

EDITORIAL: An overreaction to mayor's decision to seek state office

Swearingin is perfectly capable of fulfilling duties during quest.

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/03/12/3818426/editorial-an-overreaction-to-mayors.html>

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There's a tendency for people to overreact when big news breaks. Such was the case last week when Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin announced she was running for state controller despite having nearly three years left in her term.

For example, Dee Barnes, president of the Fresno City Employees Association, questioned Swearingin's commitment to the city and said that any politician campaigning for another position should resign.

Running for another office, however, isn't any different than running for re-election. Moreover, candidates for higher office often are elected officials. In the 2008 presidential race, both Barack Obama and John McCain were U.S. Senators. Jerry Brown was California Attorney General when he defeated billionaire business executive Meg Whitman for governor in 2010.

Elected officials attempting to move up the ranks do have a responsibility to carry out their elected duties and not to campaign on the taxpayers' dime. We are confident that Bee reporters and other media watchdogs will keep a close eye on Swearingin's schedule, travel and expenses to ensure that the mayor doesn't cross the line.

Swearingin's last-minute decision to enter the controller's race reflects at least three things: the fact that term limits encourage politicians to seek other offices, her desire to shape policy on a statewide level and the reality that she will still have a job if she loses.

The political experts expect her to lose.

Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez, the favorite in the race, is a formidable fundraiser and will benefit from the Democratic Party's dominance of California politics.

Still, the controller's race provides Swearingin the opportunity to increase her name recognition outside of the San Joaquin Valley, and she will do a fine job of representing the Republican Party, which has had difficulty recruiting top-drawer candidates for statewide races in recent years.

The mayor has plenty to accomplish in the remainder of her last term: steering the controversial Fulton streetscape project, completing the 2035 General Plan update, upgrading the water system, improving bus service, negotiating a new labor contract with the police force and continuing to solidify Fresno's shaky municipal finances.

We don't begrudge her controller candidacy a bit. Dreaming big and aspiring for new challenges are what successful people do -- these career choices are built into the American DNA.

Fresno should be proud that state Republican Party chairman Jim Brulte recruited Swearingin to run for this office. Her candidacy reflects well on the mayor and our city.