

Our choices for Bedford town races

This week we are focusing on the races in the Town of Bedford, where voters will choose a supervisor, two town board members, town justice and town clerk. It's a large field, so our discussion will be brief and limit itself to just a few of the local races. The field is also strong: across the board we see candidates with solid credentials and an authentic desire to see Bedford thrive. We also feel compelled this week to comment separately on a unique dynamic: the role of party affiliations in this year's town races. Our views on this topic can be found below. Early voting starts tomorrow, Saturday, Oct. 23, and continues through Sunday, Oct. 31. Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 2.

Supervisor

The town supervisor contest is unquestionably this year's marquis race and has garnered a lot of public attention. Our world is becoming more complex, with unprecedented challenges that require new thinking and fresh approaches. Don Scott is an able, dedicated leader with years of service on town and school boards who is passionate about serving his community. Ellen Calves, who is deputy supervisor, prevailed in a hard-fought primary in June. In her nearly two years on the town board, and in previous years in a senior role at Bedford 2020, she has impressed us with her consistent ability to connect big issues like sustainability and community police reform to tangible solutions implemented at the local level. She has broad vision, looks ahead at emerging problems, yet is detail-minded. She prioritizes human needs, like lining up services for seniors during the COVID-19 lockdown. She has also proven herself adept at aligning diverse sets of colleagues, residents and organizations behind ambitious goals. As such, she is our choice in this race.

Town board

Two candidates for town board speak often of the importance of bringing underrepresented segments of our community to the table. They are Andrés Castillo-Quintana and Stephanie McCaine, who was appointed to the town board last January. While their backgrounds differ, they both have deep roots here, and gravitate towards actions and policies that make our town and our local government more open and responsive to the needs of all residents. They are strong voices for inclusion — of young people, seniors and families in need — and believe we all draw power from weaving together diverse perspectives. Mr. Castillo-Quintana, who has worked in public health and community organizing, attended local schools since the age of three. If elected, he would be the first Latino to serve on the town board, representing Bedford's largest minority community, which makes up 15 to 20% of the town's population, according to the latest census. Like Ms. Calves, we think Mr. Castillo-Quintana and Ms. McCaine are the two candidates who will best position Bedford to meet the challenges of a changing world. To learn more about the experience and positions of all four candidates in this race, see the Q&A roundtable published on Page 1 of this issue.

Party affiliations

Plenty has already been written about the issue of political party affiliations in these particular races. Many insist we should look past party labels, saying this could be a watershed election auguring in a new era of political nonpartisanship. Others call the nonpartisan banner a sham, nothing more than a rebranding to gloss over the candidates' Republican bona fides and distance the slate from politically damaging associations with the national party. Into this fiery mix, supporters of both sides have accused the other of failing to live up to their team's stated allegiance to principles of integrity and transparency. Yes, the Democratic slate ducked public forum invitations in the last few weeks of the campaign, depriving voters. Yes, Bedford United candidates have strong past and present ties to the GOP which can't just be erased by adopting a different party moniker. Emotions on these topics run hot in every direction. For now, we want to say just this: we believe that accepting the GOP endorsement was a serious strategic blunder on the part of Bedford

United, undercutting its claims of independence and nonpartisanship. Their candidates have attempted to downplay the endorsement, saying it simply gives them more real estate on the ballot which anyone would want to claim for advantage. This breezy dismissal, in our opinion, is a gross miscalculation. Using the Republican ballot line for leverage at the ballot box is not only illogical for the party that says its difference is that it stands on its own to advance the interests of all residents. It also ignores a deep undercurrent of voter anger and frustration at this particular juncture in our country's history. Like it or not, many voters — not just Democrats, but Independents and others — are deeply shaken by the Republican Party's efforts to undermine our democracy by seeking to overturn the results of a fair presidential election and restricting voter access while, at the same time, torpedoing progress on women's rights, racial justice and climate action.

Party affiliation is *not* a disqualifier. Lee Roberts, one of Bedford's most respected and beloved leaders, was a Republican. However, in this election, this political wagon-hitching is fraught with problems. We'll see in two weeks' time whether or not it stays on the rails.

October 22, 2021