

Parties Nominate Candidates for Pr. William Seat

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In a rebuff of the pro-growth policies championed by Prince William Board of County Supervisors Chairman Sean T. Connaughton, members of his own Republican Party yesterday chose as his replacement a candidate who vowed to slow development in the fast-growing county.

The vote -- of which Supervisor Corey A. Stewart (Occoquan) took 69 percent -- came yesterday at a crowded Republican party convention, where delegates chose Stewart as their candidate to succeed Connaughton.

The leadership of the commonwealth's second-largest county was thrown open this summer when Connaughton was nominated by President Bush to head the U.S. Maritime Administration; the Senate approved his nomination this month.

Both parties held hastily organized conventions yesterday to choose candidates to run in a possible special election to replace Connaughton, whose second four-year term expires in December 2007. Connaughton is waiting for the president to approve his commission to the federal post and is expected to resign early next month. A special election has not been scheduled but is expected to coincide with the Nov. 7 general election.

Stewart, 38, will face Sharon E. Pandak, a former county attorney, who was nominated at the Democrats' convention yesterday at the McCoart Government Center in Woodbridge. Stewart accepted the Republican nomination 25 miles away at Battlefield High School in Haymarket.

Pandak touted her experience working in the county attorney's office for 25 years before going into private practice in 2004. She told the 211 Democratic delegates that the county needs to build more roads and work with developers for "smarter" growth.

"Smarter growth has to be paced at the rate of the ability of public services to handle it," said Pandak, 53.

The county, which is growing by about 15,000 people a year, has been struggling in recent years to absorb newcomers and the growing residential development.

Connaughton has won praise for ushering the county into an era of more expensive homes and more

affluent residents. But critics say his policies during his six-year tenure, in which developers have paid more for roads and schools, have only created congested roads and crowded schools.

"We are sick of traffic that has been created by big builders in the area," Stewart supporter Peggy Bassette-Hobbs told the 411 Republican delegates, drawing loud applause.

Stewart told delegates that the county must rein in high-density developments, which do not bring in enough tax revenue to cover the county services used by their residents. "When we approve large developments, we are essentially approving a tax increase," he said.

Stewart was nominated over John S. Gray, 55, a Lake Ridge certified public accountant who had pledged to continue Connaughton's policies.

"Why would we want to go in a different direction?" Gray asked the crowd.

Stewart's nomination also marks a more conservative turn for the party. Stewart, an international trade lawyer, has said that the responsibility to provide social services rests with the state and federal government -- not with the county.

At the Democratic convention, Pandak, who entered the race Wednesday, was nominated over Gary C. Friedman, a nonprofit agency director who had filed campaign papers in January.

Her supporters said they believe Pandak, who left the county payroll in August 2004 to run for the Democratic nomination for attorney general, has a better shot than Friedman at upsetting Stewart, the front-runner in the Republican-leaning county.

Pandak dropped out of the race for attorney general because she was worried she wouldn't be able to raise enough money to compete.

She has the backing of the Democratic contingent of Richmond legislators that represent Prince William, said Sen. Linda T. "Toddy" Puller (D-Fairfax), whose district includes part of Prince William and who attended the convention to support Pandak.

Pandak has "depth of experience" in the county, Puller said.

"She has been here a long time, and she has deep roots in the community," Puller said. "Her prospects are very, very good."

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