

## Ann Fisher commentary : Candidate's loss just a blip in the life of an activist

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BY ANN FISHER



Heidi Samuel has run against the odds since she started her campaign for the Columbus City Council late last year.

With little more than the Franklin County GOP endorsement in her hip pocket, she ran against Democrat Priscilla Tyson, who had the benefit of being appointed to a seat in a Democratic juggernaut.

Up for grabs was the two-year balance of a four-year term. If Samuel had won, she could have been a worthy partner in the city's success. But even though she lost, she won't walk away.

"Tomorrow, when other people disappear into the woodwork, I've still got business meetings coming up. I have things to do," Samuel said yesterday. She wasn't talking about another job or housework. She was talking about Columbus.

We met more than a year ago in a church sanctuary at a gathering of East Side community leaders. When Samuel approached the microphone, she commanded attention.

She was articulate, to the point. She was photogenic. She was a mother. She was from the Eastmoor community, the section of Columbus between Bexley and Whitehall. I'm no prophet, but I wondered, "Why isn't she a candidate for something?"

I introduced myself later and asked for her name and telephone number so we could talk about her brand of grass-roots activism in this fragmented yet increasingly polarized society. As the former president of the Eastmoor Civic Association, she was well-versed in the neighborhood issues that define Columbus.

But she appeared uninterested in organized politics, and her party affiliation never came up. At the time, I couldn't have pegged her either way.

I never called Samuel about the grass-roots issue, and I eventually cast off the notes from that meeting. I forgot her name, but not her.

Last spring, when Samuel sent me an e-mail referring to that brief meeting, I knew exactly whom she meant.

That's when I finally figured out that the woman from the church that night now was the long-shot Republican challenging Tyson for a City Council seat.

Samuel and I met again a few months ago. By then, she was a candidate, but during the wide-ranging conversation, it occurred to me that she might be more effective outside public office.

She might be stronger for the experience because she has refined the framework for her activism. But having lost, Samuel will not be burdened by the pressure of an elected official to forge, as she put it, a "dossier of successes."

It's true. At election time, we embrace the lofty promises but also the tangible specifics -- the age-old question: "What have you done for me lately?"

Pork-barrel politics endures because, like attack ads, it works. We also find comfort in the same old, same old.

As an outsider in a Democratic majority, Samuel could have been an effective check, if not exactly a balance.

She might feel the weariness of loss this morning. But more than likely, Samuel is checking her calendar and is ready to get back to it anyway, stronger and surer than ever.

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