

## *Campaign Season Arrives*

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As everyone knows, you cannot believe everything you read or hear. That admonition seems to be particularly true at election time. Efforts to persuade voters at election time too often borders on misleading them. And spin artists have become a regular part of the political scene. Political campaigning has evolved into a science with handlers, pollsters, consultants, media experts, and others. No wonder campaigns cost so much!

And no wonder voters become confused and, worse yet, turned off. The issues are too important for voters not to take part in the election. Following are a few tips for digging through all the mailings and ads that will be appearing between now and November 4.

Be wary of the outrageousness charge. In the print media these charges are the bold headlines followed by multiple exclamation points. In public speeches these charges are made with strong emphasis and much disdain. The president of the Reston Republican Club likes to point out my outrageous deed of introducing a bill to increase taxes by 2100 percent! That may sound outrageous until you learn that my bill would have raised the Virginia cigarette tax from two and a half cents, the lowest in the nation, by 50 cents to the national average, or 2100 percent. The more than \$300 million raised by this tax would have offset the cost to Medicaid by about the same amount that smoking-related diseases cost the state. Look behind every charge of outrageousness; there usually is more to the story.

Be cautious of those who take pledges. It may sound noble and brave for a candidate to stake out a position and take a pledge similar to a sworn oath as to what he or she will or will not do in office. Such pledges if honored seriously limit the actions of officeholders in the future regardless of changing circumstances. For example, the most common pledge is to support no increases in taxes. At a time when Virginia desperately needs to reform its tax structure for basic fairness if not for additional revenue, it would not be possible to maintain revenue neutrality in reform and keep a no tax pledge because a tax cut for someone would mean an increase for someone else. A fair question to ask candidates who sign the tax pledges is what they intend to reduce in government services or be willing to do without. We will not be able to maintain quality in our schools or improve our transportation system without some revenue from economic growth or tax reform.

Watch for glittering generalities. Most frequently heard these days is the glittering generality that if we reorder our priorities we would be able to pay for school improvements and roads. Ask for specifics on this one. When you look for the specifics behind all the glitter you will often find that cuts amount to peanuts as compared to the costs they are intended to cover. Every governor I have ever known from both political parties introduces cost-cutting and efficiency initiatives. There is little or no fat left after six billion dollars has been cut from the state budget.

This election is my sixteenth time running for public office. (I did not win all my elections in the beginning of my career.) The two-year term for the House of Delegates makes elections come around very quickly. I have never supported lengthening the term of office for the House of Delegates as convenient as such a change may have been for me. Going back to the people has the potential of keeping office-holders accountable and improving government. Hopefully voters will not be turned off by the coming political campaigns, will dig through the media barrage to form their opinions, and will vote on November 4. If I can be of any assistance, please e-mail me at [kenplum@aol.com](mailto:kenplum@aol.com).