

Democratic Women Leading Races for State's Top Jobs

by Kate Kingery

While presidential candidate tour buses crisscross Midwestern swing-states, Washington voters have been side-stepped by the barrage of A-list stumbers working to rally the electorate. With the state's 11 electoral votes considered a sure-bet for John Kerry, there are still plenty of campaigns to get excited about, especially in a year when Democratic women are poised to take over leadership of the state's most influential offices.

Democratic incumbent Senator Patty Murray is facing Republican Congressman George Nethercutt in her bid for a third term as U.S. Senator. (Democrat Maria Cantwell holds the second Senate seat and is not up for re-election until 2006.) Third-term and current Attorney General Christine Gregoire defeated King County Executive Ron Sims in the Democratic primary for governor, and will face former State Senator Dino Rossi (Republican).

However, one of the most significant races this fall is for state attorney general. Deborah Senn, a two-term insurance commissioner (1993-2001), defeated former Seattle City Attorney Mark Sidran by fewer than 10,000 votes to become the Democratic candidate facing King County Councilman Rob McKenna (Republican) for attorney general.

Senn recently moved her campaign headquarters to the Belltown neighborhood. She spoke with *Messenger* staff only days after the primary election, when said she was "feeling very optimistic and proud of the response [she] got from voters."

Senn became the target of a well-funded attack ad campaign only weeks before the September primary. According to Senn, "We started out 15 points ahead and when those [negative] ads came out, they did a lot of damage. We were able to turn it around. We survived a million-dollar onslaught."

After pressure from the state Public Disclosure Commission, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce admitted it had anonymously passed money to the Voters Education Committee to produce the ads. The Attorney General's Office and Public Disclosure Commission have filed a case in Thurston County to identify the source of the ad money (which is rumored to have come from a high-profile insurance company). The Association

of Washington Businesses and other local chambers of commerce across the state have denounced the ads and shown their support for Senn since the primary. Senn said she is "very gratified from what I've heard from chambers around the state. We're feeling good and we're moving forward."

Known as a long-time consumer advocate, Senn has built her campaign on improving the health and economic well-being of Washington families and not becoming captive to special interests. As attorney general, she said she will work to protect Washington residents from identity theft, fight for affordable

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— Deborah Senn, Democratic Candidate

prescription drugs, examine the state's gasoline prices, and protect homeowners from predatory lending. "I don't just have a legal resume; I have a proven consumer track record. I have identified issues that I think are important to citizens. In Belltown, for example, condo and homeownership are essential to the survival of the community and I want everyone to get a fair deal," she said.

When asked how she would contrast herself against her Republican challenger, Senn offered, "I have 27 years as a practicing attorney doing the kinds of things the attorney general's office does. I have run a large state agency. I have successfully worked with the legislature. I will not be an attorney general in training. I will hit the ground running."

When asked what accomplishment she is most proud of, Senn reflected, "There is an old biblical blessing that says, if you save a life, you save the world. I think that's what public service is about. I have literally had people come up to me and say 'the work did you helped my family get health insurance. You and your staff saved my life.' I can't think of anything I'm more proud of [in my career] than having truly helped people."

Deborah Senn and Rob McKenna will face each other in a debate on October 19 from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. at the Seattle Central Library. Admission is free and open to the public. ♦