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Endorsement: Novak best choice in GOP primary for Macomb County executive

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David Novak

By [The Detroit Free Press Editorial Board](#)

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largest county.

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Macomb County voters approved a new charter in 2009, endorsing a switch to county executive and a smaller board of commissioners, rather than a larger board, headed by a chairperson. An executive at the helm, the thinking went, would boost economic development efforts, offering companies a single deal-maker to approach.

Electing an executive would also put Macomb County leadership on an equal footing with Wayne and Oakland counties, allowing the smaller — but growing — county an equal seat at the regional table.

The Free Press is endorsing candidate **DAVID NOVAK** in the Republican primary for Macomb County executive. But this endorsement isn't so much a testament to Novak's abilities as a recognition that he's the best candidate in a limited field.

Novak faces fellow Republicans Randell Shafer and Erin Stahl in the Aug. 5 primary; the top vote-getter in that election will face incumbent Mark Hackel, the county's first executive, in the November general election.

It's unlikely that any of the GOP contenders will best Hackel, who has proved a capable leader during his tenure in office.

But here's the problem: There's no certainty in elections. Anything could happen — and any of the three ill-prepared GOP candidates could land at the helm of the state's third-

That's all true, as long as the executive is qualified for the job. It's true that Hackel will

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be tough to beat, and that it's difficult to enlist good candidates in a race that is likely a lost cause. But it's also true that the fractious Macomb County Republican Party is ill-equipped to do the work of recruiting and grooming viable countywide candidates. That has to change if the county wants to maintain or increase its political clout.

Novak is a veteran with a wide range of business experience, and his concern for Macomb County's future is sincere. But during an interview with the Free Press Editorial Board, Novak lacked basic information about key county and regional issues, such as a bond sale pitched by Hackel to generate money for the county's retiree health care plan, which is underfunded by about \$270 million.

Novak said he didn't know enough about the proposal to say whether it's a good idea. But the proposed deal has been widely reported on by the news media, and there's no shortage of information on underfunded retiree health care — a major liability in Detroit's municipal bankruptcy case, and a problem for local governments across the state.

Likewise, Novak said he didn't know enough to offer an opinion on a proposed plan to create a tri-county water authority to assume the responsibilities of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, a contentious and well-publicized negotiation between Detroit emergency manager Kevyn Orr, Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano and Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson.

Should Novak win the seat he aspires to, he'll have to remedy these deficits posthaste — and hiring strong support staff will be absolutely essential.

Despite these shortcomings, Novak is clearly superior to the other candidates.

Shafer became known to folks outside Macomb County politics after a truly bizarre Facebook conversation earlier this year supporting anti-gay and anti-Muslim statements made by former lawmaker and current Republican National Committee member Dave Agema. Shafer sparred with other Macomb County Republicans, most of whom disavowed Agema's extremist messaging in a rambling and sometimes nonsensical thread.

Stahl is unqualified for public office, lacking a grasp of even the basic structure of county government, tax policy or county operations.

Macomb County's momentum is strong, with a growing population, and a stronger voice at the regional table. It's crucial that the county's next executive advance, not hinder, the county's progress.

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