



Gene M. Seibert, National Commodore

SUBJECT:

Auxiliary Elections

Leaders Wanted!

Your decisions chart the future course of the Coast Guard Auxiliary

By Commodore Gene Seibert, National Commodore

Do you know that a decision you will make may determine who our National Commodore will be 18 years from now? That's the kind of power that you have, to affect our future course.

Yes, you!

As a member of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary, you have an important vote. Depending on the office that you hold, you may have more than one opportunity to elect tomorrow's leaders.

Why am I mentioning elections now, when elections are at the end of the year? The subject is too important not to be on your radar screen. We need to begin looking at our future leaders now and not wait until election day.

If our National Commodore of the future follows the normal Auxiliary elected path, they will probably serve two year terms as a vice and then flotilla commander, two years terms as a vice and then division captain, a two year term as a rear commodore, two year terms as vice and then district commodore, a two year term as national area commodore and finally a two year term as the National Vice Commodore. Whew! And then.... two years as the National Commodore of the Auxiliary.

Electing our local leaders may not be as exciting as participating in the Auxiliary programs that you are passionate about but Auxiliary elections *are one of the most critical duties* you will perform as Auxiliary members. That's why we all need to continually think about who we want to lead us in the future.

Why do our elections matter so much?

We need to choose our elected leaders very carefully. During their one or two-year watch, our leaders at all levels, can dramatically impact the morale, direction and accomplishments of their unit. Their impact on our course can linger long into future years.

Many of our members have not had the opportunity to explore how the Auxiliary election process works, from top to bottom. Most of us do understand how our own local units (flotillas and divisions) elect our leaders. When election time comes around, we vote for the people we think will do the best job. Or do we? Let's consider some examples:

Sometimes we simply vote for the person who is next in line. We feel we should reward them for having served in a subordinate position.

Possibly we vote for a person simply because we like the person better than another.

Unfortunately, there are times we vote for a person because no one else is willing to run for the job. I think we've all been there.

Consider the Importance of Your Vote!

I'm asking you to stop and consider just how important it is that you choose wisely. I am asking you to consider voting for those who have real competencies of leadership and management; those who are both risk managers and risk takers, yet put people first in all they do..

Our Auxiliary environment has changed dramatically since September 11, 2001. We are experiencing major cultural shifts in both the Coast Guard and in the Auxiliary. Now more than ever, we need the right leaders to help us chart our future course.

FACT: We're not the same Coast Guard Auxiliary we were even five years ago. Selecting visionary leaders has become a critical component of the Auxiliary's very survival.

Perhaps Albert Einstein was correct when he said, "The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were in when we created them."

Dramatic Cultural Shift:

It comes as no surprise that we are continuing to experience a dramatic cultural shift. A shift of this magnitude occurs when a series of dramatic events impact so heavily upon an organization that it cannot continue to operate in the same way and expect to achieve its goals.

In today's Auxiliary, there is simply no room for leader candidates who want to pursue business as usual. We should not elect someone to a leadership position just because it's their turn to serve. The leaders we elect today, must be ready, willing and able to dig deep and push hard. We cannot afford a leader who is only willing to operate as a figurehead.

Sweeping Changes:

September 11, 2001, brought sweeping changes to our operational environment. These changes only reinforce the importance of enhanced interaction and coordination between operational Coast Guard commands, our interagency partners and our own Auxiliary units. Our new generation of leaders must bring new emphasis to the importance of the planning and the sustainment of our Auxiliary operational readiness balanced with Recreational Boating Safety missions

We need to fully recognize in a broad sense, that all of our operational activities need to be focused on prevention. We do this through Operation Patriot Readiness, Maritime Domain Awareness, Recreational Boating Safety and Community Outreach Programs. We also do this through our surge capabilities and capacity under MARSEC 2 or 3 conditions where we also must provide a capable response to mitigate the effects of an incident or if called upon, to perform search and rescue missions.

Transformation:

Our Auxiliary organization must continue this transformation in view of what we know today. Our transformation cannot be postponed or ignored. The results of the dramatic events; the shift in Coast Guard missions, the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security; and the changing make-up of the recreational boater, all need to come into play as we move our organization forward.

More than ever, we need to provide our organization with a depth and breadth of operational, personal, team and strategic leadership that is critical to our sustained success in the immediate and the long term.

Do you see now, why your selection of our leaders is so vitally important to us all?

Critical Success Factors:

Colin Powell, when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, referred to critical success factors as traits/characteristics of outstanding leaders. Please consider using the following traits as a sort of checklist to evaluate potential candidates running for elected offices in your flotilla, division, or district.

Visionary – Is this candidate a visionary leader? A visionary leader sets goals, looks ahead and sees the challenges ahead of us. (Powell calls this seeing around corners). A visionary leader plans today for the challenges of tomorrow. Such leaders are proactive rather than reactive. A visionary leader doesn't accept the status-quo as unchangeable.

Motivator/achievers – Is this candidate a motivator and achiever? Leaders who are high energy and motivated to do more, want to do better than what has taken place in the past. These leaders do not rest on the laurels of their own or their unit's previous accomplishments. More importantly, they have the ability to motivate others to become like themselves. Successful motivators and achievers give 100 percent effort and are continually striving for excellence.

Communicator – Does this candidate communicate well? A leader must be able to effectively communicate ideas, values, visions, and goals. A successful leader's decisions are crisp and clear. Everyone knows where the unit is going, and how they will get there.

Solutions oriented – You have probably heard the saying, "if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem"? Successful leaders don't accept any problem as unsolvable. They are always working to find solution and have a "can-do" attitude. These leaders always maintain a situational awareness and that enables them think fast on their feet.

Perpetually optimistic – Leaders who are optimistic have a dramatic ripple effect on their organization. They always see the best in their members and their member's accomplishments. They always see what can be done, instead of focusing on the roadblocks to progress.

Know how to have fun – Successful leaders surround themselves with people who take their work seriously, but not themselves. They know how to play as hard as they work and they truly understand the value of our Auxiliary's fourth cornerstone.

Leaders are willing to make the tough decisions – You've heard the saying, "the buck stops here?" Successful leaders hold fast to this philosophy, even when it seems unpopular. A good leader's decisions are always tempered with empathy and consideration.

My Challenge to You!

So I challenge you – whether considering a candidate for flotilla commander, division captain or any of the elected leadership, start looking at potential leaders now. Do not wait until the last minute to choose. When you do choose, please choose carefully and wisely.

Like the ripple effect of a wake from a boat, the leadership choices that you make today will ultimately impact the direction of the Auxiliary of tomorrow.