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RUN, WELDON, RUN

In many ways, Weldon Davis is a typical golf course superintendent.

He wakes up at an ungodly hour to head to The Creek GC in Spartanburg, S.C. He's dealing with the lingering aftereffects of a very crappy winter. "We were frozen solid for three or four weeks in February and we had a late frost, so we've been on pins and needles a little bit waiting to see how things respond." He's considering converting the putting surfaces over to Diamond zoysia and has been bending Dr. Milt Engelke's ear about the variety, which is still kind of a novelty on greens. On weekends, he's a NASCAR nut who used to race his own cars.

Yup, Davis is a pretty typical superintendent except for one thing: he's running for a state senate seat. "Three years ago, I never thought I'd be doing it," he says. "I'm just sick and tired of the people in Columbia and D.C. They represent themselves and the special interests, not the people."

Davis wants to serve his neighbors in the 33rd district – mainly the Spartanburg metropolitan area – in the state capitol. This is his second attempt. Two years ago, he ran sort of a practice campaign against a 10-term incumbent Republican. He used his own money, knew he didn't have a chance and even (gasp!) ran as a Democrat because that's the way the local powers-that-be wanted it. "I knew I couldn't win, but I wanted to learn about the process by doing it."

Now, the incumbent is retiring and Davis is gearing up for the primary election in June with a decent shot at being elected. An early online poll has him well ahead, but he's worried that his opponent will outspend him and bury him with dollars from companies and lobbyists.

Why doesn't Davis fight fire with fire? "I'm not taking money from lobbyists. It's been offered, but I said, 'No

thank you, sir.' When big money gets into small political races, they're going to want something sooner or later. That's what I'm running against, so why would I do it just to get elected?" Jeez, that sounds like common sense. Is that allowed in politics these days?

Davis isn't new to government. He's served on the local foster care review board and been active in party stuff for years. He's a Spartanburg guy and he knows the right folks around town. Mostly, he's a passionate person who's fed up with politics as usual.

His agenda is conservative, but not over the top. He hates waste and wants smaller government and tax reform. His experience on the foster care board has alarmed him about the quality of child health care

on welfare or lives in public housing in the state. The idea has been a sensation locally, around the state and – thanks to media coverage – nationally.

Hmmm, more common sense. Did he not read the politician's handbook?

Despite the fact that I was intrigued by the idea of a candidate with uncommon common sense, I really wanted to ask Davis one question: How in the hell does a golf course superintendent find time to run for state office? "It's just like being a superintendent – it takes dedication," he says with more modesty than can be imagined. "I get off work, I make calls and I knock on doors. I love talking to people about the issues."

Will he make "our" agenda part of his work at the statehouse? "Of course

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and welfare costs. His experience in golf has made him a committed but realistic environmentalist. And, like many, he wants a chance to fight for better jobs and better education in his hometown.

But, two of Davis' positions have gained him the most attention and support in his district. First, he advocates going back to the days of making prisoners do a decent day's labor: "We should put inmates back to work on the highways. We can save money, have better roads and help them get used to working. Frankly, they're more likely to be successful in getting a job and going to work after prison if they're used to working eight hours a day like the rest of the world."

Second, he proposes to institute random drug testing for anyone who's

I will. I'll promote the economic impact of golf in the state and the benefits of turf. It'll be great to have someone from our business letting people know about how much we benefit the community."

After talking with Davis, I tried to remember if another superintendent had even run for statewide office. To my knowledge, none has. That's a shame. We're a profession of hard-working, careful, thrifty problem solvers who value clean water, healthy recreation and a good economy. It's sad that what's common in our world is far too uncommon in government. I hope Davis can begin to change that. **GCI**

Davis' Web site is: www.weldondavis.org. Donations or well wishes from colleagues are welcome.