

It's Not Just the War — Politics are Local

Tom Burgum
Contributing Columnist

The results are in. It was the primary primary. This was to be the bellwether election that would tell us just how much the Iraq war would influence the fall elections. It was Ned Lamont as challenger vs. Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.). The challenger won. The unlikely and unknown candidate who took on a three-term U.S. senator and former vice presidential candidate actually scored an amazing upset win. He may not win in the fall because Lieberman will be running as an independent candidate; but for now, Lamont is the "Rocky" of American politics.

It is true that primary elections can sometimes identify the important issues and likely outcome of the fall elections. Some believe Lamont's victory will highlight opposition to the Iraq war as the defining issue in the fall. The Connecticut primary was national news for weeks and, if the political pundits are to be believed, it was all about Lieberman's support for the Iraq war.

Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia Center for Politics said, "By now, virtually everyone knows that three-term U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman is in the fight of his political life with multimillionaire businessman Ned Lamont... The chant from the Vietnam protest era went, 'The whole world is watching,' but in the Nutmeg primary, the similar slogan is about another war, this time in Iraq." The Hartford Courant chimed in with, "Six years after becoming his party's nominee for vice president, Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman faces a struggle to keep his Senate seat in Tuesday's primary against an anti-war challenger."

Lieberman's Defeat Much More than Iraq War

Jessie Jackson, as quoted in the Boston Globe, said, "In many ways, Connecticut is a bellwether state. This campaign is about the direction for the priorities of the country as well as our world-view. It's a defining moment for the party and the nation. I think the other Democrats and others will learn much from this campaign." The Democrats may well learn a lot from this election but, like the rest of the country, much of what they learn will probably be wrong. There was much more in play in Connecticut than Lieberman's support for the Iraq war.

Don't forget Tip O'Neil's maxim, "All politics is local."

Sabato touched on this saying, "In any event, Joe Lieberman is paying for his 'sins,' if you choose to characterize them as that. It's not just Iraq." Sabato believes one of his sins was deciding to run for both U.S. Senator and Vice President in 2000.

It was selfish and dangerous, angering many Democrats. An Internet web site, "Connecticut Local Politics," agrees with Sabato. "What if he had won the vice presidency, as many believe he actually did? John Rowland [Republican Governor] would have appointed his replacement, and tilted the balance to the Republicans.

President Gore would have faced an entirely GOP Congress thanks to Lieberman." "The Politics" blog also talks of anger about Lieberman's attacks on Clinton in 1998. "...in 1998 Lieberman was one of the first Democrats to criticize Clinton over Monica Lewinski ... It caused some in his own party to turn their backs on him."

One of those in his own party who turned her back on him is Elizabeth Hanson of Ridgefield, Conn. Hanson is a Democratic activist and longtime Lieberman supporter who voted for Lamont. One of the reasons given for supporting Lamont was Lieberman's open criticism of Clinton. While not her foremost grievance, she disliked what she called, "his bombastic, self-righteous lambasting of Clinton." Even more important to Hanson was Lieberman's support for dividing the homeland security money equally among all states. For her, it was just another example of Lieberman's lack of concern for Connecticut's problems. The straw that broke the camel's back, at least for Hanson, was Lieberman's decision to run as an independent if he lost the primary. This was just too much like his selfish decision to run for both the Senate and the Vice Presidency in 2000. Surprisingly, she did not like his support for the Iraq war but this was the least of her four reasons for supporting Lamont. For Hanson, not all politics is local, but most of it is.

John Kukulka is another Lieberman supporter who moved to the Lamont camp. Kukulka served as chairman



of the Ridgefield, Conn. Democratic Town Committee during the 90s. He, like Hanson, voted for Lamont. "I think Joe Lieberman has lost touch with the day-to-day politics of Connecticut. He hasn't visited or contacted the town committees like ours ever, except for the now." Kukulka does not believe that all, or even a majority of Lieberman's troubles stem from supporting the Iraq war. "I think he is taking it on the chin for a lot of local reason, not just for the war. He lost touch with local Democratic voters in the small districts." A touch of anger was displayed when Kukulka added, "He visited Ridgefield in the last two weeks, but prior to that I don't recall him ever visiting Ridgefield. Now he is walking around expecting us to kiss the ring, but where was he in the past? This is opposed to Chris Dodd [the other Democratic senator from Connecticut] who has visited many times." For Kukulka, an experienced politician, all politics is local.

If you don't believe local politics trumps most national issues, consider this. George McGovern was a leading liberal, but from a very conservative state. He still won three Senate elections with over 60 percent. He didn't lose until 1980 when he changed his home address and driver's license from South Dakota to Maryland. It was the most prominent issue in the campaign.

Tom Daschle, former Democratic minority leader in the Senate was also from South Dakota. He was defeated in his bid for re-election in 2004. The national media attributed Daschle's defeat to his constant criticism of President Bush. Don't you believe it. Daschle, like McGovern, grew restless in South Dakota and changed his residency and drivers license to the District of Columbia. The Republicans ran with that and switched enough votes to defeat him. The central issue in the campaign was Daschle's new home address.

Senator William Fulbright (D-Ark.) was one of the most influential and best-known members of the Senate, serving from 1944 thru 1974. Despite his national and international prominence, he was defeated in a Democratic primary in 1974. He was found guilty of the political crime of forgetting his Arkansas constituents and was unceremoniously returned to private life. As Tip said, "All politics is local."

None of this is to say that the Iraq war was not an important issue. It is probable that that single issue

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Spruce up St. Armands

Dear Veda Mahadi, City of Sarasota Engineering Dept.:

In reply to your inquire concerning an assessment to bury power lines underground on Coon Key, I would like to respond as follows.

In any business situation, you always want to enhance your assets and diminish you liabilities. Here we have probably the number one asset, not only in Sarasota, but probably on the entire West Coast of Florida. That, of course, is St. Armands Circle. Let's enhance it.

What has set off our new Ritz-Carlton hotel, separating it from all of the other hotels in the area? The answer is the Royal Palm trees surrounding the entire property. They have indeed backed it up with the quality of their entire property.

My suggestion is that the city of Sarasota enhance the entire area by not only putting the power lines under ground, but also adding Royal Palm trees on Coon Key as an entrance leading up to our renown St. Armands Circle. This then would leave no doubt as to the prime spot in Southwest Florida, and probably in the entire state of Florida, leaving Palm Beach's Worth Avenue well behind.

The same Royal Palm treatment should be include on the approach to the circle from Longboat Key.

Would I be agreeable to a reasonable assessment for these changes? My answer, as I am sure would be the answer to all who could afford it, would be an overwhelming "Yes." But, of course, the other property owners and St. Armand's business owners will have to speak for themselves. These and the City of Sarasota itself would be the prime beneficiaries of such an improve-

ment.

Yes, all of Sarasota's citizens, all of the business owners, all of the tourists, all of the shoppers, and all visiting guests would be welcome and enjoy the upgrading and beauty.

John E. Woodward, Jr.
Sarasota

Consider Causeway from LBK to Bird Key

Dear Longboat Town Manager and Longboat Town Commissioners:

There may be times during the season, when circling St. Armands Key in your car, you wished for an alternate connection between Longboat and John Ringling Blvd. This proposal makes enough sense to consider at some point.

I have forwarded a marine chart, showing a proposed causeway joining Longboat and Bird Key. This may appear too costly to some, unattractive, questionable funding sources, and encounter adverse groups. However, in spite of reasons to do nothing, when you consider the very shallow water available engineering and construction costs would be reasonable.

I view such a project being done at some point in the future... may be you. Please save this letter from the "Round File." How about the "Think and do File"?

Recently I encountered Jeremy Whatmough at an Ivy League luncheon. I asked him if he thought it would be permissible to present the idea to all of you by letter. He said, "Yes, Al, go ahead." And this is it.

Albert G. Moore
Plymouth Harbor