

Plan devised to clean up political campaigns

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Staff Reporter

Minnesota could be a model of quality political campaigns for the nation if major changes are made by advertisers, the audience and news media, says one of the country's leading experts on the media's role in shaping political discourse.

Horse-race reporting, attack ads, spin control and overnight polls often cloud the looking glass into the public debate. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication, said Friday that reporters claim people don't want substance, and politicians say media won't let it through.

"Now we've got a self-fulfilling cycle because each believes the other is to blame when, in fact, they are both to blame," the Waconia, Minn., native told a gathering of the Minnesota Meeting. A corporate sponsored organization founded in 1982 through the University's Humphrey Institute,

Minnesota Meeting brings national speakers to the state. G. Edward Schuh, dean of the Humphrey Institute, sits on its board of directors.

The audience must not be left out of the equation, Hall Jamieson said.

"You've also got to create a civic climate in which audiences pay good attention to substance," she said.

Hall Jamieson, author of "Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction and Democracy," said

two non-legislative Minnesota initiatives — the Minnesota Compact and the Campaign Advertising Code — would help improve political dialogue in the coming season.

The compact, proposed by the Star

Tribune, advocates a return to Lincoln-Douglas-style debates, calls for more substantive news coverage, demands voluntary curbing of negative ads and espouses greater citizen participation.

Former Rep. Tim Penny, a senior fellow at the University's Humphrey Institute, is trying to organize a group to further the ideas proposed in the Minnesota Compact. Janna Haug, associate program director with

the Humphrey Institute Policy Forum, said Penny will host an organizing meeting for the group called the Minnesota Compact Coalition this week.

The campaign code, unveiled Thursday

by Minneapolis advertising executive Lee Lynch, asks candidates to sign a six-part code aimed at ending the mudslinging attack ads and elevating the level of public debate.

The reform measures, which Lynch unveiled at a joint meeting of the Minnesota News Council and Citizens League on Thursday, are intended to prevent gross caricature, distortion and tasteless attacks, such as new technology that allows a candidate's image to be "morphed" into a dog in a TV ad.

And while the proposal aims at boosting campaign dialogue and focusing on issues — something voters have indicated they desperately want from a political campaign in poll after poll — the plan met with opposition from a panel of political operatives and media leaders.

"It's a wonderful idea, but the Titanic was a wonderful idea," said longtime political consultant D.J. Leary. He said certainly people abuse the freedoms, but that doesn't necessarily mean they should be limited, at

See **COMPACT** page 5

COMPACT from 4

least in a free society. C

Leary was joined in his criticism of the plan, which would ask candidates to sign a Campaign Advertising Code agreement, by state Republican Party leader Chris Georgacas.

"I would not urge candidates to sign on," Georgacas said, adding that a measure in the plan asks candidates to request that broadcast stations turn down any independent expenditures in support of the campaign. And that goes too far, Georgacas said.

His DFL counterpart, Steve Hildebrand, seemed more open to the plan, while not whole heartedly supporting its six planks.

"My biggest concern is not being able to use the likeness of the opponent," Hildebrand said.

But Independence Party leader Dean Barkley, who has run in several statewide races, said his party already has the same rules the code puts forth adopted into its bylaws. "I put the challenge to the two other parties" to match these standards, Barkley said. He added, cynically, that in his experience with negative campaigns, "Victory is more important than what's going on in democracy."

In addition to denying the use of opponent photos and refusing independent expenditures, the signatory code would require candidates to take full responsibility for all ads, have their pres-

ence dominate TV and radio ads and post the campaign code's seal on all campaign literature.

Its teeth: A candidate signs 50 days before the general election or loses a groundswell of citizens who pledge not to vote for anyone not signing the code. And anyone signing on and breaking the rules would face retaliation by an opponent and the media.

Hall Jamieson offered a broad endorsement of the Lynch plan and the Minnesota Compact, which she said could be used as a model for nationwide reform of political campaigns in an effort to counter poor voter turnout and cynicism.

"Minnesota is the place to look to an alter-

native compact of civic discourse, one that is voluntary, one that engages civic organizations, the advertising community, the politicians and the news media in a discussion of what norms work in this state," she said.

And once that alternative is realized, Hall Jamieson said it is our duty to take it to the rest of the country.

"Having done it differently, I call on you to take the model out to the rest of us. We are in desperate need of becoming Minnesotans."

The luncheon address to about 100 people, including a former governor and gubernatorial candidates, in downtown Minneapolis was broadcast live on Minnesota Public Radio. C