

The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio's Greatest Online Newspaper

Down and dirty

Candidates should clean up their acts in final days of campaign

Sunday, October 29, 2006

Politicians obviously think Ohioans are stupid. Election campaigns gravitate to the lowest common denominator: Ads blow opponents' faults out of proportion or fabricate them out of whole cloth while ignoring the big issues that matter most.

Ohioans could prove their mettle by voting against candidates who campaign in the gutter.

Pundits have good reason to call this the silly season. Any quote, vote or political action can — and will — be twisted into something derogatory against the other side, particularly in a close race.

Politicians need to be tough; fainthearted and thin-skinned types have a short shelf life. But criticisms made in debates, ads and campaign literature should be accurate and fair. Two egregious examples in the race between incumbent U.S. Rep. Deborah Pryce, R-Upper Arlington, and her Democratic challenger, Franklin County Commissioner Mary Jo Kilroy, come to mind.

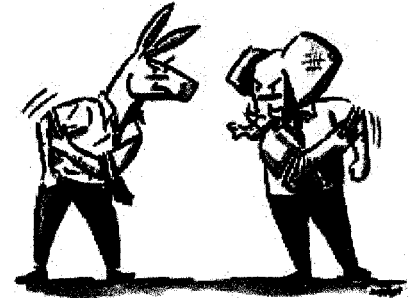
In her bid for the 15th Congressional District seat, Kilroy linked Pryce to former Rep. Mark Foley, a Florida Republican who recently resigned from Congress because of lewd emails sent to male pages. The implication that Pryce cared more about protecting her friend in Congress than protecting teenage boys working for Congress was grossly unfair and is not borne out by any evidence.

In the second example, the National Republican Congressional Committee accused Kilroy of being sympathetic to the Ku Klux Klan. This ludicrous conclusion was reached because, as a member of the Columbus Board of Education in 1993, Kilroy declined to support an ill-considered resolution to deny Klan members their freespreech rights. Kilroy's principled decision was based on First Amendment concerns and not out of any sympathy for white supremacists.

Mudslinging seems to worsen every election season. This year's slime is the unfortunate consequence of a positive development: Nearly every political race in The Dispatch's readership area is contested, and some incumbents are facing stiff competition for the first time in years. Democracy works if candidates are willing and able to challenge opponents' statements, but contenders need not sell their souls to strategists and consultants who push for smear campaigns.

These candidates in three federal races all have been criticized unfairly during the election season:

Ohio's Republican Sen. Mike DeWine has been smeared. His opponent, Rep. Sherrod Brown, D-Avon, has been smeared.



Pryce has been smeared; Kilroy has been smeared. Rep. Pat Tiberi, R-Genoa Township, has been smeared. His Democratic opponent, Bob Shamansky, has been smeared.

These six candidates should take control of their campaign consultants. Voters should expect them to raise the level of discourse during the final days of the campaign.

Recently in this space, The Dispatch shared this quote from Adlai Stevenson: "I'm not an old experienced hand at politics. But I am now seasoned enough to have learned that the hardest thing about any political campaign is how to win without proving that you are unworthy of winning."

That quote is 50 years old, but remains as true as the day it was uttered. Those who are locked in political combat today should conduct themselves in a way that demonstrates they are worthy of winning.

Copyright © 2006, The Columbus Dispatch
