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COMMENTARY

Don't Like The System? Change It

By Paul S. DeGregorio

Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their country. Let me add state, county, city, school, fire district and, of course, party.

On Jan. 7, in municipalities, school districts and fire districts across Missouri, citizens will be allowed to file for public office. On Jan. 14, Missourians can file to become candidates for Congress, statewide offices, the Legislature, county and political party offices.

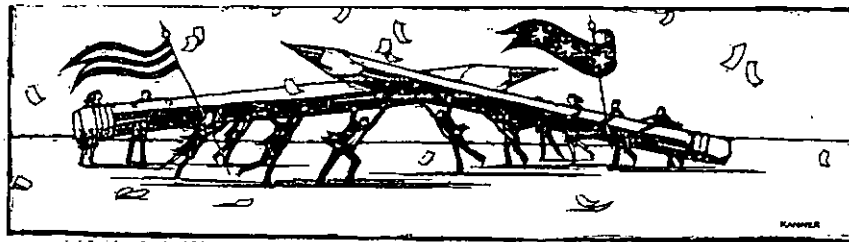
If there ever was a time when good citizens need to get involved, it is now. Let's face it: The economy is in a mess, with officials at all levels of government bicker among each other with no resolutions; the quality of education continues in its downward spiral; fire district officials buy themselves suits with taxpayers money; and voters just say no to tax increases because they lack faith in the people who are spending their hard-earned dollars.

Americans know that competition is what has kept this country strong. Our competitive nature is inherent in our recreational activities as well as our marketplaces. New businesses are created daily. Competitors are forced to become creative and spend profits wisely.

What we need more than ever is competition in the political arena. We need good people to get involved. Stop complaining and sign up; become a candidate. It's your turn to make it better. It just might be you who will make the difference.

In recent years more than half of the candidates running for office in St. Louis County have been unopposed. Competition in the political marketplace forces candidates to bring fresh ideas to the table. It obligates incumbents to become accountable for their actions and it just might bring about a discussion of the real issues of the day.

Now, incumbents might object to this



idea of competition. However, if they have maintained their integrity and worked hard to bring positive ideas to government, voters will respond.

Without competition, special-interest groups, instead of voters, will have the most influence on candidates — instead of voters. Unopposed candidates only need one vote — their own — to win. Special-interest groups will throw money at them. Guess who the unopposed candidate will listen to then?

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I believe the quality of our elected officials has diminished in recent years for two main reasons: lack of competition and the influence of large contributions, particularly by political action committees. Our government, our cities, our schools, our fire districts and our political parties have all suffered. It is highly unlikely that current office holders, especially those who will run unopposed in the upcoming elections, will do anything to correct these problems or end the influence of the almighty dollar in politics. This is more than enough reason for you to get involved.

At a time when democracy is breaking out all over the world, there is a need to bring true democracy back to America. Do your part to encourage good people to run for office, or better yet, become a candidate yourself.

Get involved in campaigns. Attend a candidate meeting; voice an opinion at the party caucuses. Find someone whose views you support and go to work. Stuff envelopes, make phone calls, speak out to your friends and neighbors; put up yard signs to show your support for all to see. Above all, see that your candidate remains honest. The more people involved in the political system, the less influence big money and special-interest groups will have on the candidate.

At one time, a sense of public service attracted some of the best people this country had to offer. Citizens with uncompromising values, whose integrity could not be disputed and who were willing to work hard for the common good are a dying breed. Now, unfortunately, we are getting not what we want, but what the special-interest groups are paying for.

We need to resurrect that dying breed before it's too late. We need the cooperation of business and labor to take the necessary steps to allow their employees to become politically active. The time to act is now! Sign up and make a difference.

Paul S. DeGregorio is Republican director of elections for St. Louis County.