



THE VIEW

Issue #23

April 9, 2007

THE 2007 ELECTIONS: TAKING THE LONG VIEW

BY

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Those who engage in the art of politics and who do so successfully understand the necessity of taking long term as well as short term consequences into account. I have heard Governor Haley Barbour expound upon his philosophy of taking the long view in politics. Basically he acknowledges his understanding that key actions taken today are almost certain to have implications years down the road. In essence, one would be well advised to pay careful attention to these immediate decisions in light of their long term implications. While this certainly applies to office holders or potential office holders, it is good advice for the average voters themselves.

With regard to the coming 2007 elections a couple of examples come to mind. One has to do with the high political drama associated with legislative redistricting and the other has to do with the senate confirmation process. While neither of these issues is at the top of the lists of reasons why voters choose to vote for candidates they are becoming increasingly important in Mississippi elections. The primary reason for this is the growing partisanship that has become evident in this now two-party state.

The legislature that is put in place as a result of the 2007 elections will serve until the elections in the fall of 2011. It is this group of lawmakers that will likely have the responsibility of redistricting the legislature following the 2010 census. Many will remember the redistricting battles following the 2000 census. Mississippi lost a congressional seat, and for the first time it became clear that the Republican Party could offer viable opposition to the Democratic Party approach in redrawing congressional districts to accommodate four rather than the previous five congressional seats. Both parties took this to

federal and state courts respectively. By contrast, legislative redistricting seemed rather tame since the Democratic majority came to the fore in this venue. Redistricting is the quintessential political war. The majority party generally is accorded the power to draw up legislative districts and hence has the power to control the geographic configuration of districts in a way that favors the current party in power. Thus, the 2007 elections will establish the majority/minority status in the Mississippi Senate and House. The redistricting process that takes place in 2011 will go a long way toward painting the picture of legislative power far into the next decade. Several factors already point to this seemingly distant political event shaping up to being the perfect storm. There is a real likelihood that the Republicans will hang on to or expand on their slim majority in the Senate. It seems a good bet that the Democrats will continue to hold sway in the House. Passage of a redistricting bill in both houses will be an interesting exercise in partisan politics. The process of redistricting itself will take place in the run up to an election year legislative session and must be passed by that session. Additionally, continuing population shifts will have significant but, at this juncture, unknown impacts on this process. Examples include the continuing tremendous rate of growth in heavily Republican Desoto County, the uncertainty of repopulation patterns on the coast and the effect on a continuing decline in population in the Delta. Stir all of this together and throw in heavy push by Governor Barbour in his last year in office and we will all probably be able to feel the ground shake.

The second example has to do with the Mississippi Senate in its role as the confirmatory body for gubernatorial appointments. This Senate role may explain why Governor Barbour seems particularly concerned about being influential in that body. Few people give a lot of thought to appointed positions on boards and commissions. Governor Barbour, in his efforts to add strength in every way possible to the constitutionally weak Governor's office, has become quite enamored with the role of boards and commissions to aid in this process. In the past it was rather difficult for a governor to be overly influential in this regard due to his inability to succeed himself. Now, however, a governor who can get reelected enjoys eight years worth of appointments. This enables him to leave a much larger footprint in state government. Thus, it is of paramount importance for a governor to have a senate favorable to him to easily confirm second term appointments. This has not always been a "slam dunk" as they say. Many may remember that the Senate refused to take up Governor Kirk Fordice's four college board appointments at the beginning of his second term. No doubt this is a scenario that Haley Barbour would like to avoid, and no doubt the Democrats would love to see such impeding ability restored by a majority in the senate.



The maturation of two-party politics in Mississippi will make battles like those anticipated above the routine rather than an exception. It is of extreme importance that each party pays attention to every detail in putting itself in the best position to prevail when tests of wills present themselves. Thus, it is imperative that they take the long view and it would be wise for voters to do the same.

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