



### [EDITORIALS](#)

**Editorial: Lake Forest caucus runs up against messy democracy. Now a fascinating mayoral election ensues.**

By [The Editorial Board](#)

Chicago Tribune • Mar 24, 2023 at 11:48 am

In leafy Lake Forest — privileged, genteel and discreet — the idea of controversy in the mayoral election traditionally has been restricted to such matters as a candidate’s position on gas-powered leaf blowers. But that’s far from the situation now, as the politically riven northern suburb heads into its mayoral election on April 4.

Like many suburbs, Lake Forest has a city manager, responsible for day-to-day operations, and a volunteer mayor. Unusually, though, Lake Forest has had a caucus system since 1935, in some ways a micro if theoretically nonpartisan version of the Electoral College.

Here’s how it works. The volunteer Lake Forest Caucus recommends “qualified citizen volunteers to serve in Lake Forest government and on the school boards and various governmental plans and commissions.” And although it calls itself a caucus, all Lake Forest registered voters (some 15,000 people) are members.

The nominating process is the job of an elected Caucus Committee. In the case of who becomes mayor, that has been the province of the Caucus Mayoral Search Subcommittee. This past fall, things proceeded as normal through these layers. Until they very much did not.

The committees recommended a local doctor, Stanford “Randy” Tack, as Lake Forest’s next mayor. Tack, who represented the city’s 3rd Ward from 2012 through 2018, looked like a shoo-in to succeed George Pandaleon, who will be leaving office next year after serving the traditional two two-year terms.

But there was a wrinkle — specifically, a rival candidate named Prue Beidler, also a former alderman, who objected to the committee’s decision, upset that these committees had nominated no women for either mayor or the three open seats on the City Council.

Beidler then campaigned for Lake Forest voters — all members of the caucus, remember — to show up and reject the recommendation to the entire caucus membership, which was supposed to ratify the slate at the Nov. 9 annual meeting.

“Lake Forest was founded in 1861 and since then all mayors have been men,” she wrote directly to voters. “This is not the example we want to set for our daughters and granddaughters.”

Remarkably, Beidler was successful. Some 500 people showed up instead of the usual 100 or so, and the Caucus Committee’s recommendation of Tack was rejected by the membership at large.

But the all-powerful Caucus Committee was not to be so easily defeated. After consulting lawyers and its own bylaws, it announced, incredibly, that the vote of the entire membership was, in fact, advisory and nonbinding. It proceeded with its initial recommendation of Tack.

Beidler not only cried foul at that, but she decided to run as an independent candidate and thus Lake Forest has a fight on its hands. There’s even a third candidate, an independent named Paul Hamann.

Beidler’s supporters argue that she represents feminist democratic reform in action. Tack has said Beidler’s entry into the election as a non-caucus candidate is unfortunate. “For some reason, three caucuses telling her she is not the best candidate isn’t enough for her and she wants to put the city through this,” he told the Lake Forester. “I think it is unnecessary, and I think it is divisive and it is going to result in an election that costs a lot of money for a volunteer position.”

The Caucus Committee huffed and puffed over Beidler, accusing her of reneging on a previous commitment to support the process and blaming “special interests and misinformation” for her victory, which likely meant that they thought she had packed the room with her own supporters.

So what if she did? The process was the process and if Tack had so much support, where were his supporters on ratification day?

## Lake Forest for Transparency

We're not endorsing in the Lake Forest mayoral race and encourage voters to weigh the candidates and make their best choice on April 4. Smart voters will focus more on who will do the best job for Lake Forest, rather than merely voting their annoyance with the system.

But we are still troubled by that November decision of the Caucus Committee to declare that the ratifying vote was nonbinding and ignore the will of the people, or at least the people in the room where it happened.

The local chapter of the League of Women Voters took a dim view of what happened, as well they should have. Although the powers that be in Lake Forest have expressed an interest in "reforming" the process, they told Patch that meant merely being upfront about that "nonbinding" thing, instead of making one of the obviously better choices: either getting out of the caucus system or at least making the committees obliged to listen to the will of the entire membership.

Simply put, if all registered voters are members of the Lake Forest Caucus and were duly notified of the meeting and their obligation to ratify, or not, the Caucus Committee should not have proceeded with a recommendation that the citizens who bothered to show up said they did not accept. The committee should have gone back to work instead.

Instead of democracy in action, the way this all played out feels a whole lot like an elite group, not so different from those that used to gather in smoke-filled rooms, becoming irritated when the will of the assembled people did not accept their choice.

Democracy sure can be messy and inconvenient at times. But history suggests it's usually the best option.

*Join the discussion on Twitter [@chitribopinions](#) and on [Facebook](#).  
Submit a letter, of no more than 400 words, to the editor [here](#) or  
email [letters@chicagotribune.com](mailto:letters@chicagotribune.com).*