

OUR VIEW Sheriff Who?

As election season inches closer, candidates are scurrying around local municipalities and around the state hoping to curry favor among influential organizations and the voting public.

The biggest political prize is that of governor. Whoever sits in the governor's mansion in Carson City is the most powerful person in the state. In Southern Nevada, the Clark County manager is the arguably the most important politician (it being his or her responsibility to govern Nevada's largest municipality.) But the job of sheriff, if not equal in political scope, is no less important. And in the wake of a higher-than-average officer-involved shootings, escalating street violence and Las Vegas being stripped of Homeland Security funding, the job of sheriff is more important than ever.

According to data from Clark county, the sheriff has "the statutory duty of providing service of process in civil and criminal cases." In other words, the sheriff is the county's top law enforcement officer. As testament to the job's heft: Nineteen people filed for the position. All the more reason for voters to really do their homework before casting their ballots.

You need to be convinced that the person who gets your vote will take officer-involved shootings more seriously. Tuesday night's shooting of a motorist on the Strip is the 18th officer-involved shooting this year, a dramatic increase over such incidents at this time last year. The new sheriff must examine why these incidents are on the rise and, more importantly, look into ways to curb them—be it more training for cops, be it investing in more non-lethal weapons, be it amending use-of-force procedures.

We understand that cops have the most dangerous of jobs, that they have to make split-second decisions and lethal force is sometimes called for. But we also understand that a police force perceived as trigger happy—a widespread perception about the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department—reduces public trust which, in turn, reduces public pressure on politicians to give law enforcement the tools they need to battle a criminal element that's growing more brazen and deadly. (Outgoing Sheriff Bill Young fought to get 300 to 400 new cops via a tax increase; he got half that.) The new sheriff must be prepared to navigate these tempestuous seas, upholding public interest while empowering officers.

The new sheriff must also be willing to do something different to combat violent crime. According to recent FBI data, violent crime is up in year-over-year comparisons, sparked in large part by surges in gang violence and shootings. As voters, you need to know what the candidates are going to do about getting guns out of the hands of minors, about creating positive relationships with residents in violence-plagued neighborhoods, about proactive drug suppression (stopping illicit narcotics from coming into the city).

For too many years, sheriff candidates have said that they could do better than the current office holder. Yet, when you ask them if their plans are realistic and how they'll implement them given the mounds of bureaucracy—the sheriff answers to a joint City Council-County Commission oversight board—they offer soundbites but no concrete solutions. Producing change in an organization that has an influential appendage, namely the Police Protective Association, isn't as easy as it seems.

And voters, please listen to see if any of the candidates talks about radical reformation of the sheriff office. Things like community policing in tough neighborhoods, with officers actually walking the beat and getting to know people. Like new community substations and police-funded youth activities, more internal affairs transparency and support of the Citizens Review Board. If you don't hear these topics, bring them up. Ask the candidates their opinions. Then go further: dare them to make these topics campaign platforms. Whoever gets in office, we must remind him or her about their promises and our concerns. If there were ever a time when voters needed to do their homework on candidates, that time is now. Our lives—not to mention our quality of life—could depend on who we elect as our sheriff.



Obama, Democrats, religion

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

On June 28, Illinois State Senator Barack Obama, addressed a crowd of over 3,000 and called on Democrats to embrace religion at a conference co-sponsored by the Sojourners, a Christian social justice organization, and Call to Renewal, a national network of churches, faith-based organizations and individuals working to overcome poverty in America.

It's about time a Democrat stood up for truth and justice. Unfortunately, the terms liberalism and Democrat run hand-in-hand, and that just isn't the case. Democrats are stereotyped as hating religion — and some rightly so — being afraid to discuss religion, not caring about God, not caring about dividing the word of truth and not caring about morals and values.

I, for one, am a Democrat and refer to myself as a conservative Democrat. The party I belong to and my faith, trust and belief in a sovereign God who has all power, who is all-knowing and who is ever-present have nothing to do with one another.

My party affiliation does not define who I am as a person and has nothing to do with my service to God. And, obviously, Barack Obama, a Democrat and a Christian, feels the same way; however, he didn't come to this conclusion haphazardly.

During his speech, he revealed that during the 2004



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

campaign, Illinois Senate GOP nominee Alan Keyes referring to the Democratic contender stated, "Jesus Christ would not vote for Barack Obama," adding that Obama was not a true Christian.

Keyes' assertions ate at the very core of Obama's soul. The freshman senator revealed that, in a very real sense, it prompted some personal soul searching as he pondered the role that faith, in general — and his in particular — has to do with shaping policy and politics in the United States.

Obviously, God pierced his heart and allowed him to understand James 2:14-26, a scripture often paraphrased: "What does it profit a man if he says that he has faith but has no works? Can this kind of faith save him?"

It goes on to provide an analogy of the verse by stating "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of food, clothing and other valuable life essentials, and you say to him 'depart in peace, be warm and full,' but do not give him the things which are needed for the body, what good is it?"

What good is your professed compassion without action? It is phony. The kind

of faith that is without works is mere empty profession, not genuine, saving faith.

So, Mr. Obama is now putting his faith into action by calling on the Democratic politicians to understand that issues of moral concern can and should be a bridge uniting Americans, regardless of how we vote or how we choose to worship God. He also asked them to understand that values and a person's religious beliefs do underline politics.

People are products of their environment and their upbringing, and I believe that there is absolutely no way that a person can separate himself from some of the core values and beliefs that are ingrained in him from birth. This means that every

vote an elected official casts is, in some way, a reflection of who he or she is as a person.

Democrats need to accept as truth studies which show that over 90 percent of Americans consider themselves members of some faith or religion — which shocks me, because if this is so, why are we debating things like same-sex marriage, prayer in schools, the Ten Commandments in public places and abortion?

So, if up to 90 percent of Americans and a majority of registered Democrats say that faith is important to them, why are Democrats so reluctant to talk about morals, values and religion? Religion, values and morality are not copyrighted by the Republican Party. They belong to everyone. Democrats who have the guts to stand up for religious views that matter most to you, your neighbors and your colleagues can and should take them back.

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