



On Valley campaign trail of political peace

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On Aug. 25, The Lighthouse Project hosted a workshop for Big Bear candidates to discuss its Positive Campaign Ethics initiative. The goal is to enlist the local candidates in creating a positive and respectful campaign.

Beth Gardner, Lighthouse program director, says a number of the candidates have signed the promise and others plan to do so during the next week. “We are encouraged by the participation so far and hope that the promise makes a substantive difference in the way people conduct themselves through this next election season and beyond,” Gardner said.

Not all candidates are signing the pledge, however. The Grizzly obtained letters signed by three individual candidates for the Big Bear City Community Services District board, Denise Proffer, John Green and James Smith. One of the letters is from Green and Proffer jointly, the other from Smith, to Gardner regarding the pledge.

The three CSD candidates respectfully declined to sign the pledge for a number of reasons. The letter writers state they agree with the basic idea of the promise, but have concerns. The Grizzly was cc'd on the letters.

As of Aug. 30, Gardner said she had not received her copies of the letters from the three CSD candidates. She said the discussion at the workshop was “amazing,” but acknowledged some of the candidates voiced concerns. She said the candidates attending were supportive of the need for more respectful and ethical campaigns.

The candidates who sent the letters declining participation expressed concern about the ambiguous language in the campaign promise, and stated it was subjective and open to interpretation. Gardner said the language is subjective by design. The hope is that a candidate listens to his or her moral inner voice before lashing out at another candidate, she said.

Concerns were also voiced that the Lighthouse Project would be monitoring the candidates' behavior, which should be up to the voters, the letter writers stated. Gardner said the campaign promise is not policed by The Lighthouse Project. The idea is that voters will also read the promise and make up their own minds based on candidates who provide promises of what they can bring to the office rather than what's wrong with their opponents.

“Our founding fathers held vehement debates, and we believe that is an invaluable part of our democratic process,” Gardner said. “However, it is important that debates are focused on issues. Personal attacks should be avoided with the rare exception of a possible threat to the public trust. In that case, any assertion should be leveraged with strict adherence to facts that can be backed up with verifiable proof of the allegations. Criticism and smears only create hard feelings that serve to divide our community and thwart progress.”

Gardner said every candidate has the right to do what he or she thinks is right for his or her campaign, and she fully supports those decisions. In Smith's letter, he asked Gardner not to publish the results of those who signed or didn't sign the pledge stating it could reflect poorly on him for not agreeing to sign. Smith hand-delivered a copy of his letter to The Grizzly. Proffer and Green also delivered their letter to The Grizzly and cc'd KBHR radio.

The language of the promise was constructed specifically so that candidates can make their own best judgment call as to the most respectful and ethical approach to their campaigns, Gardner said. It was modeled after the tenets of PeaceBuilders, the character education program used in local schools. "It is not our place to prescribe the how, but rather to remind our candidates and ourselves of the spirit and intention of the process," Gardner said.

"We encourage voters to ask candidates whether or not they have signed the promise and why," Gardner said. "Whether or not they sign the promise, we encourage voters to observe the behavior of all candidates and elected officials to be sure they are conducting themselves as role models for our future generations of leaders. Ultimately, the voters will decide what kind of leadership we want in our community."