

OPINION

AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

Why does newspaper endorse candidates?

Throughout the year, the Echo Press Opinion page includes editorials written by the newspaper's Editorial Board on a wide range of issues.

If the county commissioners, for example, make a decision that we don't agree with, we'll write an editorial explaining why. If we see a problem in the community — an eyesore, a traffic snag, a scam — we'll bring it to light.

Our editorials also take stands on state and national topics, from teen smoking and school shootings to assaults on constitutional rights.

But when an election comes around, many readers wonder why we endorse political candidates. They say it shows bias. They say the newspaper has no business telling them who they should vote for.

We believe that since we write editorials about important community issues year-round, it makes sense to give our opinion about the candidates seeking public office. Why should the newspaper suddenly stand silent?

Voting is a precious right. Running for office carries a responsibility. The issues the candidates are talking about are extremely important, impacting taxes, health care, transportation, lakes and much more. Our endorsements simply offer insights about which candidates we feel can most effectively address those issues.

Next week, our endorsements for Douglas County Board and state representatives in Districts 8B, 12A and 12B will be printed on the Opinion page. Our decisions are often difficult and the process isn't something we take lightly.

The county board endorsements are based on one-on-one interviews with the candidates, several

candidate forums, our coverage of commissioner meetings throughout the year, candidate questionnaires and insights from county employees and other sources. The representative endorsements take into account candidate forums and debates, questionnaire responses, what's been said in their campaigns, what's been taking place at the Legislature and other factors.

We fully realize that many people will not reach the same conclusions that we do. That's understandable and that is their right. We're simply putting our opinions out there from our point of view. Because reporting the news is our job, we have some insights about elected positions that the public simply doesn't have the time nor opportunity to explore.

Our endorsements are determined by the newspaper's Editorial Board, which includes Publisher Jody Hanson, Editor Ross Evavold and News/Opinion Page Editor Al Edenloff. As a group, we discuss how an endorsement will be written and which points will be raised. Every member of the Editorial Board reads the endorsement and makes suggestions or revisions. Sometimes it's a unanimous consensus; other times it's mixed. All in all, we believe it's an informed, fair and thoughtful process.

A couple other points: The purpose of our endorsements isn't to pick the winners. We endorse people who we feel would be the most effective leaders for the residents of Douglas County.

Lastly, we'd like to point out that those who are seeking public office deserve credit for devoting time and energy toward improving the lives of their constituents. That's what elections are all about.

LETTER

No leverage to improve mental health system

To the editor:

In considering how to improve the mental health system, the question that needs to be asked is, "Who should be responsible?" If no one is responsible, no one can be blamed; consequently there is no leverage to improve the system. Before 1963, the responsibility for the treatment of persons with serious mental illness was a state responsibility; thus, the governor and the state legislature could be held accountable.

With the passage of the 1963 Community Mental Health Act, followed by federal funding through Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Security Income, and Social Security Disability Insurance, the funding of the mental health system effectively shifted from the states to the federal government. But who is ultimately responsible? Medicaid funds are essentially driving the system, but we don't hold the head of the Medic-

aid Program responsible. In fact, no one is responsible. States and counties deliver the services, but their decisions are constrained by federal guidelines regarding what can and what cannot be funded. The funding of the mental health services in the U.S. is more thought-disordered than any of the thought-disordered patients it is meant to serve.

The logical answer is to give the responsibility — and the federal funds currently supporting mental health services — back to the states and hold them accountable. The experiment in federalizing these services, begun in 1963, has been a clear and continuing failure. We tried and it did not work. State governors and state legislatures should assume responsibility for all mental health services and substance abuse services and then be held accountable.

Mark Jacobson
Peer Support Specialist
Winona, MN

A story of hope and help

In my nearly 17 years of being a newspaper reporter, I have had the privilege and honor of covering the Domestic Abuse Awareness Luncheon many times.



IT'S OUR TURN
CELESTE EDENLOFF
Staff Reporter

And on Wednesday, Oct. 17, I got the chance to cover it again, along with the Taking Steps Against Domestic Violence Walk the night before.

This is the first time the guest speaker was the

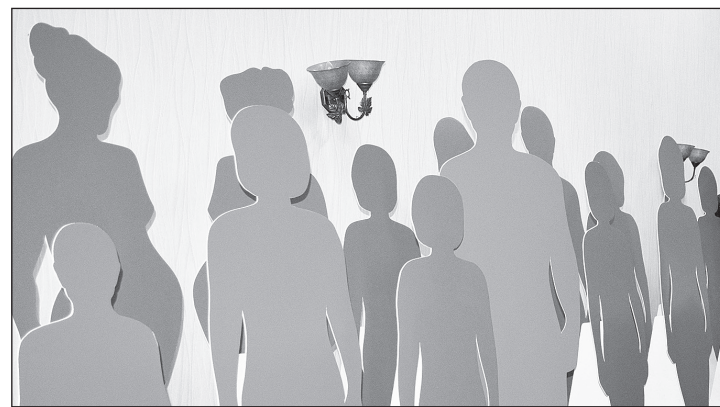
same for both events. This year's speaker, who is from Alexandria, was Marcia Siira. Her story blew me away. When she spoke after the walk, I had to keep my head down and not look up at her. Instead, I stared at my notebook and just focused on taking notes. Had I looked up at her, with the tears streaming down her face, I would have lost it, and the tears would have been streaming down my face just as fast. My heart was breaking as she told her story of domestic abuse.

But, the one thing I didn't touch on in my story, and often don't, is how she is now not only a survivor, but she is thriving in her current life and is happily remarried, this time to a wonderful man. In fact, they recently celebrated their 20-year wedding anniversary.

Marcia — like many before her — is a picture of hope and what life can be like when you leave an abusive relationship and find someone who truly loves you and treats you right.

Each year, when I cover the events, I choose to focus on the "before" stories — the stories of what these women have gone through, the horrific, mind-boggling, nightmarish stories.

Why? Because to me, they are the stories that gut-punch you and make you take notice. They are stories that make you realize that domestic violence is out there and that something needs to be done. The god-awful stories of woman being battered, beaten and



Al Edenloff / Echo Press
Silhouettes, made each year by A. Sebastian Fox, represents the 24 victims who died at the hand of their abuser last year in Minnesota. Fox, a volunteer at Someplace Safe in Alexandria, was this year's recipient of the Mayor's Peace Award.

bruised are the ones that will wake people up, will make other women realize they are not alone. They are the stories that need to be told.

However, I realized this time, after listening to Marcia's story twice that there was no way I could fit everything I wanted to into the front-page story that ran in the Friday, Oct. 19, issue. I knew her story was also a story of hope and that help is out there and that women have options — many more options now, in fact, than when Marcia was a victim. So, I made the conscious decision to focus my story on the hope instead of the abuse, knowing that I would be writing this column and I could share more here.

Marcia told the women — and men — in both audiences, "You don't have to be stuck. There is hope." She spoke of being saved and how grateful she was to the Lord, her family, friends and community of Alexandria.

She said her journey after leaving her abuser is similar to young children learning to walk. She said they take baby steps and are often afraid because they don't realize they can walk on their own. She said they stand for a while, hold onto things for support and often need someone right by their side, helping them. This is what it's like for victims. They need the support. They need people to hold onto and to guide them in the right direction.

At the luncheon, Marcia urged people to get involved and I agree with her.

She said, "If you see

someone (being abused), help. It's scary to step up, but do it."

If you suspect someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, the best thing you can do is ask. If the person gets offended or upset, Marcia said, "Let them be, they'll get over it." There were times, in public places, when the abuse was happening to Marcia, yet no one said or did anything. She wished they would have, which is why she strongly encouraged those in the audience to get involved.

"If you don't say something or get involved, they could be one of these silhouettes," Marcia said, pointing to the 24 purple silhouettes behind her at the luncheon. The cardboard silhouettes represented the 24 people who died at the hands of their abuser in Minnesota in 2017.

"I'm glad I'm not a silhouette. We could have been three silhouettes," she said, then added, "You can save lives. There is hope. There is help. (Abuse victims) can survive and they can thrive."

I have to agree. There is a hope and there is help in this community. Someplace Safe is a valuable resource in Douglas and surrounding counties. Call its Crisis Line at 1-800-974-3359 or visit the website, www.someplacesafe.info.

Please, be like Marcia. Get out. Get help. Be a survivor. I would be honored to share your story.

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It's Our Turn is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.

PAID POLITICAL LETTERS

We need Thalman back on the council

To the editor:

Roger Thalman served on the city council when my husband was Mayor of Alexandria. Dan had nothing but good things to say about Roger. He was dedicated, insightful and a conscientious worker for his constituents.

Vote for Roger Thalman. We need him back on the council.

DiAnn Ness
Alexandria, MN
(Paid political letter)

Ellison supports rural issues

To the editor:

Minnesota voters have an important choice to make on November 6.

Whether it is making rural healthcare more affordable and accessible, enforcing the laws to make rural agricultural economy fair, or supporting family farms, Keith Ellison takes seriously the issues rural Minnesotans face.

I have personally attended three separate gatherings in Rural Minnesota where he listened carefully, took notes, asked appropriate insightful questions then responded later with ways that the Attorney General can tackle the issues discussed. On August 9, he presented the "Family Farm Protection Plan" and has committed to hosting regular community meetings throughout the state.

My decision to support him took thoughtful consideration, but Keith has responded to allegations with integrity, requesting investigations and affirming the dignity of his former partner. He has been called to acknowledge the reality and harm of gender oppression and lay out how he will work to address it. He has committed to doing this.

Keith is willing to challenge power in order to support rural and urban communi-

ties alike and his web site clearly communicates just that.

Transparency and accountability are important to me and I find no clarity on Doug Wardlow's website.

Minnesotans need Keith Ellison as Attorney General!

Sylvia Luetmer
Alexandria, MN
(Paid political letter)

Backhaus will watch tax dollars closely

To the editor:

I am writing this letter in support of Judy Backhaus for County Commissioner of District 2. I have known her for over 20 years and worked with her the most when my children went through Lincoln Elementary School and she was their principal. I always found her to be easy to talk to, a good listener, and diligent in her duties as a principal. Most importantly, she cared about the kids!

I always knew whenever I walked into a meeting, Judy had done her homework. She was prepared and listened to the needs of parents and she worked closely with the teachers and other staff. That is the type of county commissioner we need. Someone who does her homework and expects the same from others.

As a commissioner I know that she will have these same characteristics, because that is just her work ethic and passion. She will listen to people, communicate effectively, watch our tax dollars closely and do what is in the best interest of all of us. She is an organized person who "gets things done." I want her working for us!

I strongly encourage you to vote for Judy on November 6!

Amy Allen
Alexandria MN
(Paid political letter)

Political letters policy

The Echo Press policy for endorsement letters took effect on May 22 (when the first filing period opened). As in the past, election-related letters that advocate for or against a candidate, ballot measure or political party will be considered ads and are subject to a charge of 10-cents per word.

The word limit for political letters is 200 words. Payment for political letters must be paid in advance.

As with other letters, writers of political letters are limited to one letter per 30 days and they must include the writer's name, address and phone number (only the writer's name and city are published).

Key dates for endorsement letters:

► The general election is Tuesday, Nov. 6 so the last batch of letters that endorse candidates will be printed in the Wednesday, Oct. 31 issue and must be received by 10 a.m. on Monday, Oct. 29.

Submitting letters to the editor:

The Echo Press encourages readers to voice their opinions through letters to the editor. Please, however, keep your letters brief and to the point. Letters of more than 300 words or excessively long letters may be edited to a shorter form by the newspaper staff. Personal attacks against private individuals will not be printed. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. Letters published will include the writer's name and the city of residence only. Writers are limited to publishing one letter every 30 days. Submissions can be emailed to aedenloff@echopress.com or submitted to the Echo Press office at 225 7th Ave. E., Alexandria, MN 56308. For information, call (320) 763-3133.