

FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY

YOUR NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

Publisher

Pason Gaddis
pgaddis@floridaweekly.com

Executive Editor

Jeffrey Cull
jcull@floridaweekly.com

Creative Director

Jim Dickerson
jdickerson@floridaweekly.com

Reporters & Columnists

Roger Williams
Nancy Stetson
Karen Feldman
Betsy Clayton
Michelle Start
Evan Williams
Artis Henderson
Carol Simontacchi
Barbara Boxleitner
Jim McCracken
Tanya Amador-Daigle

Photographers

Amanda Hartman
Carol Orr Hartman

Contributing Photographer

Jim McLaughlin

Copy Editor

Cathy Cottrill

Production

Alex Perez
Amanda Hartman
Kim Boone
Jon Colvin

Circulation Manager

Penny Kennedy
pkennedy@floridaweekly.com

Circulation

John Noe
Paul Neumann
Rod Irvin
Francie Moser
Sherry Neumann

Account Executives

Shelley Lund
slund@floridaweekly.com
Doug Rosburg
drosburg@floridaweekly.com
Allison Spencer
aspencer@floridaweekly.com
Michelle Harrison
mharrison@floridaweekly.com

Business Office Manager

Kelli Carico

Street Address:

Florida Weekly
4300 Ford Street, Suite 106
Fort Myers, Florida 33916
Phone 239.333.2135
Fax: 239.333.2140



Subscriptions:

One year mailed subscriptions
are available for \$29.95.

Call 239.333.2135

or visit us on the web at
www.floridaweekly.com
and click on subscribe today.



Copyright: The contents of the Florida Weekly
are copyright 2007 by Florida Media Group, LLC.
No portion may be reproduced without the express
written consent of Florida Media Group, LLC.

OPINION

Bundlers in our midst



tanyaAMADOR-DAIGLE
politics@floridaweekly.com

— Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle is reporting for Florida Weekly on the presidential election. She has a unique perspective on the primaries and the process for choosing a candidate, having traveled the country reporting on primaries and caucuses for the Purple States project. To learn more about Purple States go, to www.purplestates.tv.

Never in my life did I feel the words, "We all want the same thing," resonate so loudly as they did this past week. With all the warring of words between political parties lately over the economic crisis, it finally hit me: Americans are all on the same page. What I mean is that we are all fed up with our government.

This week on the Purple States Web site we had a discussion about the housing market, which cannot be debated without mentioning the economy in its entirety. The conversations almost always went back to the same thing: Washington has been screwing us. And no one is blameless, Republican or Democrat.

Last season on the site we argued and screamed like banshees. The lines were clear. Democrats spat on Republicans for Bush, and Republicans ridiculed Dems for the do-nothing Congress. Now, we all just want to tar and feather the lot of them. At this point, they are all the same evil machine. It doesn't even matter who did it, just fix it.

A few of us are still holding out hope that one of the candidates can mend the broken economy. But even those who have decided who they are voting for seem half-hearted in their backing. It's as if no one really believes anyone can fix it. The passion is gone, along with the cash in our wallets.

Who can blame them? When you look at the associations between both Barack Obama and John McCain and companies

like Fannie or Freddie, it doesn't exactly give you a warm and fuzzy feeling.

In order to understand campaign contributions, one needs to know what a "bundler" is. Basically, a bundler, or "burglar," as I like to call them, is a fundraiser on steroids. Under current law a person can donate a maximum of \$2,300 to a campaign in each election (primary and general elections). Bundlers gather donations from many different individuals and present them to the campaign. It's a way for bundlers to gain influence with a candidate. The practice came about after the 2002 revision to campaign finance laws made unrestricted soft money more difficult to get.

The Center for Responsive Politics, a non-partisan watchdog group, has a helpful Web site that keeps an eye on these things. When I went to the site, I found that both McCain and Obama have been almost equal recipients from the investment, securities, insurance and real estate industries.

More specifically, and beginning with McCain, Wall Street appears to have contributed, through bundlers, at least \$30 million to the Republican candidate. For Obama, the number appears to be somewhere around \$22 million but with less transparency. While McCain has disclosed all of the names and occupations of his bundlers, Obama has "ignored repeated requests from the Center for Responsive Politics and other watchdog groups to disclose his bundlers' employers and occupations, these figures (for Obama) are probably undercounts," according to the center's Web site.

Additionally, bundlers for McCain include Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain, Lehman Brothers, Bear Sterns, Morgan Stanley, JPMorgan, Chase, Credit Suisse and Wachovia. Obama's list includes Citigroup, Lehman Brothers, Credit Suisse and Goldman Sachs.

From the commercial banking industry, on a whole, McCain and Obama's contributions are almost equal at about \$2 million each.

With all of that information, what really floored me was this number: \$101 million has been contributed to both political parties from the finance industry in the 2008 election. More than half, 56 percent, went to

Democrats. In other words, this is common practice in politics on both sides of the aisle.

I know I may be stating the obvious to some people, but to those who are just beginning to understand how the process works, it's gotta hurt. Especially when you really start to process the enormity of it.

Any reasonable, clear-thinking individual would probably assume that bundlers might have something to gain from their efforts. Things like government contracts and the chance to gain some influence and favors from the politicians they have worked so hard for, right? Yep, you are right, pass Go and collect \$200. It's a recipe for corruption.

I won't blame anyone, but here are a few fun facts, according to USA Today:

Bob Rubin, one of Obama's advisers, is a senior adviser for Citigroup. Citigroup is one of the companies that is deeply entrenched in the subprime mortgage crisis. He was given \$17 million in compensation from the company in 2005. This is the company that kept giving out mortgage after mortgage to high-risk borrowers. Hmmm.

One of McCain's advisers, Carly Fiorina, the former CEO of Hewlett Packard, was dismissed and was given an \$11 million going away present. Fiorina contends that shareholders backed that package, which is one of the reforms McCain is calling for.

Clearly, the whole system needs to be reformed. After all, the parties involved aren't doing anything illegal. The problem is, that if one does it, then the only way for the other to compete is to do it as well. It all boils down to matching campaign dollar for campaign dollar in order to win. Unfortunately, the corruption that inevitably comes out of campaign finance ends up hurting guess who? The American people.

I'm so disgusted by the abuse of the power that I don't even want to watch the news anymore unless it's titled, "Virginia Town Tries to Prove Existence of Ghost Cats." I kid you not; it's a real headline. ■

Purple States

Purple States citizen journalists have joined forces with the Washington Post to cover the issues that matter most to Americans leading up to election day. New videos will be aired at www.washingtonpost.com on Thursdays. Purple States also has daily video and interaction with American voters at www.purplestates.tv

GUEST OPINION

Change is coming to the Fort Myers Police Department

BY ANTHONY THOMAS JR.

Chairman of Citizens for a Better Fort Myers Government

I am pleased to report that for the second time in Fort Myers' 122-year history, a citizen's petition drive has been successfully completed. We have worked for more than 17 months and gathered 4,400 signatures to support a civilian oversight panel for the Fort Myers Police Department.

We have built a broad coalition of ordinary citizens from different backgrounds and different points of view. They all have one thing in common: wanting a government that works for and respects them.

When we began our journey and started the process to change the way our government operated, those who were the powerful, dismissed our concerns and pretended that no problem existed at the FMPD. History has shown that our concerns were valid and even the government's own experts pointed out the numerous flaws in the police department.

When you — the citizens — began to

raise your voices and participate in democracy by signing our petition, the powers-that-be began to change their tune.

They spent \$25,000 to hire an outside consultant to look into the department. They went from saying this was a small group of people complaining about how criminals were being treated to seeing veteran Councilwoman Veronica Shoemaker defeated because of her opposition to the oversight panel. We went from former Police Chief Hilton Daniels saying that there was no need for outside oversight to saying that he welcomes oversight.

Now those same powers at City Hall have appointed puppets to be an advisory group to the police department.

I have learned from my experience in politics that the citizens of this great city are not easily bamboozled. After the city council saw the handwriting on the wall, that voters wanted change, they decided to circumvent the process and appoint an advisory group for the FMPD. They were gravely mistaken to believe this would halt our efforts to get an oversight panel.

Mayor Jim Humphrey sought to preempt this citizen petition drive by appointing a group of political cronies to advise the FMPD. Would you believe that one of the members of this advisory group wrote a guest opinion in a local newspaper stating that there was no need for a civilian oversight panel? How can you be impartial when you come with your own prejudice and predisposition? A second member of this advisory group is a certified bail bondsman who does business with law enforcement. Isn't this a conflict of interest?

The citizens of Fort Myers want change and the political shenanigans at City Hall to come to an end. They want their voices heard and an elected panel chosen by the people of this great city. They have made it clear that they want the oversight panel to have subpoena power with the ability to call witnesses and to put them under oath so that the truth may be revealed. I want to thank all of our supporters who have stood up with us for the principle that no one is above the law, whether they be those who make the law, or enforce the law. ■