

Pick Brinkley, Schulz, Flores and Elliott in District 4

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The election season started off slowly for voters in Maryland's District 4, but then a Republican incumbent dropped out near the deadline and the race was on for an open seat in the House of Delegates.

Now, the ballot for the Sept. 14 primary election is full of people who want to represent District 4A, which is roughly all of Frederick County north of Interstate 70 (except for a circle around the City of Frederick).

In fact, the Republican primary for the district is arguably the most hotly contested state race in Frederick County this election.

Only two Democrats are running for District 4A, Bonita Riffle Currey of Middletown and Ryan P. Trout of Woodsboro, so both will make it through to the Nov. 2 general election.

The Republican race is crowded: Kathy Afzali of Middletown, Dino E. Flores Jr. of Walkersville, Kelly Schulz of New Market, incumbent Paul S. Stull of Walkersville, and County Commissioner John L. "Lennie" Thompson Jr. of Walkersville.

Incumbent Joseph R. Bartlett of Middletown dropped out of the race.

Scott L. Guenther of Myersville will appear on the ballot for the general election as an unaffiliated candidate.

All candidates in the contested heat for District 4A have merit and similar platforms focused largely on the economy: Taxes are too high, spending needs to be reined in, and government regulations need to stop stifling business.

Stull has represented the district well since 1995, but given the depth of the lineup from which voters can choose (attributed largely to Bartlett dropping out), the time is right to go in another direction and pick Flores and Schulz.

Both Flores and Schulz are members of the Frederick County Republican Central Committee, and are quick to point out that they are running for the open seat, not against Stull. But change is good, especially when voters have quality candidates from whom to choose.

The top issue Flores wants to address is the budget, particularly the structural deficit, projected to be \$1.8 billion next year. In broad terms, the solution is easy — increase revenues and decrease spending.

But the hard work is figuring out how to increase revenues without raising taxes and determining what spending to cut. Flores said he does not want to increase taxes, and that propping up small business is a great way for the state to bring in more revenue.

Two ways to do that are to roll back the sales tax to 5 percent (from the current 6), and extend the tax credit granted to businesses that hire people who are on unemployment to businesses that hire the underemployed.

The state could also look at what spending to cut by looking at overlap. For example, three agencies deal with the environment: the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources. Why can't they be two agencies?

But what makes Flores stand out is his knack for research, and his practice of being well prepared for the matters at hand — habits he learned in his career as an attorney.

Schulz is a director at NMR Consulting, a business consultant firm in Annapolis. She said the dominant issue in this race is the economy, which encompasses the tax burden on residents and businesses, government spending, and job creation.

Maryland needs to become more business friendly by lowering corporate taxes to keep them here and create jobs.

Schulz said she won't go to Annapolis with specific targets for cutting spending, but understands that every budget has waste. The trick is to determine what can be cut across the board to reduce spending.

As a member of the Frederick County Republican Central Committee, she has listened to people on the streets and understands the needs for effective leadership.

And as a former legislative aide to Sen. David R. Brinkley (R-Dist. 4), she understands that going to Annapolis "yelling and screaming and waving your arms and telling them that they're all wrong" is an ineffective way for a Republican to accomplish goals in a mostly Democratic body.

In addition to the economy, illegal immigration and other common themes strewn about this election cycle, she also has an interest in increasing mandatory sentencing and restrictions on child sexual predators and taking additional steps to address the drug problem in schools.

Senate

Democrat Sara Lou Trescott of Woodbine is running uncontested, so she will make it through to the general election.

Republican Kathryn Freed of New Windsor is running against incumbent David R. Brinkley of New Market for the District 4 Senate seat.

Voters should stick with Brinkley, who has been a member of the Senate since 2003 and served in the House of Delegates for eight years before that.

The top issue Brinkley wants to address if re-elected is the condition of the state's budget, which he refers to as the "pink elephant in the room." One troublesome aspect of the budget is pensions, which he said are funded at about 60 percent of the obligation.

The General Assembly needs to open up the program and reform it, possibly with a mix of raising the retirement age, and contributions from participants and local governments. He believes the state should keep the promises it has made in terms of pensions, but the promise has to change moving forward.

Brinkley is in a great place in the Senate to have a voice in that reform, given his education and career as a financial planner and his seat on the Senate's Budget and Taxation Committee, which is responsible for previewing legislation that relates to the state's budget. Voters should not give up having a member of the Frederick County Delegation to the General Assembly appointed to such a powerful committee.

Certainly, the issues facing the state run deeper than pension reform, but it is one example of a financial tsunami headed Maryland's way. To deal with it, the state needs to focus on economic opportunities, from making the state friendlier to business to making agriculture profitable.

District 4B

Only one Democrat, Timothy Schlauch of Westminster, is running for District 4B in the House of Delegates, so he will make it through the primary.

Three Republicans are running: incumbent Donald B. Elliott of New Windsor, Bret Grossnickle of Union Bridge, and Bob Lubitz of Westminster.

Given the choice of candidates, voters should stick with Elliott, who has been a member of the House of Delegates since 1987. While some people would argue that six terms in the legislature is more than enough, no other Republican in the race is better suited for Annapolis than Elliott. He would like to see Maryland become more business friendly, and points to one of his successes of the last term that will allow small businesses to pay property tax in two installments, like homeowners do, instead of one.

Elliott said he would like to improve regulation and taxes on businesses by looking at how Maryland's neighbors treat businesses. If Maryland can compete with its neighbors, the better chance it will have of attracting and maintaining small businesses, which will lead to more jobs.

Next week: District 6