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shadowing norfolk

NO REST: RACE FOR REVENUE COMMISSIONER STARTS UP

Now that the national and state elections are behind us, it's time to turn our attention back to Norfolk politics.

Already, a candidate, Evans Poston, has announced that he will challenge longtime Commissioner of Revenue Sharon McDonald for the Democratic nomination. It will be a first run for elected office for the 33-year-old insurance broker and Norfolk native. For Mc-Donald, it would be her fifth term as commissioner.

As of last week, Pos-ton had cobbled together the endorsement of nearly every elected Democrat in Norfolk. The list of supporters includes Mayor Paul Fraim, Sen. Ralph Northam, Sheriff Robert McCabe, City Treasurer Thomas Moss Mr., Clerk of Court George Schaefer and 89th House of Delegates nominee Daun Hester, once a political ally of McDonald's.

Councilmen Paul Riddick, Andy Protogyrou, Tommy Smigiel and Barclay C. Winn, who is an independent, as well as Vice Mayor and Deputy Treasurer Anthony L. Burfoot, also have backed Poston.

"I just think we need some change in that office," Smigiel said. "And I think he's going to bring the necessary changes to it."

Riddick said the environment on the first floor at City Hall is "too political," so much so that McDonald's office is "stagnant." He also cited the continual conflict between McDonald and the City Treasurer's Office as a reason for his decision to support her challenger.

"If you don't have a good working relationship with other elected officials, with your City Council, it's tough to get the things done that you need to make the office work effectively," McCabe said. "I think she's burned a lot of bridges in that regard over the years."

Several of these Democrats also pointed to Mc-Donald's public missteps in the past year, from hiring family members in her office to charges on a city credit card for which she had no receipts. The bad press that these decisions brought forth cast the city in a negative light, several of the officials said.

McDonald hasn't said whether she'll rise to Poston's challenge and try to best him for Democratic nomination in the spring, run as an independent in next year's general election, or neither.

McDonald, who was first elected in 1997, said last week that she would announce her plans before the end of the year.

"I have addressed and responded to all of these issues in the past," she said in an email Wednesday. "It is now abundantly clear that this is the kind of campaign the voters and I will be confronted with should I decide to run."

She's right. The controversies and public clashes with other city officials will be rehashed over the next several months should she seek re-election. Saying McDonald has a "history of not getting along with other members of city government," Poston said he would work to "build coalitions" with others.

The general election will be held next November.

Moss won't run again

City treasurer Thomas Moss Jr. confirmed last week that he will not seek a fourth term. Moss, the former speaker of the House of Delegates, is retiring after a long political career.

Noting his age, Moss said it's time to enjoy himself. Moss, 84, served as a delegate for 36 years before coming to City Hall in 2001. Deputy Treasurer and City Councilman Anthony L. Burfoot, who is expected to run for the seat, said he would announce a decision later.

If Burfoot runs, Moss said he would "of course" endorse him: "I've taught him all he knows."

Race date change sought

The City Council has asked the state to approve a city charter change to align the mayoral race with the superward races starting in 2016, and the Norfolk Chapter of the NAACP now says it plans to review the proposal before a General Assembly vote next year.

The organization was involved in the change that brought about Norfolk's ward system and then, in 2008, it questioned whether the city needed permission to change to an at-large mayoral office.

Any proposed tweak to an election schedule is touchy said Tristan Breaux, president-elect of the Norfolk NAACP. Breaux said he found the city's effort to "try to switch things" now unsettling.

When the city went to an at-large mayor system, Roy Perry-Bey filed a civil rights lawsuit, saying the change diluted the black vote. One member was added to the council in the system. As a result, a 4-3 white majority ticked up to 5-3. The suit was ultimately dismissed.

At a recent council meeting, Perry-Bey was one of a handful of people who spoke in opposition to the newest proposed change in volving the mayoral and su per ward races.

"It's not just about chang ing the date," Perry-Bey said. "It's moving the election process."

City Attorney Bernard Pishko told the council that the city would need approval from the U.S. Department of Justice to make change happen.

Mayor Paul Fraim first proposed the change during the council's retreat in September. He said the move is intended to encour age voter turnout for the superward races.

But any change to the city's electoral process is worthy of serious review, Breaux said.



BY jillian nolin



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McDonald



Moss
