

## KeyOpinion

## Why Leavitt Deserves Your Vote

Who deserves your vote, Bob Siekmann or Miles Leavitt?

Just as in the ideal love interest, we seek that perfect blend of looks, smarts and personality, in voting for a candidate to lead Longboat Key, we want an ideal mix of experience, intelligence and temperament.

But beyond that, we also have the weighty task of selecting someone who best compliments a board of seven. After all, we are not electing a stand-alone.

So which candidate will help make the strongest and most balanced Board? I have gone back and forth with these two candidates, but in the end, it is Leavitt, despite numerous shortcomings, who makes the best choice. Here is why.

When it comes to experience in Town affairs, Siekmann is clearly superior. Like a shared teabag, he has steeped himself in many of the committees and organizations around Town. And that experience is admirable and inspires confidence in both the candidate and anyone talking with him about the sundry issues. Now if we were hiring a Town Manager or if it was a Commission of one, than Siekmann is clearly the stronger choice. After all he is ready to go and well versed on most every issue large and small.

#### Town vs. Klauber

But there are a few real and substantial problems with Siekmann. To start, he continues unabatedly to support the installation of T-head groins at the Islander Club. There are two problems apparent with that decision. First, we are rapidly returning to the Town vs. Murf Klauber mindset. Klauber is convinced the Theads do not make sense based on the fact that the Colony's groin, a semi-permeable groin that slows the movement of sand, has worked. He fears solid T-head groins will either damage his beach or beaches south of the Islander. He will sue if engineers and experts that he and other prop-

By Steve Reid  
Editor & Publisher

erty owners hire can substantiate such damages. And they will. He can already argue that the Town is ignoring experts who clearly contradict the consultants the Town has remained loyal to, Coastal Planning and Engineering (see story on page 1).

And then there is a character issue. Siekmann, in my eyes, took a most unfortunate and haughty attitude at our candidate's debate last Tuesday night. He berated Leavitt for knowing little on any issue and saying that Leavitt would be the first time a rookie was elected who would be learning on the job. He accused Leavitt of not putting in his time.

Siekmann exhibited a sense of entitlement an "I-have-put-in-my-time-and-I-am-far-more-experienced-and-how-dare-you-even-share-the-stage-with-someone-of-my-stature-and-experience" attitude."

It reminded me of Al Gore's mannerisms during his own debate. It lacked grace, tact and instinct. It also was unbecoming the tone our Town commissioners should exhibit toward one another or residents. Instead of the cliché "we agree to disagree," it was, "I think you are an idiot and I cannot suffer you anymore."

Meanwhile, Leavitt, who is retiring as a pension fund manager this July, was gracious and honest. He was straightforward when he did not have a prefabricated or thought-out position. He said repeatedly that he would guide Longboat Key in its payroll and pension and salary issues. And that is commendable. We need someone who does not have all the answers but will walk in with his eyes open and question the current mode of operation. That alone is worthy of a vote.

Clearly we would not want seven Leavitts on Longboat's Town Commission just as we would not have wanted

seven Dawsons. In many ways Leavitt is a lone man out like Dawson, but will not be as alienating and emotional as Dawson oftentimes acted. He makes a good choice to build a stronger board as a whole.

#### The PIC Issue

I must say that while discounting candidates merely because they are members of Public Interest Committee is disingenuous, it does point to an important movement afoot on our island — we want someone who will complement the common wisdom. We want someone who is outside the cozy clone laboratory of ideas and solutions that surround those who have been politically raised on Longboat Key after retirement. And despite his flaws — a lack of erudition with expertise solely in the field of salaries and pensions — there is enough merit to warrant a vote for Leavitt.

Besides, Siekmann's berating demeanor could prove troublesome. It was difficult enough to watch the discourse dive to new depths at last Monday night's Town Commission meeting when Commissioner George Spoll went out of his way to lob attacks at Commissioner Lee Rothenberg that sounded personal and calculated. This debasing of the communication and in-your-face belligerence makes for behind-the-scenes enmity and politicking. It also is not befitting the stature of the position.

And by the way, Leavitt's experience is similar in proportion to Dawson's, who bothered me because his expertise was mainly confined to budgeting and cost-cutting accounting. But that limited ability was enough to make our Commission stronger in examining its way of doing business and its way of spending money. If Leavitt can force the Town to give a thorough examination of how it pays its employees and funds their pensions and health care plans — which is the largest portion of the Town budget — that too, should earn your vote.

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## PIC-a-Pack of Pixie Pipers

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*Politicians can be beaten,  
Can be beaten without cheating—  
When the voter goes down to the polls.  
Candidates may rant and thunder,  
Now's the time to make them wonder  
If we trust their often stated goals.*

Next Tuesday, March 14, the Town of Longboat Key will have its election to select candidates who will serve on the Town Commission for the ensuing two years.

There are four vacancies to be filled, but voters will actually only get to select one of them, since three are running unopposed.

Also on the ballot will be the controversial question of whether to allow Moore's Stone Crab Restaurant to petition the Planning and Zoning Board for a change in zone for the property on which the restaurant sits.

This column does not endorse candidates. That privilege is reserved for the editor and publisher of this newspaper, should he choose to exercise it.

We can, however, and we do, take a position on the issues.

Readers may have already noticed that this column consistently takes the side of the underdog — the individual facing an uphill battle with bureaucracy and red tape.

Back in October of last year, we took up the cudgels on behalf of Alan Moore, proprietor of the restaurant bearing his family name, which is located in the middle of a residential zone at the north end of the island.

In most municipalities, jurisdiction over zone classifications rests solely with the zoning bodies established for that purpose, but several decades ago, Longboat's citizens decided not to trust them entirely. As a result, applicants are first required to obtain the permission of the voters at a referendum, just to make application to the Planning & Zoning Board.

And to add a "Twilight Zone" touch to the procedure, placement on the ballot at a referendum can only be obtained in one of two ways: either by obtaining 700

signatures on a petition, or by obtaining a waiver of that requirement from the Town Commission.

To its credit, the Town Commission recently acted to cut through the red tape and grant the waiver. On Election Day, voters will be asked to permit Mr. Moore to seek redress from the Planning & Zoning Board.

Having slogged his way through the bureaucratic morass, however, the final decision will still be up to the Planning & Zoning Board, after due notice and a public hearing on all the evidence.

From the outset, part of Mr. Moore's problem has been the improper public opposition of several members of the Planning & Zoning Board — improper because they are supposed to wait until the matter is actually before them and evidence presented before they take a stand.

The situation was made doubly reprehensible because the voluble opposition came from a gentleman who was at the time not only Chairman of the zoning body, but also President of the Public Interest Committee, or "PIC," as it is popularly called.

Now comes PIC this week, with a propaganda "bulletin" worthy of the old USSR newspaper Pravda, replete with false and undemocratic arguments as to why the voting public should deny Moore's right to apply to the Planning & Zoning Commission.

First, PIC claims that the way to force Moore to stay in business is to turn him down, regardless of how much money he is losing. That, of course, is arrant nonsense.

In this country, you cannot force a business to remain operating, even though it is losing money. If the PIC brain trust believes otherwise, let them visit the vacant alley of shops at the Avenue of Flowers.

Second, the economic "experts" at PIC claim that if the Stone Crab Restaurant is zoned residential, its tax

