

DWMC ISSUES & RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE INTERVIEW

Subjects: NC Rep. Mary Belk (D-88, 2nd term) & NC Rep. John Autry (D-100, 2nd term)

Conducted by: Lisa Ellsworth, 1st VP, DWMC

Date: Monday, February 4, 2019

Why did you decide to run for office?

Rep. Belk:

- Moved to Charlotte as a child.
- Charlotte always had a reputation as a forward-looking city with dynamic leadership, good for small business, innovators, and education.
- In the last several years NC seemed to be moving backwards – no longer a leader of the New South.
- Wanted to turn anger to action. Asked to run by several people, including the House Dem Caucus.

Rep. Autry:

- Have always worked to have a positive impact on my community.
- Had previously served on Soil and Water Commission and then City Council.
- Opportunity presented itself to run for the NC House – work on city council had highlighted “pre-emption” where the State interfered with local authority such as control of the airport and HB2 in reaction to city’s nondiscrimination ordinance.
- Have grandchildren in the public school system.

How did you go through the decision-making process?

Rep. Belk:

- Received a phone call from the House Caucus.
- Talked to my husband and family.
- Went to Raleigh to meet with House Caucus and have them show me the numbers that my district was winnable (not interested in being a placeholder).

Rep. Autry:

- In 2006, ran for the 8th Congressional District – came in 2nd in a field of 4 in the primary.
- Was subsequently approached by the Chair of the Soil & Water Commission to run for a spot on that commission. Non-partisan race. Was elected in 2006.
- In 2010, was told that Nancy Carter was not going to run again for City Council District 5. Filed and won primary by 44 votes. Served 3 terms.

- Had built a large network of supporters and volunteers who I knew would help me run for NC House.
- My biggest supporter who shares my vision and activism, my wife Rebecca, encouraged me to run.

What were your primary concerns/reservations?

Rep. Belk:

- Fundraising
- Public speaking

Rep. Autry:

- Fundraising
- Impact on Family
 - Public exposure
 - Time spent away from home – 3- 4 nights a week minimum.
 - Pay not adequate to cover accommodations and other costs in Raleigh - \$13K annual plus \$104 per diem for meals & costs when in session and 29 cents per mile for gas.
 - If spouse does not support, almost impossible.

How did you recruit your campaign team and what were the crucial positions?

Rep. Belk:

- Has a huge family to volunteer for campaign.
- Took Lillian’s List Training and determined crucial positions
 - Campaign Manager – got resumes and interviewed candidates
 - Treasurer – family member with CPA and law degree
 - Field Coordinator – neighbor who had campaign experience
- Recruited interns from nearby Queens University.
- If a candidate meets certain goals, they will get additional help from the Dem House Caucus and from different groups like Lillian’s List & Human Rights Council (HRC).

Rep. Autry:

- Soil & Water - Rebecca Autry
- City Council – Rebecca was Treasurer, hired a campaign manager for the first race due to crowded primary, did it myself 2nd and 3rd terms.
- NC House – Hired local political consultant as a part-time campaign manager. Tapped activist networks, precinct chairs, and neighborhood coalitions for phonebanking.

- HRC continues to support my races as a legacy from HB2.

How much time did you spend campaigning?

Rep. Belk & Rep. Autry:

- 100%

What were your most & least effective fundraising efforts?

Rep. Belk & Rep. Autry:

- Most effective – calling/speaking to people directly and asking for money.
- Fundraisers/social media.
- Least effective – email but still do them, especially around a hot topic.

How much did you spend?

Rep. Belk:

- District 88 was a purple district during 1st race in 2016, but redrawn district lines made it more blue for re-election race in 2018, plus no primary.
- Initial Election - @\$450K – big expense was commercials in the last 2 weeks, the House Dem Caucus gave \$225K for that and an additional mailing.
- Reelection - @\$30K

Rep. Autry:

- District 100 is a low-income, safely Democratic district with no-show opposition
- Spent \$20K
- BUT, the path up the leadership hierarchy is to raise \$ for other candidates, so need to work to raise more.

Can you provide a breakdown of the amounts spent on various tactics?

Rep. Belk & Rep. Autry:

- Goal is to spend less than 10% on the cost of the event.
- Media market is the most expensive but should do some early before bigger races take all the slots and prices go up.
- Mailings are expensive but necessary depending on district.
- Doorhangers/palmcards are helpful when walking your district.
- Less \$ on signs – not as effective (can reuse them)
- Social media is practically free

If you were advising women candidates, where would you suggest they spend money and time?

Rep. Belk:

- Attend fundraisers & events to meet business leaders in community, ask for introductions & advice, expanding your reach.
- Minimum 20 hours a week on the phone asking for money and referrals.
- Plan a media strategy based on budget.
- Canvass door-to-door to meet voters.

Rep. Autry:

- Continually meet new people – ask those people to introduce you to more people.

Why do you think your campaign was successful?

Rep. Belk:

- My campaign team created a detailed plan unique to my race and district.
- Worked the plan until 7:30pm on Election Day.

Rep. Autry

- Articulated a message and a vision for the future that resonated with my primary voters.
- Safe district for general election.

What is day-to-day like in your position?

Rep. Belk:

- Shifts based on cycle of sessions.
- Currently working to get on committees that are important to me.
- Have to be in Raleigh to talk to people about my goals plus get input from others, including advocacy groups and other stakeholders.
- Many meetings and workgroups, learning and impacting policy.
- Working with my committee colleagues and the House caucus to coordinate message.
- Must have a strong Legislative Assistant to field calls and manage schedule.

Rep. Autry

- Committee Meetings – bills to be discussed can be held up until 9pm the night before.
- Meetings with advocacy groups on a variety of topics – many legislative breakfasts and receptions – and constituents.

What have you learned about serving in office that would benefit a potential candidate?

Rep. Belk

- Prepare for a huge life adjustment – not really a part-time job and affects you, your family, your friends.
- Have to be passionate and committed to enjoy it – every time I walk on the House floor I am humbled and honored.
- Build relationships within your caucus and across the aisle.

Rep. Autry

- Work is constant, overwhelming at first, and challenging, but rewarding.
- Must have strong Legislative Assistant and delegate to that person.
- Find reliable, experienced people for go-to wisdom - constantly learning, seeking information and advice – can't be an expert on everything.
- Watch out for co-sponsoring as bills will change drastically – jump in early but jump out if changes too much.
- No bill is simple and the rationale is often illogical and contradictory – some seem to support certain principles in one instance, then the opposite in another. Talk to members of the opposing party to gain an understanding of their positions on a bill, even if you disagree.
- Have a sense of humor....especially if you're in the minority party!