

Letters to the Editor

Westfield Resident Asks: Obama - An Agent of Change? Or Bad to Worse?

I was reading last week's letters to the editor, most of which seemed to disparage Sarah Palin or the GOP ticket.

Senator Obama, a charismatic and highly skilled politician, is attempting to ride a nebulous promise for change to the White House. The message resonates well because the majority of Americans are dissatisfied with President Bush, the economy and Washington's partisan politics.

Frankly, I am dissatisfied with President Bush, the economy and Washington's partisan politics. But I am not sold on Obama's message because I only want change if the candidate selling the "change" story is sincere, has a plan to change things for the better and has a track record of achievement that validates his ability to implement positive change.

Most people lean to the left on some issues and to the right on others. It seems odd for any intelligent person to be completely aligned with a political party on every issue. In spite of this, Senator Obama has never found reason to stand up against his party and side with Republicans on any issue. So he is either a simpleton devoid of independent thought, which I doubt, or he is a partisan politician entrenched in the ways of Washington. He is not a candidate looking to shake things up or reach across the aisle.

Where Obama does embrace change is his continually evolving message, which is always catered to the audience of the day. When speaking to an Israeli audience, he is for a tough military stance in the Middle East - but the message changes when Muslims are in the audience. He is supportive of the lower middle class right up until the point that he finds himself in front of a more educationally elite audience where he readily calls the small town folks, "Americans who cling to guns and religion and xenophobia out of bitterness over lost jobs." This kind of message *du jour* brings his sincerity into question.

We are in the midst of an economic slow down, which by the way, pales in comparison to the fiscal disaster heading toward us unless we can change direction and put our nation's house in order. The federal deficit is growing to dangerous levels, personal debt is too high, there is a trade imbalance and Social Security is unsustainable in the current form. Obama has yet to articulate an idea or plan that will move us off the current course.

If Obama keeps the promises he's made, existing problems will be amplified. He wants to limit free trade even though growing exports have been the one bright spot in the economy. If free trade is limited, it will translate to lost U.S. jobs, skyrocketing inflation and a lower standard of living. Trade needs to be expanded and this might mean pressuring trading partners to behave fairly, like forcing China to honor intellectual property and buy software and pharmaceuticals as opposed to stealing them.

Anyone who has even a cursory understanding of economics knows free trade results in higher living standards for all trading partners. Democrats sometimes attack McCain because he once admitted that he doesn't understand economics. I guess they prefer a candidate who is not honest enough to admit he doesn't understand economics.

Obama has also promised to punish companies that move jobs outside our borders. At first blush, this seems like a great idea, but if we think about how it will play out, the problem becomes clear. For example, if a U.S. based manufacturer wants to relocate a factory from the U.S. to India in order to reduce labor costs, but it is prevented from doing so, it will be competitively disadvantaged relative to European (and other) competitors. As a result, the U.S. manufacturer goes out of business because competitors can sell similar products at a lower cost. The U.S. workers end up unemployed either way; but now shareholders lose their money and the Treasury loses the tax dollars that it would have otherwise earned had the U.S. manufacturer remained competitive and profitable.

Another feel good idea that the Democrats have been pushing is a punitive tax on oil companies. Just like promising "change" against the backdrop of an unpopular President, punishing "Big Oil" when people are paying \$4 a gallon for gas appeals to our emotions. Unfortunately, there is no Big Bad Mr. Exxon determining gas prices and taking everyone's money. Big oil companies like Exxon have millions of shareholders, many of which are small investors. A windfall profits tax would be counter to the protecting property rights of those investors and is unfair.

Ignoring the property rights issue, the next questions is how "Big Oil" might respond to a windfall profit tax. The most obvious countermeasure would be keeping profits below the "windfall" threshold. This can be done by paying executives higher salaries and/or pumping less oil out of the ground. Worse still, large oil companies can flee the U.S., relocating their corporate offices to more tax-friendly nations.

The final question is - does Obama have a sufficient track record of accomplishment to convince us he is fit to be President? He is obviously a bright guy with an Ivy League education. He also gives a good speech. But what has he really done? He has never run a business, never led a military unit and never championed important legislation. There is little on his resume that qualifies him for the job at hand.

Unfortunately, McCain is also a populist who probably won't attack the budget deficit or take steps to improve the long-term financial outlook. Though given the choices, McCain is the best choice. He is a sincere man, is willing to fight his party if he believes they are moving in the wrong direction and has a prolific record of service and accomplishment. He also showed good judgment picking an intelligent, well-liked, financially responsible woman as his VP.

Political Parties Are Progressive In Selection of Obama and Palin

Before everyone goes off bickering about who they believe is the right ticket to vote into the White House this coming November, we all should take a step back and first celebrate the progressive nature of both parties' tickets our diverse country has had a hand in creating this time around.

We, as a country, have taken a huge leap forward in a socio-political manner. Given that the United States political system is usually a defacto two-party system when it comes to holding political offices of importance, we are essentially guaranteed that we will have either a black President or a female Vice President.

How great is this moment in time for America? We should all reflect upon this before we start pointing fingers and speaking negatively about the candidates we are not voting for come this November.

I am an independent, which I personally define as any person who votes their conscience based upon the individual merits and potential of any one candidate or ticket. An independent will also always question how each candidate will best serve both their personal needs and the needs of the country as a whole.

I always find it humorous and irresponsible that people always vote along one particular party line because it is expected based upon race, gender, religion, ethnicity or economic status. Why does individuality go by the wayside when it comes to politics, yet rears its conspicuous distinctiveness in almost everything else people do in their decision making, be it professionally or personally?

Vote for whom you like because of the reasons that seem most logical to you and sit through all the negative rhetoric both parties' candidates will surely be putting out against each other through various media outlets in the coming weeks.

Also, don't try to feel you are saving or damning the world if you vote for one candidate over the other. It is human nature to take actions that will benefit you first, others second. Do not be ashamed about having these feelings especially if it goes outside what you thought was your party of choice. Embrace them within reason as it is a natural protective measure for one's survival.

For example, in Westfield, as long as I have lived here, property taxes have gone up roughly triple the rate of inflation every year and I believe will continue to do so until many people are simply taxed out of town and are forced to move despite loving the town and owning their homes for many years.

Further, just like elsewhere, but maybe just a bit more hidden, our residents' financial problems are being exacerbated due to a terrible economy, mortgage refinancing problems and higher jobless claims. Who is to blame? This is open to debate like everything else in politics as we have a Republican President, but have had a Democratic majority Congress for the past two years. I would say that most people have to blame themselves first, politicians second.

However, Senator Barack Obama has proposed as much as a 5 percent increase for the top end of income tax rates and another 5 percent increase in capital gains taxes if he is elected President. As a Westfielder, it's a simple matter of math and not politics for our community. Rising property taxes, increased income taxes plus increased capital gains taxes means an acceleration of many Westfield residents' and businesses' tax bubble. I vote for a thriving community, not a localized bubble that will most certainly pop.

Aaron Turnof Westfield

Districting County Government Would Mostly Help Democrats

The county Democrat machine would like everyone to believe that districting county government is "political" and a Republican initiative "against" Democrats. What has been left out of the debate is the fact that there is a Democrat freeholder challenge in the primary every year. Our current at-large system makes it just as impossible for the dissenters and reformers of the county Democrat machine to get on their party's line as it is for a Republican or an Independent candidate to get elected in the general election.

The bigger threat to business as usual for the county government powerbrokers is that districting county government would empower Democrats at all levels of government.

Registered Democrats outnumber Republicans 2 to 1 in Union County. Doing away with the at-large system of electing freeholders would offer Democrats that are not aligned with the county machine an opportunity to have a chance to take back their party and return it to the people. People such as Mayor Garret Smith of Roselle and former freeholder Adrian Mapp just to name a few.

The numbers in Union County freeholder races don't change much from year to year. The Democrats win by the same margins. The only thing that causes a fluctuation in freeholder race numbers is the top of the ticket. Presidential and gubernatorial elections bring out more voters who, more than likely, will vote straight down their party line.

Union County is overwhelmingly Democratic. If county government was districted it would have the most benefit to Democrats. The Republican freeholder candidates win the race in most of the towns, but the large population of just a few cities outdoes the efforts of the rest of

the county. Just because a freeholder lives in Cranford, doesn't mean that she is the choice of the voters in the area to represent them. Democratic Freeholder B.J. Kowalski has never won an election in her hometown of Cranford. If county government were districted she would face real opposition in both a Primary and General Election.

Using 2003 numbers: Towns in which Republican freeholder candidates won the election were: Berkeley Heights, Clark, Cranford, Fanwood, Garwood, Kenilworth, Mountainside, New Providence, Roselle Park, Scotch Plains, Springfield, Summit and Westfield.

A breakdown of registered voters of the above towns by party affiliation is: 54 percent unaffiliated and independent; 22 percent Democrat; 24 percent Republican and with a combined total of 106,306 registered voters.

Towns in which Democratic freeholder candidates won the election were:

Elizabeth, Hillside, Linden, Plainfield, Rahway, Roselle, Union and Winfield. A breakdown of registered voters of the above towns by party affiliation is: 49 percent unaffiliated and independent; 41 percent Democrat and a paltry 10 percent are Republican. The combined total registration is 142,600 registered voters.

It is the Democratic leaning towns that elect the freeholders that then have absolute power over approximately a quarter of our property tax bills. Districting county government would not only offer all county residents' true representation, no matter their party affiliation, but it would free Democrats from the stranglehold of their own machine.

Tina Renna President, Union County Watchdog Association, Inc.

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