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Candidate University shows proper methods of seeking election or reelection to office



Levy County Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones holds the Candidate Guide folder containing all of the rules and laws for campaigns. Candidates who name a treasurer, establish a bank or credit union account and file a DS-DE-9 form will be given this folder.

Story and Photos

By Terry Witt, Senior Staff Writer © Jan. 19, 2018 at 10:37 a.m.

BRONSON -- It doesn't take a genius or a rocket scientist to run for election to public office. Nonetheless, the election laws in Florida are complex and there are plenty of technical potholes candidates can fall into if they don't study and follow the rules carefully.

Levy County Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones conducted a Candidates' University on Thursday (Jan. 18) to teach candidates and would-be candidates the fundamentals of running for office in 2018 and how to avoid problems with filing paperwork.

Three people attended the classroom event including two of the most experienced public officials, County Judge James T. Browning and Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks (R-Dist. 4), plus an unidentified woman.

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Levy County Court Judge J.T. 'Tim' Browning and Assistant Supervisor of Elections Jordan Lindsey are seen during Thursday's Candidate University at the elections office in Bronson.

Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks (R-Dist.4), who has said she intends to seek a fifth term of office, enjoys a donut provided by Candidates University.

Browning and Rooks both said they intend to seek reelection. Qualifying for judicial candidates takes place from April 30 to May 4 and for county candidates from June 18 to June 20.

Candidates can begin collecting campaign contributions when they open a campaign bank or credit union account, appoint a campaign treasurer (often themselves) and file the DS-DE-9 form containing their bank or credit union account information.

The DS-DE-9 form must be given to the bank or credit union. The campaign account must be separate from their other bank accounts to avoid mixing (or comingling) campaign funds with other types of income.

People who open a campaign account are not officially qualified to run for office until they file qualifying papers later in the year. For judicial candidates qualifying takes place from noon April 30 to noon May 4; for county candidates from noon June 1 to noon June 22.

The Levy County officeholders who may run for reelection this year are Rooks and County Commissioner Rock Meeks (R-Dist. 2), and Judge Browning and School Board members Brad Etheridge (R-Dist. 1), Cameron Asbell (R-Dist. 1) and Rick Turner (R-Dist. 5). None have opposition at this early stage of the campaign.

Residents who didn't attend the Candidates University can pick up a large, hard cover folder from the elections office in Bronson containing all of the rules, regulations and requirements for candidates; however, it will be only after they appoint a campaign treasurer, open a campaign bank or credit union account and file the DS-DE-9 when they will really start their path to qualification.

Levy County Supervisor of Elections Jones will sit down with them to answer their questions if they



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have any.

The primary election this year is on Aug. 28. The general election takes place on Nov. 6. Book closing for voter registration is July 30 for the primary election and Oct. 9 for the general election.

Early voting at the elections office in Bronson runs from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from Aug. 13-25 for the primary election and Oct. 22 to Nov. 3 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. for the general election.

While Jones goes out of her way to explain the requirements of running for office and the pitfalls of what might happen if the rules are breached, she said ultimately the responsibility for knowing the requirements and complying with them falls squarely on the shoulders of the candidates.

Most county and city candidates in the modern era ask voters to sign petitions rather than pay a fee to run for office.

The petition does not say the person signing the petition endorses their candidacy. People signing the form just say they are willing to sign the form to let the candidate participate, given the candidate completes all requirements to be qualified,

The petitions give the candidate access to the ballot and nothing more. State law requires county candidates to collect 268 petitions signed by voters if they don't want to pay the filing fee. The petitions for judicial candidates are due at the elections office by noon on April 3 and for county candidates by noon on May 21.

Candidates are charged 10 cents per name for having the signatures verified by the elections office. They pay the fee in advance.

Candidates must turn in no fewer than 50 petitions at a time; provide 5 to 10 extra signed petitions, and the petitions must be signed and the dates placed in sequential date order. The elections office has 30 days to verify the signatures.

There is a Resign to Run law in Florida.

It means any government officer whether elected or appointed must resign if they have "authority to exercise the sovereign power of state." Any municipal officer, whether elected or appointed who has the authority to exercise municipal power must resign to run.

No candidate may qualify for more than one public office at a time. No officer may qualify as a candidate "if the terms of any part of thereof run concurrently with each other." Written resignation must be submitted at least 10 days prior to the first day of qualifying. For those who have questions in regard to any of the finer points of election laws are invited to contact Jones.

Candidates must file campaign finance reports on the required dates by opening up an online account with Jones.

Levy County Supervisor of Elections Jones and her staff will show the candidate how to enter campaign information correctly, but the candidates are responsible for complying with the reporting requirements and the accuracy of their information.

Contributions to candidates also come with rules. No person can make a contribution greater than \$1,000 for each election, but individual family members can each make \$1,000 contributions.

No candidate or their supporters can solicit or knowingly accept any political contributions in a building owned by a governmental entity. All contributions received must be deposited by the 5th of the month. A person may not make a cash contribution to the same candidate in excess of \$50 per election. The candidate must report the name and address of the contributor and how much they gave each time. If the contribution is more than \$100 the occupation is required to be listed on finance reports, unless it is a relative.

There is no limit to what a candidate may spend as long as there are sufficient funds to pay the full amount. The campaign treasurer who signs the check shall be responsible for the completeness and accuracy of the information on the check. Contributors may use a debit card to make a contribution.

Regarding political advertisements, any political ad that is paid for by a candidate (except a write-in candidate) and published, displayed or circulated before or on the date of the election must state the following: "Political advertisement paid for and approved by (name of candidate and party

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affiliation), for (office sought), by (name of candidate and party affiliation or (office sought).” The words “elect” or “re-elect are not required to be used in political advertisements. However the word “re-elect” may not be used if the candidate is not the incumbent for the office sought.

The exemption to this is if there is a political ad on the web, with a link to the candidate’s website and that statement is on the website.

Specifically, in regard to that exemption, there is Florida Statute 106.143, which notes in part, in regard to some exceptions from placement of those words –

“(10) This section does not apply to any campaign message or political advertisement used by a candidate and the candidate’s supporters or by a political committee if the message or advertisement is:

- (a) Designed to be worn by a person.
- (b) Placed as a paid link on an Internet website, provided the message or advertisement is no more than 200 characters in length and the link directs the user to another Internet website that complies with subsection (1).
- (c) Placed as a graphic or picture link where compliance with the requirements of this section is not reasonably practical due to the size of the graphic or picture link and the link directs the user to another Internet website that complies with subsection (1).
- (d) Placed at no cost on an Internet website for which there is no cost to post content for public users.
- (e) Placed or distributed on an unpaid profile or account which is available to the public without charge or on a social networking Internet website, as long as the source of the message or advertisement is patently clear from the content or format of the message or advertisement. A candidate or political committee may prominently display a statement indicating that the website or account is an official website or account of the candidate or political committee and is approved by the candidate or political committee. A website or account may not be marked as official without prior approval by the candidate or political committee.
- (f) Distributed as a text message or other message via Short Message Service, provided the message is no more than 200 characters in length or requires the recipient to sign up or opt in to receive it.
- (g) Connected with or included in any software application or accompanying function, provided that the user signs up, opts in, downloads, or otherwise accesses the application from or through a website that complies with subsection (1).
- (h) Sent by a third-party user from or through a campaign or committee’s website, provided the website complies with subsection (1).
- (i) Contained in or distributed through any other technology-related item, service, or device for which compliance with subsection (1) is not reasonably practical due to the size or nature of such item, service, or device as available, or the means of displaying the message or advertisement makes compliance with subsection (1) impracticable.”

Showing this one exemption is an example of why Candidate University is good to attend before seeking election or reelection. Running for office requires insight.

There are certain things that a candidate cannot do in Florida.

Among the prohibited acts are: speaking at political meetings; using a state-owned aircraft, boat or motor vehicle; using services of state, county, municipal or district officers or employees; making contributions in the name of another; solicitation from religious, charitable and civic organizations; accepting contributions in a government-owned building; certifying a false report.

Candidates are reminded to not take requests for absentee ballots when they are out campaigning. An individual voter can request an absentee ballot by phone, mail, email or in person. A request for an absentee ballot can be received by the supervisor of elections no later than 5 p.m. on the 6th day before the election. Five days prior to an election, a voter may designate in writing a person to pick up their ballot. Absentee ballots are due in the Elections Office no later than 7 p.m. on Elections Day.

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What is a poll watcher?

A candidate may ask a person or political party to go to the polling place and observe. The poll watcher must be a registered voter. Poll watchers cannot be a candidate, sheriff, deputy sheriff, police officer, etc. Poll watchers can't interfere or impede with the conduct of the election. They are allowed to be inside the voting area, but they must keep a reasonable distance from voting booths.

A poll worker, in contrast with a poll watcher, is someone designated by the supervisor of elections to work in the polling place.

No person, political committee or other group or organization may solicit voters inside the polling place or within 100 feet of the entrance to a polling place.

Candidates are advised to let supporters know there are no restrooms at voting precincts.

Family members may assist a relative living in a nursing home or assisted living facility with filling out an absentee ballot. Unless a person has been judged to be mentally incompetent they can vote in an election with assistance. If someone doesn't have a family the elections office can assist but a member of both political parties must be present to witness the assistance given.

Overseas absentee ballots can be mailed or faxed.

Levy County Supervisor of Elections Jones wants every candidate to have as much information as they need to properly conduct their campaign.

For candidates who were unable to attend Candidate University, Jones can provide individual counseling; however the person should set aside three hours to receive the same information as people who were able to attend the session on Thursday (Jan. 18).

For candidates who need clarification or better understanding about a specific issue related to voting in Levy County, Jones and her staff are ready, willing and able to help.