

## **Our Recommendation: Montgomery County Auditor Karl Keith merits re-election**

Wednesday, October 11, 2006

*Karl Keith is not the guy who sets gasoline prices. Though his name is on gas pumps throughout Montgomery County, he did not raise prices during the last couple of years, and he did not lower them in recent weeks.*

It's just that, as Montgomery County auditor, he's charged with making sure that when you pay for a gallon, you actually get a gallon. In return for performing this duty, he gets to put his name on the pumps, which is generally considered good publicity for him.

Another thing a county auditor doesn't do is audit. Instead, he has a hodge-podge of duties, including keeping the county's financial records. It's the state auditor who makes sure governments are spending tax money legally and appropriately.

The county auditor's touchiest duty is to determine property values for taxing purposes. This task brings his office to the attention of many people who are not happy, because usually property values go up, raising taxes as well.

Mr. Keith, a Democrat, has done his job creditably. He has stayed out of trouble — crucial in this kind of administrative job — and updated his operation as technology allows and demands.

Holding a master's degree in state and local government from Miami University, Mr. Keith has climbed through the ranks, having worked for the state auditor, the county treasurer and the county auditor before being elected himself.

He also is active in the Democratic Party. Therein his opponent sees a political opportunity.

Republican Seth Morgan, a 28-year-old Huber Heights City Council member, talks vaguely about the need for more "professionalism" in the auditor's office. Pressed for evidence of an absence of professionalism, he notes only that some of Mr. Keith's employees have gone on to run for office or are related to other well-known Democrats.

It's true that Montgomery County Commissioner Debbie Lieberman, Dayton school board member Joe Lacey and Dayton City Commissioner Nan Whaley have worked for Mr. Keith, and that other last names in his office would be familiar to people who are in the know about local politics.

Mr. Keith says he's proud to be able to foster future elected officials, and that he has never come under pressure from Democratic Chairman Dennis Lieberman to play this role.

Playing the role does shine a spotlight on him. He needs to be careful to make sure that nobody can ever make the case that he's putting politics above his office's needs.

Mr. Morgan does not make the case that performance of the auditor's office is somehow below par. Absent that, there's not much of an issue. Mr. Keith is not the first elected official, after all, to try to help bring other politicians along.

Mr. Morgan also raises a point about testing gasoline for its octane quality, which he would like to see the auditor do. Mr. Keith has supported legislation in Columbus that would allow that.

But Mr. Morgan argues that the incumbent could proceed without a change in the law, though he admits that any local program would have limitations.

As an auditor might say, the bottom line is: Mr. Keith has done his job well and easily merits re-election. His opponent is promising and will have other opportunities.