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UNION-TRIBUNE EDITORIAL

City Council choices

Boling, DeMaio, Merrifield are key to reform

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The future of Mayor Jerry Sanders' financial recovery plan is up to San Diego voters on June 3 when they cast ballots for four vacant City Council seats. Our endorsements are premised on which candidates are prepared to move forward with the reforms essential to San Diego's financial health.

In District 7, which encompasses such diverse communities as Allied Gardens, City Heights, Del Cerro, San Carlos, Rolando and Tierrasanta, our strong choice is April Boling, a certified public accountant and proven reformer at City Hall. Her landmark work as chairwoman of the city's Pension Reform Committee, which advanced a series of sweeping measures to overhaul the troubled retirement system, testifies to Boling's knowledge and hard work. She will be an articulate voice for change on the City Council.

By contrast, Boling's opponent, volatile TV reporter Marti Emerald, believes "San Diego is one of the most undertaxed major cities in the country," that single-family households should begin "paying for our trash pickup," and that "as a new politician, I recognize that it's political suicide to go out there and say, 'Elect me and I'll raise your taxes.'" Political suicide or not, higher taxes are not the solution to San Diego's financial woes.

In District 5, which stretches from Mira Mesa to Rancho Bernardo, the reform candidate is Carl DeMaio, president of a for-profit government institute. DeMaio is a backer of Mayor Jerry Sanders' recovery efforts, with the dismaying exception of Proposition C dealing with the selection of city auditor, and he has been tireless in prodding the City Council to scale back the most egregious pension excesses. His opponent, retired assistant Fire Chief George George, is a latecomer to the race as the candidate of the firefighters union, which has been an obstacle to reform.

In District 1, covering the north city from La Jolla to Torrey Hills, businessman Marshall Merrifield has the best grasp of San Diego's financial problems. He would bring a needed dose of business sense and common sense to the City Council when it comes to fiscal issues. Opponent Philip Thalheimer shares many of Merrifield's conservative views, whereas opponent Sherri Lightner cannot be counted on to support a reform agenda.

The race in District 3, which includes such mid-city communities as City Heights, Balboa Park, Normal Heights and Golden Hill, features no fewer than six candidates. Consequently, this contest is virtually certain to go to a runoff in November. We will withhold an endorsement in District 3 until that time.

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