

Commentary & Perspective

Why the negative ads? Let's look behind the curtain

I have been asked why I don't write editorials. The reason is simple: I don't want to use this newspaper as a bully pulpit. I want to provide readers with news and information in a fair and objective manner, and let them form their own opinions or make their own informed decisions. While I naturally have opinions on many of the stories, people and issues we cover, I expect this newspaper to be an impartial reporter of the news.

Unfortunately, this election season has seen a new low in election campaigning and I feel compelled to write. One of the most honorable, ethical, intellectual and honest persons I have come to admire in the nearly 10 years my family has owned this newspaper is the target of personal attacks and vendettas.

Geauga County Common Pleas Court Judge David Fuhry is being accused of bilking the public because he has expressed an intent to retire from the bench to draw his pension, and then start a new term if he is re-elected Nov. 2.

Ohio law allows the practice, which critics commonly refer to as "double-dipping." The process is rather simple. Prior to an election, a person has to inform the board of elections of their intent to retire. It doesn't even mean they are going to do it. It simply preserves an elected official's right to retire before the end of their term and receive their pension.

So, is the phrase "double-dipping" an accurate portrayal of what Judge Fuhry is doing? After all, he simply has indicated an intent to begin receiving pension money HE has paid into the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System. It isn't costing county taxpayers a penny — the county would be contributing the same amount to OPERS regardless of whether Judge Fuhry retires and is re-elected or simply is re-elected. The only difference is what retirement bucket — pension fund versus money purchase annuity — OPERS would deposit the money.

And, his "re-hire" — or re-election as an elected officials — would be anything but political. The PEOPLE would rehire Judge Fuhry, not political party leaders. Also, whoever is elected is paid a fixed salary defined in the Ohio Revised Code.

The purpose of this editorial, however, is not to endorse Judge Fuhry nor to condemn or condone

the retire-rehire practice. Rather, it is to shed light on who is behind the attacks on a person's whose integrity is beyond reproach, thereby allowing voters to make an informed decision on whether the vitriol against an out-standing jurist is politically or personally motivated.

While most motorists ignore election signs — and for good reason — some might have noticed the smattering of "Stop Double-Dipping Dave" signs littering the roadside. Those signs are part of an unprecedented negative ad campaign waged through Terry Carson, the husband of Geauga County Democratic Party chairwoman Janet Carson. For those unfamiliar with Mr. Carson, he is a former Bainbridge Township trustee who was ousted from office in 1980 after being found guilty of malfeasance in office.

In his ruling removing Mr. Carson from office, Geauga County Common Pleas Court Judge Robert B. Ford wrote: "There is evidence that Terry Carson has a foul mouth. There is evidence that Terry Carson is at least amoral, if not immoral. There is evidence that Terry Carson is an occasional traffic law violator. There is evidence that Terry Carson personifies the ruthless, vicious, perverting qualities, or lack of quality, with which a minority of men bring disgrace to the proud calling of politician."

I won't comment on the nobility of politicians. And, while I do not know Mr. Carson, I do believe that everyone has ingrained personality traits that don't change over time.

There's more. Last week, I received a call from Tim Covert, a Chester Township resident who owns Electolite Lite for Life. Mr. Covert asked me if I had seen the election signs and had an opinion about them. He asked lots of innocuous questions about Judge Fuhry — which I answered truthfully — before revealing he didn't like the judge. He also asked if I had seen or heard of the full-page ads Mr. Carson and his cohorts intended to publish in local newspapers, sharing with me Mr. Carson's toxic message.

Mr. Covert also shared with me that he intended to vote for Judge Fuhry's opponent because the judge dismissed the class action lawsuit that all-electric homeowners filed against FirstEnergy. I asked Mr. Covert if he thought Judge Fuhry followed the law. He said he did. I

then asked him if he was voting for Judge Fuhry's opponent because he thought she would not follow the law. The question posed a dilemma for the caller.

After hanging up and reflecting on the conversation, I became suspicious of Mr. Covert's motives. I searched the Geauga County Court of Common Pleas docket and discovered Judge Fuhry sentenced Mr. Covert to jail in 2008 for drug abuse. It was Mr. Covert's second time behind bars. Five years earlier, Judge Forrest Burt had sentenced Mr. Covert to jail after he pleaded guilty to possession of criminal tools.

On Nov. 2, Geauga County voters will have the right to exercise an American privilege. That privilege didn't come cheap. So, whether you vote Republican, Democrat or independent, take the time to educate yourself on the issues and candidates. Don't allow people with ulterior motives to influence your decision. Ask yourself, "Why the negative ads?" "Why aren't these people spending their resources extolling the qualifications and virtues of Judge Fuhry's opponent?" "Why is Judge Fuhry's preservation of a right to receive his pension even an issue in a judicial race?"

When it comes to judicial candidates, obtain a copy of the Geauga County Bar Association's judicial evaluation survey. Members of the county bar anonymously rate all judicial candidates for office. While the survey has no legal weight, it does provide voters with need to know information which should be considered when voting for or against retaining a judge.

Most courtrooms are public.



JOHN KARLOVEC

Spectators are allowed. Any citizen may sit in on court proceedings. Doing this provides an evaluator with first-hand knowledge of a judge such as how he/she conducts their courtroom; how lawyers interact with the judge; mannerisms, temperament and patience; and applicability of the law.

Although it requires more effort on a citizen's part, visit the county law library and read judicial reports. A judicial opinion demonstrates a judge's logic abilities in applying the law and reaching a ruling in favor of one side and against the other. (Anyone interested in reading Judge Fuhry's ruling in the all-electric case can call me at (440) 285-2013 to request a copy.)

Finally, read our election story on the race in this week's issue.

Staying informed improves communities and allows citizens to make better choices — it also has a way of vanquishing scoundrels.

Notes of Gratitude

Gracious thanks —

Permit me to take this opportunity in gracious thanks for the held Chardon Alumni Baseball Game (Sept. 25) in my benefit.

There are many to thank, particularly alumni Josh Leikala, who exhaustively put this benefit game together. I thank CHS varsity baseball coach Greg Fronk and the Chardon alumni that he has coached for their willingness and efforts to help bring this day together. Thanks to Butch Lauderback (Northeast Umpire Association) and the respective umpires for their benevolent umpiring of this ballgame. Many thanks to the wonderful people and local businesses that volunteered their time and giving willingly in order to make this day successful. And, to all that attended, supported in spirit and/or gave donations for my benefit via the CHS Alumni Game.

This cancer journey of four years has been nothing but God's blessing after blessing. Where I have persevered in the strength of my heart and spirit, this coming together in spanning 25 years of coached players, their parents, prior and subsequent coaches, and alumni baseball players that I had the opportunity to befriend is much more than any contributory value raised.

Know of my graciousness in our Lord God for this help and to be reunited with those that never left my heart. It was an honor to have coached many through the summer leagues and through their baseball years at Chardon High School. It is in these blessings that the medicine of healing is realized. Thank all of you for your lives in mine. Be assured of my continued life in yours.

Coach Philip Hlabse



Bon Appetit!

Invite new customers to enjoy your restaurant.

Advertise in the Geauga Maple Leaf.

Call 440-285-2013