



TIDOTE TO HIT PIECES - 'FINAL WORD' FORUMS IN - Mercury News, The (San Jose, CA) - October 21, 2004 - page 6B

October 21, 2004 | Mercury News, The (San Jose, CA) | MERCURY NEWS EDITORIAL | Page 6B

What can you do about those slimy, last-minute hit pieces that unethical candidates send out right before elections when there's no time for their opponents to fight back?

Here's what. Make sure the truth comes out on "The Final Word" -- the League of Women Voters' apt name for an 11th-hour, televised community forum to air questions, compliments and, most important, ethics complaints at the end of a campaign.

Milpitas and Santa Clara voters are lucky to have the first "Final Word" forums. But wouldn't it be great if every local race had a last-minute opportunity to clear the air and get the facts straight?

Santa Clara is sponsoring its forum the night before the election -- the ideal time -- and is promoting it as a way "to discourage last-minute unfair campaigning." That is, if candidates know they'll have to defend some below-the-belt mailer in a televised public meeting, they may just decide not to send it in the first place.

Milpitas' forum, sponsored by the non-partisan league but using city facilities, will be the Saturday before the election. That may be too early, since unfair mailers could hit the streets Monday -- but there's already plenty of vitriol in Milpitas' cutthroat campaigns, so there'll be plenty to talk about.

In both cases, residents and candidates will have to submit comments ahead of time to prevent grandstanding.

It's no coincidence that these two cities are working with Santa Clara University ethicist **Tom Shanks** on ethics issues. But other cities should be just as interested. The cost is minimal. And what an appropriate way for the league to expand its important civic role.

Every election should have a "Final Word." If they did, there would probably be fewer election-eve shenanigans to expose.

'FINAL WORD' FORUMS

Moderated by Gloria Chun Hoo, League of Women Voters.

MILPITAS

When: 4 to 6 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 30

Where: Milpitas City Hall, 455 E. Calaveras Blvd.

Televised: City cable channel 15, plus live Webcast on the city site, www.ci.milpitas.ca.gov

How to submit questions/comments: By noon Oct. 29, send topics to info@sjsc.ca.lwvnet.org or call (408) 271-7163. Include name and a phone number for that day.

SANTA CLARR

When: 7 to 9:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 1

Where: Santa Clara City Hall, 1500 Warburton Ave.

Televised: City cable channel 15

How to submit questions/comments: By noon Nov. 1, bring topics and documents to the City Clerk's Office. Include name, address and a phone number for that day.

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

MERCURY NEWS EDITORIAL, 'AN ANTIDOTE TO HIT PIECES - 'FINAL WORD' FORUMS IN MILPITAS, SANTA CLARA PROMOTE TRUTHFULNESS', *San Jose Mercury News* (online), 21 Oct 2004 6B <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.sjezp01.sjlibrary.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/105E315036DD2E7B>>

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