



Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOIA)

A non-profit, non-partisan, volunteer-run organization

No Party this Year

Why we should not rely on political parties to tell us who to vote for in City Council elections

Most of the more senior residents of Los Altos would probably agree that this presidential election is turning out to be more partisan, uglier and nastier than any in the last fifty years. But does that mean that our local elections for City Council members need to be partisan, ugly or nasty? We think not and we hope not.

In fact, since the early 1900s local elections have been non-partisan, and required to be so by law. This means that the ballot statements cannot identify the political party of any candidate. There is a very good reason for this: almost all issues facing local government are, in fact, non-partisan. The issues faced by local governments are by their nature non-ideological and do not give rise to party politics. As a wise city government politician once said, there is no Republican or Democrat way to pick up the trash! The residents of cities (and particularly small ones like Los Altos) are far more interested in the efficient administration of their local needs. We are reminded of the statement of Senator Boies Penrose of Pennsylvania, on the occasion of Philadelphia adopting a new charter in 1919 that prohibited partisan city elections: "One general principle is clearly establishing itself; that municipal government increases in efficiency in the exact ratio in which it is divorced from partisan politics."

For most of the 1900's, political parties were actually forbidden by law to even endorse local candidates. While that longstanding law was overturned by the federal courts in the 1980s on the grounds of freedom of speech, the policy behind it still makes sense –the concerns of political parties generally are not aligned with the concerns of local residences on municipal issues. For instance, the endorsement questionnaire for Los Altos City Council candidates by one of the Santa Clara County political parties asked questions of the candidates on their positions regarding the death penalty, equal rights in the military, state tax measures, healthcare and prescription drugs costs and rights, citizenship and immigration policies. There is no doubt that these are all issues of great importance and which should definitely be addressed by state and national candidates, but they are hardly within the purview of the Los Altos City Council.

We also feel strongly that our local Council members should not be beholden to any political party – whether Democrat or Republican. We rightly expect them to make the best decisions based on the facts of the local issues. There should not be and nor is there a need for divided loyalties based on party affiliation.

We not only encourage you to vote, but also vote based solely on the merits of each candidate, and to not blindly rely on any endorsement by either political party. As an example, the FOLA Board, which consists of five members, three Democrats and two Republicans, has never looked at City issues through the lens of party affiliation. Our only considerations when evaluating a candidate are what that person's priorities are with regard to issues facing the City. We really believe that local government is in fact non-partisan. Let's keep it that way.

Friends of Los Altos

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