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ARLENE VIOLET - The best - and worst - of government



I know that I should not do so, but the fact is that I hold women in politics to a higher standard. It's not exactly that we have a surfeit of them, so that's probably why I want the ones who are in public office to be role models for young women. Two women recently represented, in my view, the best and worst in politics.

The Best:

Candidate Sharon Gamba (Republican, North Kingstown) - Ms. Gamba has called for an end to the practice of elected state legislators being employed as town solicitors and municipal judges. She rightly cites the reality that this long-standing practice is rife with political manipulation. Granted, she is running against a Democratic incumbent, Robert Craven, who currently holds down positions as assistant town solicitor in North Kingstown, probate judge, prosecutor, and solicitor for the Charlestown Zoning Board, and assistant town solicitor for East Providence. A look at the roster of legislators who are in these positions elsewhere in the state is a sad commentary that proves her view that this practice is another seedy example of how the system is designed to feed insiders at the expense of taxpayers.

During the summer, the public was nauseated by the so-called "beach gate" of insider dealing. (What, by the way, is the outcome of the investigation?) GoLocalProv, an Internet news source, recently listed a bevy of legislators who are "selected" to represent clients before such bodies as the Department of Labor and Training, with the taxpayers picking up the tab for the services. To date, nobody has done a study to examine what the accretions of these jobs do or don't do to public pensions and health care benefits. One thing, however, is certain: Being in public office as a lawyer appears to be the gift that keeps on giving.

District 32 candidate Sharon Gamba has pledged to submit legislation if she is elected to eliminate the practice of these municipal appointments. She anticipates a fierce legislative battle to end the favor factory, and undoubtedly, she is correct.

Parenthetically, it is laughable to see the insiders who gave us these self-serving deals mobilize against a Constitutional Convention, which would be the last hope to curb these appointments. If the reader believes any of the prophecies of doom by the naysayers, then a few heads ought to be examined. A Constitutional Convention is needed now, as this most recent example of a debacle proves.

Violet is an attorney and former state attorney general.