



THE VIEW

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THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER: POLITICAL “WHAT IFS?”

BY
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We are in the middle of a hot and dry Mississippi summer. Among the things that are certain is that when a few political junkies get together under a perpetually humming air conditioner, talk will automatically turn to speculation over the 2011 Mississippi elections.

Questions like, “What ‘ya hearing?” or “What’s “_____” going to do?” get things started. The answers that follow are little more than good practice for the front porches of the cabins and dust or mud surrounding the speaker’s pavilion of the Neshoba County Fair. That is where you can make the best use of the political wisdom gathered over the lunch tables of the preceding weeks. It is there that you can put on the cloak of political wisdom by saying, “I heard.....”

In my last few such get-togethers discussion has turned more toward the mysterious “unannounced” candidate than to those who have already made some noise. The fact of the matter is that with the known candidates jockeying for position political season ticket holders usually feel the need to inject some intrigue into the process lest things get as boring as the dog days of summer.

Take the Governor’s race, for example. Thus far, most of the speculation has centered on Lieutenant Governor Phil Bryant, Gulf Coast businessman Dave Dennis and Secretary of State Delbert Hoseman on the Republican side of the ticket, and Hattiesburg Mayor Johnnie Dupree and Clarksdale Attorney Bill Luckett on the Democratic slate. This list has been fairly stable for a few weeks now so, predictably, the urge to shake up things is becoming irresistible. Hence, we are witnessing the arrival in political conversation of the well-known, but as yet undeclared, major vote getter. These are the candidates who, if they decide to run, certainly have the ability to be game changers, if not winners outright.

There are three big names being bantered about that fit in this category. Oddly enough, they are evenly spread across the political spectrum – at least as the conversations of the “political

experts” would have it. There is former State Senator, former two-term Lieutenant Governor, current Mississippi State University administrator and Democrat-turned-Republican Amy Tuck. Ms. Tuck is only in her forties and she has proven time and again to be a vote getting machine. Her presence in the Republican primary would change things in a hurry.

Then there is the talk of Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice, National Guard General and son of a former Governor, Bill Waller, Jr. entering the field as a Democrat. Such a turn of events has the ability to send tremors through both sides of the ballot.

But perhaps the ominous turn of events for all aspirants for the big house on Capitol Street is veteran Mississippi Farm Bureau President David Waide’s, so far undenied, consideration of entering the governor’s race. Mississippi political expert Sid Salter pulled the curtain back on this possibility a few days ago. Waide certainly elevated his profile and the opinion of his political acumen in the recent tiff with Governor Barbour and a number of legislators in staking out the populist position against expanding government’s eminent domain powers. But the element of political speculation that is popping up around the political lunch tables is that Waide may run as an Independent.

Think about the possibilities. If Waide runs as an Independent he will go straight to the November ballot opposite the Republican and Democratic nominees. Remember that Mississippi’s Governor candidate must receive 50% plus one of the popular vote to win, or the race goes to the Mississippi House of Representatives where the winner must receive a majority of the 122 House members. Conventional wisdom has it that any credible Democratic candidate on the Mississippi ballot will almost automatically be guaranteed at least 40% of the vote. In this day of voter contempt for both political parties, the opportunity to park one’s vote, whether out of protest or genuine support, for a well-known populist Independent like David Waide will be quite tempting for many.

If you are calculating the numbers in you head it is not a huge stretch to see Waide’s best hope as being that of an election thrown into the House. Such a turn of events would mean that either the Republican or Democratic nominees had been eliminated. In this, the first election following eight years of Republican gubernatorial dominance under Haley Barbour, it is almost unthinkable that a Republican could actually “miss the cut” in a House of Representatives decided race for Governor. The same can be said of a Democratic candidate from the party that reigned over Mississippi politics for over a hundred years.

I know. It is summer time and the sun his hot and the humidity is high. Now go and call your circle of favorite political hacks and see what they are doing for lunch, or better yet go to the Neshoba County Fair and hang out somewhere between the pavilion and Sid Salter’s porch. Believe it or not that’s all you have to do to become a certified Mississippi political expert.

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William Martin Wiseman is Director of the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Professor of Political Science at Mississippi State University. He received his Ph.D in 1986, his MPPA in 1980, his MS in 1974, and his BA in 1973, all awarded from Mississippi State University. In addition to his duties at Mississippi State, Dr. Wiseman is a guest professor at Jackson State University. Dr. Wiseman's areas of academic interest include American government, intergovernmental relations and federalism, county and municipal management, public personnel administration, and innovations in state and local government management.

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