

Evaluating Candidates for Office

Christians are responsible to vote well. This requires knowing *what* to look for in a candidate before deciding *who* to vote for. Prepare prior to Election Day.

What are the qualities to look for in a candidate?

People running for office as Christians will be held to a higher standard than those who do not make that claim. More is expected of Christians because they are promoting a Godly standard in the culture. Non-Christians often dismiss Christians as hypocrites if they do not seem to uphold their own Godly standard.

Character – Officials you can trust behind closed doors require Godly character. Consider:

1. Is he arrogant? Everyone's biggest enemy is pride. It is easy for our leaders to think they know better than everyone else once they're in office.
2. Does he have an honorable reputation or one of dishonesty or deception?
3. How is he running his campaign? Are his accounts of his own qualifications true? How does he report the shortcomings of his opponents?
4. Does he or his family have “baggage” from the past, things that he does not want to become public? Candidates may be forgiven by God, but they will not be given a pass on the campaign battlefield.

Competence – Imagine you are considering the candidate as a prospective employee.

1. Can he do the job? Check his work ethic, experience, education, and knowledge.
2. Does he have the right temperament, and is he a servant-leader? Each office holder needs to respect the office he holds and the people he governs.
3. Can he win? Does he have the campaign skills and funds it takes? Is he willing to work hard at the job of campaigning, or is he depending on others to do it? Or does he expect God to just “drop a win” in his lap because he's a Christian?

What are the issues?

Biblical values – From God's Word and His character, decide what positions *you* believe the candidates should have on the issues. While some positions seem obvious, Christians may not all agree on others, especially at the local level.

Key issues: These issues are critically important regardless of the office being sought.

1. Life – protection for life from conception to natural death.
2. The traditional family – definition of a marriage relationship and parental rights.
3. Legalization of illicit drugs and prostitution.
4. Protection of the Constitutional rights of the Church and individuals.

Although local elections don't always involve these issues, local politics is the “farm club” for higher office. Select well at the local level to have good candidates in the future.

Local issues:

For city council races:

1. Budget items – how to raise money and where to spend it.
 - a. Economic development – attracting and keeping local businesses/tourism.
 - b. Paying for infrastructure – such as roads, bridges, and government buildings.
 - c. Paying salaries and benefits for city employees.
2. Zoning – imminent domain, new shopping centers, historic preservation.

3. Transportation planning - includes mass transit options.
4. City services – Parks, recycling, water, police and fire protection, etc.

For school board elections:

1. Budget items - personnel and facilities, bond elections.
2. Student achievement and test scores.
3. Quality faculty and staff and how to evaluate them.
4. Security, discipline, and interface with local law enforcement.
5. Curriculum decisions, including reading lists and library selections.



Who are the candidates and where do they stand on the issues?

In order to decide who to vote for, you must first know who is running for office. In Tarrant County, you can download a sample ballot from www.tarrantcounty.com or calling the elections office at 817-831-8683.

Resource challenges: For down-ballot races (races near the end of the ballot) or for local elections, information can become much harder to find than for high-level offices.

1. Search the internet to find like-minded state or county groups who describe or endorse candidates.
2. Your party precinct chairmen may be of help.
3. Every data source has a bias. Knowing the bias helps you use the source.

Personal research:

1. Go to candidates' own websites and Facebook pages. Look for issues and where they stand on them, qualifications, professionalism, and endorsements (who is supporting them, especially current or previous office holders.)
2. Check their Texas Elections Commission financial reports that are available at www.ethics.state.tx.us. Donors often have a reason for supporting a candidate.
3. Meet the candidates personally at their campaign events or at forums/debates hosted by local organizations (see Facebook for schedules.)
4. Contact them personally, either by email or phone, if the contact is given. Often the phone numbers are on their Facebook or website.
5. Some questions to ask could include current issues and any negative attacks on them. They're often quite willing to give their side of the story.

Making your decision: In addition to considering the items already listed above,

1. Ignore the order in which the names appear, the candidates' gender, and whether the names are familiar or likable.
2. Don't skip a race because no one is good enough – one of the candidates will win.
3. Some candidates claim to be Christians, but have a secular worldview that may contradict the Scriptures. Others do not claim to be believers, but their actions are compatible with the Word. Don't refuse to vote for non-Christians.

Help the candidates you have chosen with any of these steps:

1. Voting – be sure to take this most important step!
2. Recommendation – share your list with others.
3. Endorsement – formal permission for a candidate to use your name.
4. Donations – realize that gifts over a certain amount must be reported and will remain in the public record.
5. Campaigning – give your time by phoning and/or block walking.

