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# THE VIEW

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## TWO YEARS OF CELEBRATING DEMOCRACY

BY

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A few months ago I remarked that we were in for an inordinately long political season. If joining our fellow citizens in making the trek to the ballot box is indeed a celebration of democracy then we will be partying for two years before all is said and done. As we stagger to yet another milepost let us take stock of where we are.

November 6, 2007 marks the conclusion of a fairly long if not so eventful Mississippi election campaign. While this year's races have lacked the intrigue that often attends election campaigns in this state, they do seem to have drained the energy out of a good portion of the electorate. This may be attributed to the new evenly divided, evenly vitriolic partisan world in which even we in Mississippi find ourselves in. Up until a few weeks ago we could at least look forward to a deep breath after the last votes of November 6 were counted. Thanks to Third District Congressman Chip Pickering that breath may be only a gasp between wind sprints. Congressman Pickering's announcement that he would not seek re-election has resulted in the gathering of candidates seeking to replace Chip in that district that cuts a wide swath through Mississippi all the way from the Louisiana line in Southwest Mississippi to Oktibbeha County in Northeast Mississippi.

Overlaid over the Third District race is the Presidential race that started a full year early. So much for the good old days when we anticipated the respective summer doldrum-breaking nominating conventions. Your television would have to be on the fritz for you not to notice that that primary season is only a few weeks away, and the matter of who the Democratic and Republican candidates are will have been settled long before the previously pivotal

nominating conventions are gaveled into action. These events that used to hold a great deal of intrigue particularly for political junkies are now nothing more than week long “infomercials”.

The Third District Congressional race deserves a little closer look at this not so preliminary stage. Readers will remember the Third District as the primary focus of the redistricting battle following the 2000 Census and subsequent Congressional reapportionment that cost Mississippi one of its five Congressional seats. The race in 2002 pitted two incumbents, Republican Pickering and Democrat Ronnie Shows against each other in a district that had been redrawn decidedly in the Republicans favor. Pickering was the winner and was virtually unchallenged in 2004 and 2006. With his decision to leave the seat, the predictable interest in a vacant seat has developed. So far at least four candidates have approached the starting line and are revving their engines in anticipation of the checkered flag. All four are Republicans, and given the nature of the district, the level of Democratic effort remains questionable at this point. So what are the Republican candidates waiting on? If the street talk is accurate, each is obeying the request by incumbent Governor, titular head of the Republican Party and candidate for re-election Haley Barbour’s not to campaign or raise money until after the November 6th election. Thus, expect to see the field off and running bright and early on the morning of November 7th. Known to be running so far are Madison County insurance executive David Landrum, Rankin County Republican Party activist Greg Harper, Rankin County State Senator and recent Lieutenant Gubernatorial candidate Charlie Ross and former Pickering staffer and recently resigned head of USDA Rural Development programs in Mississippi, John Rounsaville. Rounsaville appears to be the lone Mississippi State University alumnus in the race. The significance of this is that the main MSU campus and its largest branch in Meridian are both in the Third District. The Third is also the home territory of Mississippi State’s most prominent political alumni, Senator John C. Stennis of Kemper County and G. V. “Sonny” Montgomery of Lauderdale County. Expect to see the political commercials roll on unabated after the Mississippi elections are put to bed.

So what are your opportunities for political participation as we gaze toward the horizon? Statewide elections draw to a close on November 6. Third district Congressional hopefuls roar to a start on November 7. The dark and damp days of winter will be filled with Presidential primaries and a potentially bruising congressional race. To borrow a phrase from Jack Crystal, the politics will be “as hot as a depot stove”. This summer the conventions will put a cramp in our remote control mashing finger, and the campaign for President in



the fall will surely make our partisan blood boil. And don't forget that shortly after the Presidential inauguration in January the candidates will be knocking on your doors for the 2009 Municipal elections. These can be the most intense of them all. Remember, it was the late Speaker of the U. S. House Tip O'Neal who said "all politics is local". By my count most of us have twenty-two more months of unrelenting political campaigning to go before we can take stock of the fruits of our voting labor. That's a lot of Democracy to be celebrating.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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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.

Wiseman is a sought-after speaker on state and local government, state and local politics, political theory and rural development. Often a guest editorial writer in Mississippi daily and weekly newspapers, he can also be relied upon to evaluate federal, state and local election results for all media.

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Elected to the United States Senate in 1947 with the promise to "plow a straight furrow to the end of the row," John C. Stennis recognized the need for an organization to assist governments with a wide range of issues and to better equip citizens to participate in the political process. In 1976, Senator Stennis set the mission parameters and ushered in the development of a policy research and assistance institute which was to bear his name as an acknowledgment of his service to the people of Mississippi.

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