Budget uncertainties sparks races

Written by Mark Jaeger Wednesday, 30 March 2011 16:31







School incumbents face challenges from village, town officeholders

Voters in the Northern Ozaukee School District will have to make choices in two contested races in the Tuesday, April 5, election for what is likely to be political hot seats in the months ahead.

Races have developed for the Village of Fredonia seat, pitting incumbent Paul Krause against challenger Joe Short, and the Town of Fredonia seat, where incumbent Stacie Stark faces a challenge from John Blasczyk.

In both races, the challengers are already known commodities, with Short serving as Fredonia's village president and Blasczyk a Fredonia Town Board supervisor.

Short is also running for re-election as village president.

All of the candidates agree that dealing with the changing rules of schools and unions is the greatest challenge ahead for the next School Board.

In addition, the district is in the process of reorganizing its administration, due to the pending resignations of the district superintendent and high-school and middle-school principals.

Krause, who is currently the board president, said steady leadership is most needed during such critical times.

"Right now we are managing through a lot of change. We are changing much of our administrative team, rechartering our virtual school and managing the budget changes in Madison," he said.

"We need to continue to keep our focus on improving the district while managing all of that change that is going on."

Krause said changes to collective-bargaining rules mean an abrupt halt to long-followed labor practices.

"This does not mean we can be reckless with making cuts. In order to have a premier school district, we need to employ the best teachers," he said. "The budget-repair law will allow us to

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be more creative with our benefit package and provide benefits that our staff values most while still reducing the cost to the district."

Short said the turmoil in Madison was a sign that the current labor status is not working.

"Municipalities, school board and the State of Wisconsin have failed to say 'no.' The QEO did not solve the problem and taxes kept going up. The unions failed to look at the impact on communities, and the results have been overtaxed citizens who are footing the bill and have voted for change," Short said.

He said if the School Board does not look for savings in benefits packages, costs will continue to rise.

"As far as contract talks with teachers, I feel with good leadership and honest talks both sides can come to an agreement. The time for a hard line stance will have to be put aside," Short said.

He said the greatest challenge the district faces is its image. "The School Board has to not only inform those who have children in the schools, but also keep those who don't informed," Short said.

Both candidates said they supported continuing the virtual school program.

Krause said it has proven to be the "key to the financial stability of the district and provided us with educational opportunities for our students that many other districts only dream of."

Short said the virtual program has been a useful tool but said the importance of the brick-and-mortar program should not be underestimated. "We also cannot depend on it as a revenue source forever," he said.

Stark agreed that school districts can no longer rely on the status quo.

"School districts will have to tighten their belts, just as private sector businesses have had to do. Close scrutiny of expenditures, finding areas of opportunity for cutting back, doing without, altering class sizes and sharing resources (is needed)," Stark said.

"NOSD is doing fantastic things — people just don't know about them. We have to do a better job of getting the message out about how great the staff and students are here and what we have to offer."

Stark said she is "extremely pleased" with the direction the virtual program has taken. "I think that a blended environment of virtual and brick-and-mortar learning is the future of education and NOSD is certainly among the front-runners in this arena," she said.

Stark said the greatest challenge is to make Northern Ozaukee a school of choice with less money. "Community and parent support are going to be paramount in helping the district meet

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these challenges," she said.

Blasczyk said his commitment to community is the reason he is running for a seat on the board.

"I've lived here for 28 years. My children attended school here, and I think it is my turn to give something back," he said.

"With the budget-repair law, I think the School Board is finally realizing they have to stop raising taxes. They can't keep going to taxpayers and asking for more money," Blasczyk said.

During his tenure as a town supervisor, Blasczyk said he has been a stickler on spending. He wants to keep that role.

"The most calls I've gotten from town residents have been when I proposed ways to cut spending. I plan to do the same thing on the School Board," Blasczyk said.

Board incumbent Tom Hoffmann is uncontested in his bid to retain the Town of Saukville seat.