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Candidates focus on education, jobs in Senate District 16 race



By Christopher Sardelli - Reporter

The two candidates for the state Senate District 16 seat are each focused on improving education, reducing unemployment and creating new jobs.

Republican candidate Mick Mulvaney, the first-term incumbent state District 45 House representative, and Democratic candidate Mandy Powers Norrell will square off in the Nov. 4 race. The winner will succeed Greg Gregory, the Lancaster Republican who has held the seat for 16 years. Gregory is not seeking re-election.

District 16 is Lancaster County's dominant state Senate district. It includes most of the county from the town of Heath Springs, north to the state line.

It also includes the Fort Mill and Tega Cay areas in York County

Mulvaney running on conservative values

Mulvaney, 41, lives in Indian Land and is president of the Mulvaney Group, a real-estate development group, and co-owner of Garver Homes, which builds homes in Fort Mill, Van Wyck and Lancaster. He is also co-owner of a Salsarita's Mexican restaurant. He is encouraged by the strength of his campaign for the state Senate seat.

Incumbent Greg Gregory endorsed Mulvaney early in the race to be his successor.

"It's been going very, very well and much larger from two years ago," Mulvaney said, referencing his earlier run for the District 45 House seat. "This year, we have dozens of volunteers."

He expects the race to get more intense as it gets closer to Election Day. He plans to continue traveling door-to-door to meet constituents, as well making phone calls and conducting an active online campaign to an e-mail list of more than 2,000 people.

One of the main issues of his campaign is how to provide more funding for education.

Mulvaney is a proponent of a conservative school spending plan called the "65 percent solution" that, if implemented, would require 65 percent of a school's budget be allocated for classroom costs. He said only about 50 cents of every \$1 in South Carolina school budgets makes it to school classrooms and he wants to increase that number to at least 65 cents.

He is adamant about fixing funding formulas in Lancaster County that prevent local schools from

receiving appropriate funding and is a proponent of "backpack" funding, wherein public schools would receive a per-student grant for every child enrolled.

Mulvaney is also a supporter of strengthening education options in the state, which includes improving the charter-school system and exploring ideas, such as virtual schools, single-gender schools and year-round programs.

"My opponent slams me for not supporting public education, but charter schools are 100 percent public. So, I'm talking about improving the public education system," Mulvaney said.

Unemployment, taxes, business development and wasteful spending are all at the forefront of his campaign, Mulvaney said. He said the issues are interconnected and his plan to increase local jobs and grow local businesses is to cut taxes "across the board."

"I'd like to think I'm being honest with people about where I stand," Mulvaney said. "I voted as a conservative, I'm running as a conservative and I will vote next year as a conservative. You won't find any philosophical changes."

Mulvaney and his wife, Pam, have 8-year-old triplets, two boys and one girl. He is a graduate of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., University of North Carolina School of Law and Harvard Business School. He is a member of St. Philip Neri Catholic Church in Fort Mill.

Mulvaney is on the Board of Visitors at the University of South Carolina at Lancaster and was both the former campaign chairman at the United Way of Lancaster County and formerly on the board of trustees at Springs Memorial Hospital.

In Indian Land, Mulvaney is a charter member of the Indian Land Rotary Club, on the board of directors at the Surgery Center at Edgewater and on the mission board of the recently founded Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church.

You can find more on Mulvaney's campaign at www.mickmulvaney.com.

Norrell stresses issues of working families

Norrell, 35, is a Lancaster native and has been attorney for the city of Lancaster for 10 years. She is pleased with the support she has received during her campaign. If elected, Norrell will make history. She will be the first woman elected to represent Lancaster County in the state Senate.

"It's going wonderfully well," Norrell said. "I'm meeting so many wonderful people and reconnecting with people from so many phases of my life. I keep meeting people who knew my father or say they knew my momma at Springs (Industries)."

The reason she decided to run for office was to improve the education system in South Carolina. With two children in the public school system, she adamantly opposes a statewide voucher system, which she believes would take money away from public schools.

"Taking public tax dollars and giving them to private schools, it's a huge threat to the public education system," Norrell said. "It's not fiscally conservative. You're asking people to fund two school systems and nobody can convince me that makes sense."

Norrell is concerned that businesses drawn to the district through various incentives will leave once those incentives end and they have no further vested interest in the area. Instead, she would rather grow local businesses who won't leave in five to 10 years.

She supports the creation of innovative jobs to solve the state's unemployment problem, including "green jobs" that would best make use of the state's strong agrarian workforce and background in

factory work. Jobs could include anything from electric car production to the development of ethanol from switchgrass.

Norrell is also focused on controlling government spending at the state level. State government spending grew significantly over the last five years and Norrell said it sets a bad example. She believes that if families must tighten their belts during tough economic times, then so should the government. She proposes keeping government spending on a strict budget.

"I come from a working family and I know what its like to deal with basic things, like buying gas or paying bills or paying for medicine," Norrell said. "I'm very different in almost every way you can imagine from my opponent."

Norrell and her husband, Mitch, have two children. She attended Furman University and supported herself through graduation by working at Springs Industries Grace Bleachery. She also graduated from the University of South Carolina School of Law. She is a member of Lancaster's First Baptist Church.

Norrell is a longtime member of the advisory board for the Pregnancy Care Center in Lancaster, on the board of Lancaster-based adult education program Learning Institute For Tomorrow and a Relay for Life team captain for the local American Cancer Society fundraiser. She and her husband work together in the law firm of Norrell & Powers Norrell.

You can find more on Norrell's campaign at www.norrellsenate.com.

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