

Political Update

By Nina Albano Vidmer

Usually this column is dedicated to include information about elected officials throughout the year, however as the Primary Election approaches, I wanted to inform the readership about the history of the Italian American Political Coalition and the endorsement process.

Founded in 1994, the IAPC is dedicated to the advancement of the Italian American Community in politics, government and the election of qualified Italian-Americans to governmental and judicial positions. The Board of Directors is comprised of businesspersons and lawyers who are dedicated to the advancement of Italian Americans in the political arena. To that end, the IAPC has scheduled endorsement hearings for candidates prior to the primary elections. In recent years, the IAPC has teamed up with the Mexican American Political Action Committee for this process, thereby providing candidates with a venue to meet with two political powerhouses in Illinois. Though joint endorsements are not always possible, both organizations often jointly endorse a candidate.

The process is lengthy. All candidates who have filed with the State Board of Elections are invited to meet with the boards in January for a 10-minute panel hearing. They are also requested to fill out a questioner to obtain important background information while judging responsiveness to the concerns of the Italian-American and Mexican- American communities. Candidates are expected to discuss: 1) the number of employees working under the candidate and how many of them are Italian American or Mexican American; 2) what initiatives the candidate is prepared to make that could benefit the Italian-American and/or the Mexican-American communities; 3) the candidate's knowledge and thoughts about Italian Americans and Mexican Americans in the political arena and community, and 3) any awards that demonstrate personal integrity.

Because many concerns have not always been clearly articulated by the Italian-American and Mexican-American community, a commitment to future responsiveness is considered as seriously as past performances. Endorsements are not given to candidates who do not request one. Candidates are interviewed separately by the board members of the IAPC and representatives of MAPAC; candidates may send a representative if they are unable to attend.

In addition to the interview, candidates are requested to sign a pledge that spells out, in general terms, the expectations of the IAPC and MAPAC. Signing the pledge does not guarantee an endorsement, but no endorsement will be issued unless the pledge is signed. The pledge asks the candidate to vow, if elected, to do their best within the scope of their authority to: 1) fight bigotry and discrimination against Italian Americans, Mexican Americans, and all other ethnic

groups; 2) to hire qualified Italian American and/or Mexican Americans to fill positions whenever possible without prejudice toward other ethnic groups; 3) to ensure that both Italian Heritage Month and Hispanic Heritage Month is honored in a suitable fashion; 4) to execute the responsibilities of their office with integrity and diligence, and to uphold all of the laws, codes and standards that govern their performance; to discharge their duties with fiscal responsibility and efficiency while preserving the quality of service delivered, and; 6) to craft programs designed to break the cycle of poverty and government dependence and uplift the less fortunate.

The performance of all endorsed candidates are tracked to determine the adherence to the pledge.

The board of directors of the IAPC and representatives of MAPAC meet after panel hearings to discuss the candidates and issues its endorsements. Candidates are endorsed based on their responsiveness to the Italian-American and Mexican-American communities, as well as issues such as personal integrity, experience, civic involvement, fiscal responsibility, social conscience and viability of candidacy. All endorsed candidates are notified in writing.

Endorsements for the Primary Election do not necessarily guarantee an endorsement for the General Election. The boards may endorse both a Democrat and a Republican for the Primary Election in an office; however just endorse one of those candidates in the General Election.

Judicial races are handled differently than other political races. Candidates seeking judicial seats are asked to forward their curriculum vitae to the IAPC Judicial Advancement Committee, where they are review and recommendations are made to the board for recommendation to office. Many of the members of this committee are lawyers and members of the Justinian Society of Italian American Lawyers.

Candidates seeking endorsements should call 708-338-1026 or write the IAPC at P.O. Box 804, LaGrange, IL 60525.

This column is written by Nina Albano Vidmer, executive director of the Italian American Political Coalition. To submit information, please fax to 708-401-0360 by the first of each month for consideration in the following month's issue.