

## YWCA luncheon encourages women to seek public office

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Before running for office in 2000, K.D. Benson knew the impact the county commissioners had on the quality of life for residents in Tippecanoe County.

"The county commissioners are making decisions on whether your roads are going to be paved or not and those kinds of issues," she said. "It's important if you live in Tippecanoe County that you feel like the commissioners are making good decisions."

So after multiple people encouraged her to run for county commissioner, it solidified her decision to campaign for the office. "I felt like I could do a better job," said Benson, former county commissioner.

For some women, living life, working, raising kids and running a household may take priority over running for political office. But sometimes all a woman needs is encouragement to get involved in the political sphere, especially on the local level.

Benson and Lisa Decker, former Lafayette city clerk, will be speaking at the YWCA's

April network luncheon, "Run, Lady, Run," about why women should become more involved in politics and how to realistically accomplish this goal.

"It was very personally fulfilling for me," said Decker, who is vice president of marketing and business development for Franciscan St. Elizabeth Health. "I truly enjoyed my service with the city of Lafayette. When you are in a local elected office you really do feel like what you do can really make a difference."

Benson added that she believes women also make great political leaders. "I really believe that having a view of compromise or consensus building is something that women seem to be more tuned into than men," she said.

Lisa Decker said she hopes the luncheon not only encourages women to run for office but also helps other women campaign, which can expose them to the political process. "Having that support system behind you when you run is very

important," she said.

Both women agree that there are currently not enough women involved in local politics. So there are many opportunities for women to get involved.

Today, only two of the nine Lafayette city council members are women. In West Lafayette, two of the seven city council members are women. There currently are no female county commissioners.

The trend also hits home in state politics. Women account for only 21.3 percent of the state legislature. There currently are no female Indiana congresswomen and there has never been a female governor in the state, according to the Center for American Women and Politics.

"I think family commitment is a barrier," Decker said. "My children were very young when I first ran, and if I had not had a very strong support system at home, I could have never done it."

Benson said society also plays a role. "We are not to the point where women are viewed as equals in leadership capacity in many cases," she said. "That's definitely a barrier because you can't get the support."

Although each office might have a different set of criteria, women may be more qualified than they think.

"For the most part you have to be a personally prepared for running for office," Decker said. "It's not easy. You have to be

able to get financial support ... and be able to attract volunteers."

Benson said once in office an elected official needs to be intelligent, able to listen and able to network. "If you are interested and you care about your community, you can probably run," she said.