

Electioneering in Rotary

By Dan Mooers, past RI Director

When I joined Rotary in 1970, Rotarians who met the prerequisites for a certain Rotary office were allowed to "electioneer" for the office. At International Conventions and District Conferences, posters would spring up promoting an individual's candidacy and the individual's supporters (and the candidate himself) would ask convention delegates for their vote. The atmosphere was similar to a political convention as campaigning became the focus of the meetings.

All that changed in the mid-1970s. Legislation prohibiting "electioneering" had been considered several times at past conventions and the issue finally reached a boiling point. Delegates realized that the electioneering did not result, necessarily, in the best man being selected for the office. Very quickly, Rotary transitioned to a nominating committee process and electioneering was prohibited.

Today, the provision of their Bylaws prohibiting "electioneering" provides:

10.060. Campaigning, Canvassing and Electioneering.

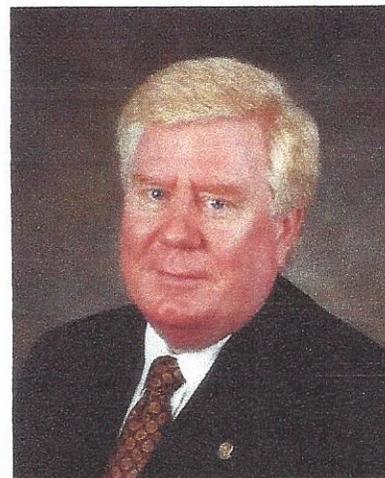
In order that the best qualified Rotarians shall be selected for service in RI's elective offices, any effort to influence the selection process for an elective office in a positive or negative manner by campaigning, canvassing, electioneering or otherwise is prohibited. Rotarians shall not campaign, canvass, or electioneer for elective position in RI, or allow any such activity, either on their behalf or on behalf of another. No brochures, literature, letters or other materials, including electronic media and communications, may be distributed or circulated by Rotarians or on their behalf to any clubs or members of clubs except as may be expressly authorized by the Board. Where candidates become aware of any prohibited activities having been undertaken on their behalf, they shall immediately express their disapproval to those so engaged and shall instruct them to terminate such activity.

Frequently, however, well-intending Rotarians, usually because of an overabundance of caution, will advise prospective candidates for higher office to avoid any discussion or questions concerning an office beyond the club. As a result, many times a Rotarian is nominated or selected for an office without a clear and full understanding of the responsibilities of the office.

Section 10.060 clearly does not prohibit educational inquiries. If a Rotarian is asked to consider higher office or the Rotarian himself or herself is considering higher office, it is imperative that the Rotarian gain a full understanding of the time and financial commitment, and the responsibilities, of the office. Some of that information can be gained by reading available Rotary publications. Other information, however, can be gained only by discussion with and questions to other individuals who have held the office.

Even though the bylaws and the RI Code of Policy explain the basics of the office, there is at least equal information left unsaid. Certain Districts and Zones have traditions within the District or Zone that are expected to be upheld, and every District budgets differently to support the work of the Governor. Traditions also dictate the role of the spouse, and the role of Governors-elect and Governors-nominee. There is nothing worse than an enthusiastic Rotarian committing to the nominating committee to serve in an office, only to resign the position because of a misunderstanding of the responsibilities of the office. The only way to avoid such misunderstandings is to ask questions of Rotarians who have held the office (avoiding, of course, asking questions of the members of the nominating committee).

Asking discrete "educational" questions to an appropriate Rotarian is not "campaigning or electioneering," if done prior to the time of deciding to stand for the office and if the questions are directed to individual Rotarians who are not participating in the selection process. Knowing the responsibilities of an office is absolutely critical to a successful tenure.



Dan Mooers served on the RI Board of Directors in 1994-96, and as chair of the RI Board's Executive Committee in 1995-96. After serving as the District 7780 Representative to the RI Council on Legislation in 1992, he went on to serve three years on the RI Constitution and Bylaws Committee and as the Committee chair. He has also served two CoLs as an advisor in the capacity of "Member at Large" and at the last CoL in an executive capacity.