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Postmus' base strengthens

Assessor candidate seeks endorsements for race

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San Bernardino County Sun

Considering he has more than \$800,000 in campaign funds and a reputation as the most powerful county politician, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Bill Postmus has been asking for a lot of help.

In the four months since declaring his candidacy for county assessor, Postmus has landed at least 90 endorsements from city, county, and state-elected officials - nearly cornering the market in pursuit of one of the more obscure elected positions.

If Upland's City Council were deciding the June 6 election, the vote would be 5-0 for Postmus, according to his voluminous endorsement list. The same goes for Chino Hills and most of the cities in the High Desert, which he represents.

Clear majorities of city leaders in Fontana, Rancho Cucamonga, Needles and Hesperia are also committed, along with most of the county's state Senate and assembly delegations and three other county supervisors.

Postmus isn't shy about asking, openly politicking after hours at last month's annual city-county conference. The support is a centerpiece of his campaign, Postmus said, and one he's worked to earn.

"I've definitely made a lot of relationships and a lot of friends over the years," Postmus said, adding that he'd never seen a candidate for county-wide office receive so many pledges of public support.

But the length of the list is no substitute for qualifications, said his principal opponent and three-term incumbent Assessor Don Williamson.

"He doesn't have any experience, so he's got to put something out there," Williamson said.

It doesn't hurt that Postmus started asking for endorsements while Williamson was still publicly declaring his intention to retire. Or that, as chairman of the San Bernardino County Republican Party, he is in a position to help, or hinder, the political careers of aspiring San Bernardino County conservatives.

"If you're a Republican, whether you admit it or not, you don't want to incur the wrath of the chairman and all the power he's got," said Williamson, who said he was pressured to stay out of the race.

Some of Postmus' supporters said a large part of their decision was based on his enthusiasm for their support.

"You know, Mr. Williamson has not contacted us, which means something in itself," said Kris Vosburgh of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers' Political Action Committee. "The assessor's office is one of those where the most important thing they can do for the taxpayer is their attitude."

Steven Frates, a senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government in Claremont, said endorsements are important for any challenger in a low-profile race.

"The more endorsements there are out there, the more likely it is for a voter to at least know one of the endorsers," said Frates. "And in technical races, it takes a real effort to push an incumbent out."

Frates described the Jarvis endorsement as "the gold standard" of assessor's endorsements, and Postmus said it confirms that he's the best candidate to defend low property taxes.

But even without the organization's support, Williamson said he has done more for county taxpayers in his three terms than his opponent ever could. Williamson regularly visits senior centers and mobile-home parks across the county to explain how citizens

can claim property-tax deductions, he said, and has battled the state's Board of Equalization to prevent tax increases on homes burned in wildfires.

Williamson also said he expects to roll back the property taxes of 65,000 county residents this spring.

Voters should cast their ballots based on those accomplishments, Williamson said, not on the results of a popularity contest.

"Politicians get endorsements," Williamson said. "I'm a hard-working assessor, but I'm not a politician."

Some of Postmus' supporters argued that the supervisor's political acumen might do the assessor's office some good.

"I like Don, I met Don before, and I think he's probably doing an OK job," said Rancho Cucamonga Councilman Sam Spagnola. "But if there is anything, I trust Bill's capability to make things a little bit better."

Fontana Councilwoman Acquanetta Warren said she picked Postmus after seeing his effectiveness on the Republican Central Committee.

Postmus is pledging to modernize equipment in the assessor's office. Warren said Postmus' political connections would help him in seeking county funding for more portable technology and other improvements in the office.

Mark Mosher, the head of the office's administrative-services division, said the office could use more resources and could certainly improve, but is not technologically illiterate, he said, citing a recent independent audit.

"Bottom line, they came out and said we have one of the best assessor systems for a county of our size in the state," he said.

The county Safety Employees' Benefit Association had already endorsed Postmus when Williamson entered the race shortly before the March deadline. The union endorsed Williamson in the past, but president William Abernathie said Postmus earned the union's support - although members would likely prefer he remain as chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

"He's been pro-public safety, very productive, how do you knock a guy like that?" Abernathie said, adding that "I would never want to hold anybody back."

Chino Hills Councilman Curt Hagman has known Postmus for six years from the county's Republican Central Committee.

"I don't know why he's running for assessor, honestly," he said. "But that's Bill, and he's done a lot of good things for the county as a whole and for the Republican Party."

Postmus' hunt for endorsements doesn't appear to be over.

Chino Mayor Dennis Yates called Postmus "Very intelligent, very aggressive and extremely likable" adding, "I'd endorse him in a heartbeat."

But he has yet to be asked, which he isn't taking as a snub.

"My name is Yates," he said. "I'm at the bottom of his list, probably."