Ramping Down the Rhetoric in Washington Politics

Local News

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Bellevue, WA - Less than three weeks before Washington's primary election, accusations are being hurled in campaign ads that can make a person wonder, 'Whatever happened to civility?'

It's a question the League of Women Voters of Washington is asking, in seminars beginning Saturday in Bellevue. The free six-hour training is for moderators of public events who are faced with tough crowds and tough issues. And there will be other, shorter public workshops through this fall.

League Co-president Kim Abel says the goal is to spark discussions that are still lively - without yelling or name-calling.

We're going to have disagreements and that's perfectly fine - there is no reason that we'd all think the same, we don't believe that. But we do believe that we all can sit down and talk about our differences, and find where we have similarities. - Kim Abel
The July 21 moderators' training, Civility in Our Democracy, starts with an introduction at St. Andrew's Church, 2650 148th Ave S.E., Bellevue. Other workshops will be held in Clark County (Sept. 15), King County (Sept. 29) and Spokane County (Oct. 6).

Secretary of State Sam Reed is a fan of the training. He says what he's seen in public office is that negative campaigns and hate speech discourage people from entering politics - and they also discourage voters.

"The more negative ads there are, the more people are kind of disgusted with the whole process, and not particularly inclined to participate in the process, and even vote."

In his last year in office, Reed is visiting every county, speaking to students and civic groups about the importance of ramping down the hostile rhetoric in order to get things done.

"Week before last, I was at the Colville Chamber of Commerce, the Moses Lake Rotary Club - groups like that, throughout the state. I focus on civility, moderation and bipartisanship, and I've been getting just a terrific response."

Reed says he asks civic leaders not to endorse a candidate or contribute to their campaign without first getting a promise that they will abide by those three tenets.