures, tax measures, and land use measures.

It is clear that Americans feel very strongly that they should have the right to vote for their representatives and on decisions that affect them. From the voters in Thousand Oaks who demanded (unsuccessfully) that there be an election to determine who should fill the remaining three-year term of the late Councilmember Masry, to the Ventura County SOAR initiatives that gave voters a say on sprawl development, the right to vote is a part of our civic principles.

Upholding democracy requires that people be ensured the right to vote. Coupled with this right is the willingness of people to run for office. While there usually is no dearth of candidates for the more visible public offices, there are many special districts, such as water and sanitation district boards, that have people who have sat on them for decades without having to face election because no one else runs for their seats. When there are no challengers, the seated official is appointed in lieu of election. Whether these old-timers are doing a bang-up job, or potential challengers just don't know about these board openings, the end result is the same: no one runs for office, and the board members who are already on are re-appointed over and over again.

It takes genuine hard work to run for office and hold elections. I have taken the lead to change County rules so that notices of openings for elective office are printed in local newspapers. Before I got the change, notices for elections to boards such as Oak Park's Triunfo Sanitation District ran in newspapers in Oxnard! Now the notices for openings must run in the local area that the board serves. Not only should government not hinder the potential for elections, government should go one step further and make the opportunity for elections available. For example, my office puts out press releases, web postings, and advertisements so people can know that they have an opportunity to run for office.

I know first-hand that making the decision to be a candidate for office is not an easy one. I knew when I first decided to run for office in 1996 that I was taking a risk. From my experience I have learned that nothing is accomplished without taking that first step. Through the several elections I've been involved in, I have come to place my trust in the voters.

I firmly believe that we owe it to our country to give people the opportunity to run for office and to have elections. We know we must be vigilant to preserve our democracy and not take it for granted. Elections, with all their ups and downs, are still the best way

to choose our leaders. We must do our part as citizens to participate and keep the heart of democracy beating strong.