

What's needed is quality candidates

But both parties have been better at running women for county offices
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Bloomington City Clerk Regina Moore is engaged in a laudable task: Trying to get more women involved in politics.

"When I sit at a (city) council meeting and I see all white men, I say to myself, something's missing here," she said. It's a valid point.

It would be easy, though, to make more than what's merited about the present gender composition of the city council. It's a real anomaly. It's the first city council elected since 1971 without a single woman.

It's ironic, but if Moore wants to look for a model of efficiency in producing female candidates, the Monroe County Republican and Democratic parties have been more proficient at it at the county level, while county voters have been particularly willing to elect women to county and legislative offices.

Elected Democratic women in the county include commissioner Iris Kiesling, Assessor Judy Sharp, and Monroe Circuit Court judges Elizabeth Mann and Viola Taliaferro, though both judges are retiring at year's end. State Sen. Vi Simpson and State Rep. Peggy Welch are Monroe County Democrats in the legislature.

Three other local Democratic women must be mentioned: former 12-year state representative Marilyn Schultz, former two-term commissioner and 1970s City Council member Charlotte Zietlow, and former Bloomington mayor Tomi Allison.

The Monroe County Republican Party has been equally successful, maybe a bit moreso at present, in finding and electing women. Their current ranks include commissioner Joyce Poling, county council members Marty Hawk and Sue West, Auditor Barbara Clark, Recorder Pat Haley and Treasurer Pat Jeffries.

The Republicans' success in getting women elected countywide ought to carry a message in it to those folks who simplistically want to pigeonhole voters. Not all blacks are knee-jerk Democrats. Not all evangelical Christians are right-wing Republicans. And not all women, even in a community as liberal as Bloomington, are liberal, much less all Democrats. Many women are conservatives or moderates, and county Republicans have done a solid job of recruiting them to run for office. County council president West may be the premier current example.

The fact is that voters judge candidates less by gender than philosophical compatibility and even party affiliation, and rightly so. Most of the 9-0 male Bloomington City Council represent the views of liberal Democratic women far more closely than do some of the more conservative Republican

women in county government. Similarly, many conservative men in the county are more closely represented by those female Republican county officials than the more liberal Democratic males on the City Council.

While it's true that city government is experiencing a temporary dearth of women in elected office, what matters more than anything is that top-quality people of both sexes and from both parties need to be involved in the pursuit of elected office.

And in that respect, officials such as Moore and Poling are right on the mark when they blame a "coarsening" of elections with more and more negative campaign tactics and personal attacks as a reason why many potential quality candidates in general and women in particular are turned off by the entire process.

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