

POLITICS

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of the big picture: All politics is local. That's no less true for its stature as the most worthy of American political clichés, one coined by the late Congressman, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill. And it suggests that all politics is about us.

With that in mind, Florida Weekly decided to offer readers a local variation on the national political commentary. Instead of relying on the frequently quoted opinions of campaign managers, candidates themselves, media columnists or professional students of politics, we asked a number of local elected leaders or prominent personalities how they will vote on Nov. 4, and why.

Among those were the five Lee County commissioners, the mayors of Fort Myers, Bonita Springs and Naples, the vice mayor of Naples, the sheriff of Lee County, and several other citizens in Lee and Collier counties who have not been elected to office. Often such men and women are not asked publicly which candidates they favor. Some chose not to respond to our query. As Penny Taylor, the Naples vice mayor, noted, "I almost didn't call you back. (Politicians) are often afraid of offending their constituents."

The opinions of those who did respond appear here, edited only for space when necessary. Their answers reveal in vivid local color what and who lie at the heart of this most American political moment, the national election of 2008.

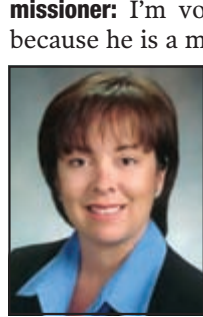
>>Wayne Daltry, director, Lee County Smart Growth: I voted for McCain in the Republican primary,



Daltry

but I'm going to be voting for Obama in the general election purely for the reason that this man probably expects to have to live a good two decades with the results of decisions. I'm not saying that's a blessing, I'm saying it's a curse. And that does indeed confer a sense of responsibility. Both Obama and McCain have children, which is handy, so in that respect they both care about the future, too. The issues, I believe, are wide-ranging: debt, climate change and moving away from the fossil fuel economy. We don't know how the landing from all of this is going to be, but without better planning it's going to be hard. And if you believe there are no hard landings in the history of God-fearing nations, then you better just open a book. Those are the three issues that should be driving both domestic and international policy. And in a nuclear-armed world, the consideration of another point of view is also going to be required. America first - country first - doesn't mean America only. So in listening to the candidates talk, I think one has more promise. As far as executive experience, I don't consider it all that valuable, because if you're going to have to work with others, that's a legislative trait. Considering that the current incumbent had a great deal of executive experience, I don't see it as a defining requirement. Have I just deep-fried myself? But let me add a P.S.: Despite the rant and furor and cursing and carrying on with the two national conventions, I won't feel like emigrating if either party wins. I won't be going out to join a militant group. Obama or McCain? It's not that bad a choice.

>>Tammy Hall, Lee County commissioner: I'm voting for John McCain,



Hall

because he is a man of integrity, another person who works very hard to tell you what he's thinking. I think he has in his heart the best interests of this country, and what is going to take us into a stronger economy and a safer America. He's an advocate for change but willing to do it within a system where it's hard to be an outsider, so I don't see him as a Washington crony. And I'm proud he reached out and brought in some young blood (Sarah Palin, McCain's pick for vice president). She does have some executive experience: She was a two-term city councilwoman before becoming mayor and then governor. In that kind of position, every time you go into your grocery store and talk to people, you're dealing with issues. Do you really think the issues of a town of 7,000 are that different than the issues of a place like Manhattan (New York City)? So she understands issues and she truly understands the average American citizen. In Lee County I also want to bring that balance, to make a difference, to seek change. I have to ask, how can I work regionally if I can't work with people in the five counties? And McCain is that kind of person - he will bring individual Democrats and Republicans together. That's going to be his emphasis.

>>Frank Mann, Lee County commissioner: Do you realize I'm the only



Frank Mann

commissioner running for office supported by the Republican Party here? Are you trying to get me in trouble? Since you're going to put me on the spot, let me say this: I always try to support my party's nominee (John McCain is the Republican Party nominee). Is that a good enough answer for you? I will say that in my lifetime I don't remember such a historic moment in national politics, with an African American male and a Caucasian female on the ticket.

>>Rabbi Bruce Diamond:



Diamond

Besides being a rabbi, I teach civic engagement at Florida Gulf Coast University. Students are getting excited and re-engaged in the American political process in ways I haven't seen in so many years. So I'm voting for the future - for Barack Obama. The future is these young people and the civic life they bring to this community. You would expect a Republican orientation from them since Lee County is so Republican, but I've watched a transformation. Nowadays it's like 80/20 in favor of Obama. He has three qualities I look for in a leader: One is courage, because I think it takes a lot of guts to step up and do what he's done; the second is intelligence; and the third is the ability to communicate. A president by himself doesn't do very much, but he sets the national mood. He defines how we feel about ourselves as a country. And lately we've been feeling very not-so-good. So I'm counting on Obama to raise the national state of mind. And

I am a life-long southern "Dixie-crat" who nearly got sucked into my parents' "Ronald Reagan downdraft," but fortunately I was able to escape.

- said Woody Hanson

John McCain is a bit of a George Bush - not in the conventional sense, but this way: He's never been very good at what he does. George was a failed businessman, and it was through the legacy of his father and some others that he was bootstrapped up. And McCain was near the bottom of his class at Annapolis (the U.S. Naval Academy), he crashed five planes, and his greatest achievement was crashing a jet and being captured. Most countries don't give you a medal for that. And he abandoned a wife who stood by him while he was a prisoner of war, which did not show character. Most of all, his place in our political life is a result of the second woman he married - he married into a rich and influential political family that bought him his congressional seat. America has gotten tired of this legacy.

>>Mayor Bill Barnett, Naples:

I'm a Republican, and I was leaning toward McCain. I'd met him a few times,



Barnett

and I liked what he stands for. But if I needed a solidifier it was without a doubt Sarah Palin. I think she sold the show. I had a smile on my face when she first spoke and talked about moving from the city council to becoming a mayor - that was near and dear to my heart. She was refreshing, sincere, and I could relate to her. If there was ever even a hedge of doubt or a waiver of doubt, she sold me. As far as I can remember, and it goes back a long way, this will go down in the history books as the most historical political moment, when you have an African American and a woman on the tickets, and throw in all the rest of it. The two presidential candidates are so different in their opinions, and everything else. Here's a final thought, and it's never going to happen, but I listened to Obama's speech and he did a credible job. But if candidates would just talk about local and national goals and dreams and not beat the hell out of the other candidates, politics would be a better place.

>>Barbara B. Mann, philanthropist and mother of Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann: I don't know who I'm going

to vote for. I think I'll be voting against



Barbara B. Mann

instead of voting for. I have a sort of a feeling that Mr. McCain is not going to last the four years, and that worries me. And the Democrat (Barack Obama), he's smart. F.D.R. (President Franklin Delano Roosevelt) was my benefactor. He helped my family and many families, and it's my opinion that the Democrats are still more for the working people, for the blue collar people, and the Republicans are more for the wealthy few. But my son is a registered Republican, did you know that? And I'm a registered Democrat, because of F.D.R.

>>Veronica Shoemaker, former Fort Myers councilwoman of 32 years: I'm

voting for Barack Obama, and here are the reasons why: Because of the struggles we went through many, many years ago, and Obama has been there, too. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. helped us, and I served on the national board to bring about the Martin Luther King holiday. The struggles we had, the many bridges we had to cross, the many lawsuits we



Shoemaker

had to file before we could get equal participation - all of that, Obama knows about. Obama has been there. And let's be real. Any elected official who goes into a job, especially in the White House, is going to be new. There's going to be a learning curve for everybody, including McCain or Obama. Everybody is new, when they come into an office, from the president to the governor to the city council or the county commission or Mosquito Control. When I went in on the city council, I had the experience of civil rights. And we had studied how to use federal monies and we knew how to protest. And when I knew all that - and that schools were segregated and money was taken from us, and jobs were segregated - I still didn't know how to implement it, to implement what I knew. That was another story, until I learned. But as a people we are not as far back behind as once upon a time. Right now, I'm sure with the background and education at some of the best colleges in the universe and with all the training - and now every issue we have has a legal curve - right now I believe Obama can take all his knowledge from the streets and higher education, and from coming up through trials and tribulations, and be the best president.

>>Penny Taylor, vice mayor, Naples: I've sat on the fence for a while.

I'm a registered Republican, but I don't always vote party lines. I vote for the man or woman. I, too, was impressed with Sarah Palin. But I'm voting for McCain basically because I'm very concerned with what I see as a tremendous amount of anger from Michelle Obama. And it really concerned me. We have enough anger in this world and we do not need to have

any more. We need to pull together as Americans. I think McCain understands that more than most, and I don't think we can minimize what he went through as a POW. I know it's considered flag waving and all that, but the man lived it. There's experience there, and there's experience that Obama lacks, and you add that to the anger frequently exhibited by Obama's wife toward white people - I know it's downplayed so they can get elected, but it's there - and it makes it very difficult. About Palin's experience, yes, I have a concern. But I think the positives of McCain outweigh that. And one would hope that if something happened to him, the people surrounding this administration are very experienced, and they would step in to help guide us, and to help guide (Palin).

>>Woodward S. "Woody" Hanson, of Hanson Real Estate Advisors in Fort Myers, whose family helped settle Fort Myers

I am a life-long southern "Dixie-crat" who nearly got sucked into my parents' "Ronald Reagan downdraft," but fortunately I was able to escape. I believe this is the most important presidential election that has or will occur in my life span."

About that, Hanson has one emphatic word: "OBAMA." ■



Hanson