

Lessons Learned With Debbie Helsley and Friends

Monday, June 24th 2024 – 201 Café and Wine Bar

Our meeting this month was a continuation of our Women in Politics and Political Service series. This month we heard from Debbie Helsley about the trials and tribulations of the campaign. We also heard from our local candidates about their campaigns and goals for office.

Debbie Helsley is a South Knoxville native who served as the first president of the South Woodlawn Neighborhood Association. She retired from Bell South/AT&T after 32 years of employment in a variety of positions. She served as president of the Communications Workers of America Local 3805 for over 15 years and served as vice president of the Tennessee AFL-CIO. Debbie also served on the Civil Service Merit Board for 10 years. She served six years on the United Way Board of Directors, where she served three years on the executive committee and twice as chair of the labor participation committee. She is currently serving on the Knoxville City Council – elected At-Large with 71% of the vote.



Helsley didn't go into politics thinking she would win; however, after an unsuccessful attempt she persevered and is now seated on the Council. A takeaway for the audience was that you can lose and then win. And sometimes you can win, then lose, and then win again. The important thing is to be persistent and not take time off. Another point is that it often takes one election cycle to become known – canvassing and meeting people where they are is vitally important to becoming a known political figure. She also shared how important it is to spend the campaign funds wisely. She found that mailers and yard signs were money well spent. Canvassing takes a tremendous effort and a lot of people power but is well worth the effort. Helsley also talked with the group about the difference between campaigning and serving. She found that when campaigning it is important to make the ideological distinctions more apparent. However, when serving in office it is important to seek to understand all viewpoints, honor traditions, represent all the constituents, and learn to not say the first thing that comes to mind.



We also heard from Ashley Craven, who is running for Oak Ridge School Board. “What do you need” is core to her philosophy of how to support teachers and parents. She is opposed to vouchers and taking needed funds away from public schools to fund unregulated private schools. She also will never vote to arm teachers in public schools.

Tiffany Malone is running for another Oak Ridge School Board position. She has two kids in public school. Malone believes it is crucial to have policies and procedures in place to serve all students – and those with different abilities also must have a quality school experience. As an Oak Ridge parent she knows the Oak Ridge schools are doing a great job; however, there is room for improvement in technology and enrichment.

David Miller is a lifelong Democrat who came from a family of immigrants in the 1800’s. He believes we need to emphasize all the good Democrats have done historically and are doing currently. Miller taught professionally for 35 years in traditional and non-traditional learning situations. During that time he was a union supporter and was President of two local teacher unions. He is committed to bringing a teacher’s perspective to the Anderson County School Board.

Theresa Venable is a teacher and parent in the Anderson County School System. She is concerned that the school board has become polarized and politicized, and the public funds for public schools are being diverted to private use. Her mottos are “every student every day” and “put children 1st.” She feels if these mottos are followed by the school board the quality of education would benefit all Anderson County children.

Ebony Capshaw is running for the Anderson County Commission from District 6. Ebony is a lifelong Oak Ridge resident who went to school in the Oak Ridge school system, and then to Roane State for a Pharmacy Technician degree. She is active in the community and local

organizations, such as Altrusa, CAC, the East TN Regional Medical Reserve Corps, Roane State Community College Pharmacy Technician Program Advisory Board, East TN NAACP, the AME Zion Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society, and TN Clinch Valley Boys and Girls Club.

Anne Backus is running for the State House of Representatives from District 33. Anne is canvassing every Saturday morning and welcomes the audience to join her. She will be focusing on District 5 next in canvassing. She also asks anyone living in the county on a main road to volunteer to have a large yard sign.

Jack Allen is running for the US House of Representative from District 3. He covered 20,000 miles of the state, meeting people and hearing their concerns. His priorities are the deficit, the border situation, and women's health care. Allen has had women in his life who taught him about the importance of women's issues – and believes it is high time we start listening to women.