

NEWS

Smith Is A Write-in Candidate For Seat

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LAKELAND | Alton Carl Smith wants voters to know they have a choice in the Nov. 4 general election for State House District 64.

Although his name won't appear on the ballot, Smith, 77, qualified earlier this year as one of two write-in candidates for the seat being vacated by Lakeland Republican Dennis Ross.

He is challenging Republican Kelli Stargel, the only one listed on the ballot. People can write Smith's name on the ballot and it will be counted as a vote. Not being on the ballot, however, puts him under greater pressure to reach voters.

To do that, the retired educator and Assembly of God missionary, who said he is a lifelong Democrat, will rely on steering people to his Web site, www.altoncsmith4flhr64.com; on talking to groups that invite him to speak; and on the media. The Web site presents his views on issues such as economy, education, health care, war and security, along with his philosophy and morals.

He said he is a better choice than Stargel because of his education, work history, political experience and support of traditional Democratic values. "I have educational background that is far superior to what she has," he said.

He has a doctorate in philosophy from Michigan State University and a master of science in education from the University of Michigan, earned while working full time and supporting a family. He taught junior high, senior high and college in Michigan; was a junior-senior high principal and owned Smitty's Dairyland Drive-In, he said.

Smith said he became a write-in candidate, when a Stargel supporter asked him to, because he believes in closed primaries in which only people in the party vote. That occurs when someone is running in another party or as a write-in candidate.

But he said he intended to let his views be known and soon realized it was a mistake not to be on the ballot.

Smith supports "bread and butter" Democratic values, such as affordable health care, quality public education and a strong economy.

"I'm interested in helping the middle class and the blue collar," he said.

He advocates better pay for teachers, continuation of Medicare and Medicaid and letting people know government isn't their enemy. He would support legislation regarding "sanctity of life" and marriage of one man to one woman.

Keys to his campaign, he said, are being transparent, restoring trust in government and helping solve problems of people in the Lakeland and northern Polk County district.

"There needs to be a harmony of the views of the legislator and the people he represents," said Smith, a Michigan native who has owned property locally since the early 1980s. He retired here in 2002 with his wife, Norma, who had taught at Southeastern University.

Married after their first spouses died, they became missionaries in Africa, Haiti and Belize. He had political experience in the 1960s as a commissioner in Flint, Mich. He also served on a zoning board of appeals and as a drain commission inspector.

Florida state representative are paid \$30,336 a year and have a two-year term.