

McBullied

## Taking the low road

*Confronted with losing his job if he stayed in the hunt for a state House seat, Frank Farry chose to keep his name on the ballot.*

Intimidated, bullied, pressured. Pick one. Any of them accurately explain why state House candidate Frank Farry resigned from his day job as assistant manager in Middletown Township.

Farry quit his post, which pays \$74,587 a year, after Middletown supervisor Chairman Robert McMonagle, in a one-on-one session after a closed-door township meeting, told Farry he'd lose his job if he didn't drop out of the state House race. McMonagle cited the federal Hatch Act, which mainly prohibits federal employees from engaging in partisan political activity, though the law also applies to state and local officials who deal with federal funds.

Farry, who didn't want to resign, told our reporter it's "a real stretch" to cite the act as reason for him to stay out of politics. He's right. And McMonagle was wrong to do it.

So why did McMonagle corner Farry, who as best as we can tell was doing a good job for the township? Farry is a Republican running against incumbent state Rep. Chris King, a Democrat. Here's the clincher: McMonagle, a Democrat, is King's campaign manager.

So the sordid irony is that McMonagle used a law designed to thwart political corruption to achieve a political end. In the end, however, McMonagle didn't get what he wanted. Instead of dropping out of the race, Farry, who has a law degree and also is chief of the Langhorne-Middletown Fire Co., quit his job. Confronted with a low-road tactic, Farry took the high road.

Voters looking for an alternative to King should find Farry's decision both brave and commendable. Frankly, we're surprised and disappointed that King, who's been a strong reformer since joining the Legislature, would condone such a tactic. Our hope is that McMonagle acted on his own.

While admitting that he met with Farry, McMonagle offered a different version of their discussion. "I tried to counsel him that he was in an untenable situation and the worst thing he could do was give up his job for a race he would probably lose."

"Counsel"? You be the judge.

All we know is voters in the 142nd Legislative District could have lost the rare opportunity to choose between two solid candidates for the state Legislature. There are plenty of issues for state House candidates to debate — issues that affect citizens of both the state and district, as well as issues affecting state government.

Limiting debate by forcing a candidate out of the race for specious reasons would have been a disservice to voters and the democracy we all hold so dear. At least most of us do.