

Tennant to run for WV secretary of state

Former WVU Mountaineer vows to cap election spending

By Bill Byrd

Times West Virginian

FAIRMONT— Natalie Tennant was a political newcomer when she ran a surprisingly strong campaign for the Democratic Party's nomination for secretary of state in the 2004 primary.

On Wednesday, the former television reporter and anchor showed off her hard-earned political skills.

Announcing her second run for the office — first at the Capitol in Charleston and later in Fairmont — the county native quickly laid down a marker for her fellow candidates.

With parents John and Rose Mary Tennant of Fairview and her daughter Delaney, 5, by her side on the small front lawn of the old Sheriff's Home next to the Marion County Courthouse, Tennant said she will limit herself to spending only \$150,000.

The spending cap is part of the Code of Fair Campaign Practices. As she did in her first race, she will sign it again, she said. Other candidates should do the same, Tennant said.

Recalling her narrow, 1,118-vote loss — “that's less than one vote per precinct” — with good humor, she said she's also learned some serious lessons about the post.

“There's no other candidate in this race who understands the importance of making sure that every vote is counted,” she said with a big smile.

representing Kanawha County in the state Senate in 2006. A lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve, Wells is serving in the Pacific. He is due back home in October. In introducing Tennant, state Sen. Roman Prezioso, D-Marion, a longtime teacher and school administrator in the county, said Tennant has “always made Marion County so proud.”

She first gained statewide notice in 1990 when she became the first woman to serve as the Mountaineer mascot at West Virginia University.

Nearly 3,000 votes were tossed out because of poorly designed ballots in that race, she said. The careless formatting of ballots in some counties led to “overvotes,” with voters choosing more than one candidate for the nomination.

The secretary of state's office “should be viewed as the critical office which it is with the power to shape the public's image of our voting system.”

Her loss gave her a chance to show her leadership, she said.

“This day represents courage, persistence, determination, loyalty and pride — all that makes up the character of a true West Virginian,” she said.

“I stand before you today with the courage to give it another try,” she said.

She could have cried foul after her defeat, she said.

“I could have stalked off, but I didn't. It gave me the chance to show my loyalty to my party and to keep my word and to keep working.”

Noting the day's significance as the 144th anniversary of the state's creation — and the ninth anniversary of her wedding to former fellow newscaster Erik Wells — Tennant also cited President Lincoln's example.

Lincoln, who approved the state's entry into the union in 1863, lost eight elections, she said. “He could have quit many times but he didn't.”

Also a Democrat, Wells won a seat

“She's a trailblazer and she certainly has a heart as big as the state of West Virginia,” Prezioso said.

House Majority Leader Joe DeLong, D-Hancock, filed earlier this month for the Democratic nomination. Senate Majority Whip Billy Wayne Bailey, D-Wyoming, is also expected to be a candidate, The Associated Press reports.

Secretary of State Betty Ireland, R-Kanawha, has not announced whether she will seek re-election.