

FLORIDA VOLUNTARY CODE OF FAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICES

A charter framed by the Collins Center for Public Policy reflecting some conclusions reached by a convening of citizens at Tallahassee in October 1991.

To refresh the people's participation in their democratic process, Florida's citizens should expect their candidates for public office at all levels to observe and uphold standards of fairness and honesty during election campaigns so as to give voters a clear look at the personal values that motivate their candidacies and a clean choice on the political issues that define their differences. Along with the candidates, the news media and the general public play their own parts in the self-governing process. This voluntary code addresses all three and invites all to subscribe.

THE CANDIDATES

As I seek public office in Florida, I honor the following principles as a guide to conduct which the public is entitled to expect of me:

1. I will address valid issues in my campaign, will tell the truth as to my intentions if I am elected, and will fight fairly in any contest with my opponent(s).
2. I will shun demagoguery that seeks to deflect the public's attention to sham issues that obscure real concerns of the electorate.
3. I will limit my attacks on an opponent to legitimate challenges to that person's record, qualifications, and positions.
4. I will neither use nor permit the use of malicious untruths or scurrilous innuendos about an opponent's personal life nor make or condone unfounded accusations discrediting that person's integrity.
5. I will take personal responsibility for approving or disavowing the substance of attacks on my opponent that may come from third parties supporting my candidacy.
6. I will not use or permit the use of campaign material that falsifies, distorts, or misrepresents facts.
7. I will neither use nor permit the use of appeals to bigotry in any form, and specifically to prejudice based on race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin.
8. I will neither use nor permit the use of last-minute charges made without giving my opponent reasonable time in which to respond before Election Day.
9. I will demand that persons or organizations supporting me maintain these standards of fairness.
10. I will repudiate any abuses of this code.

THE NEWS MEDIA

As a journalist, free under the First Amendment to report to the people on their election process, I honor the following principles as a guide to my professional conduct, which the public should reasonably expect of me:

1. I will report the campaigns of all candidates fairly and will ensure their access to equitable coverage. While editorial expression of preferences in spaces reserved for opinion is an expected part of a robust press in a free society, the news presentation of political debate presupposes fair access to the public ear for the messages of all candidates.
2. I will emphasize coverage of candidates' stands on substantive issues and I will not allow my coverage to be distracted by images that some candidates seek to substitute for substance.
3. I will listen to the citizens and convey their concerns to the candidates through my questioning as a reporter, and in turn I will persist in efforts to elicit the candidates' responses to those concerns.

4. While offering news space or time to candidates who seek to state positions on serious issues, I have a like duty to draw the public's attention to the means by which less-than-honest campaigners may seek to mislead, distort, or falsify.

5. When accepting campaign advertising, I will require the identity of the person or organization buying the ad to appear with the ad. If the advertisement (including television commercial) in behalf of a candidate attacks an opponent, I will ask the candidate to state personally as a part of the ad itself whether the candidate approves or disapproves of it. I will keep a watch on campaign advertising so as to monitor and consistently publicize misrepresentations or untruths that may appear in advertisements in any of the news media including my own channel, frequency, or publication.

THE PUBLIC

As the 20th century closes, people all over the world are casting off failed authoritarian rule and are laying down their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor in a reach for the free democratic process which my American forebears won through revolution and which I now accept as a routine part of my life. Surely it is a time for me to join with all voters and renew our pride in participating in the majesty of self-government, to demand the cleansing of its upswept corners, and to demonstrate by our interest and our vote that we care about the political process that keeps this land free for ourselves and our posterity.