

Inside the Statehouse

You have an advantage over me because you know the results of Tuesday's balloting and I do not because I had to go to press prior to Tuesday's primary voting. However, today the big question is whether the February 5th voting winnowed out the field and gave us clear cut frontrunners?

Yesterday's Mega Super Tuesday balloting consisted of 22 state primaries, including us, and was to be the Waterloo of the presidential primary cavalcade. For many of us, this year is unlike any we have ever witnessed. It is the first presidential election year since 1952 where there is neither an incumbent president running nor a vice president waiting in the wings to move up the ladder. Therefore, it is the most open presidential race in over 56 years. Hence it is only fitting and proper that we have the most undecided race in history.

If the polling data prevailed and was accurate, we in Alabama had close races between John McCain and Mike Huckabee in the GOP primary and Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton on the Democratic side. McCain and Obama were favored to win in Alabama.

National polls seem to indicate that the Republican race is boiling down to a two man race between John McCain and Mitt

Romney. On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton's presumed waltz toward her coronation as the Democratic standard bearer is seriously being challenged by a dynamic Barack Obama insurgence. The titanic struggle between Obama and Clinton may well be played out all the way to the Democratic convention in Denver this summer.

Many of you have questioned the accuracy of polling after the New Hampshire debacle. Indeed in the Granite State the pollsters were way off on the Democratic side. Although they nailed the Republican vote on the head, the Democratic projections were historically askew. The poll results from the Sunday before the Tuesday vote had Obama winning 41% to 28% over Clinton. However, the actual vote was Clinton 39% and Obama 37%.

In defense of the poll they also said that 40% of the voters were undecided. The media overlooked this important equation when reporting the horserace figures. In addition, New Hampshire has such an open primary process that independents can vote in either primary and they have same day registration. Therefore a person could be polled on Saturday and truthfully say to the pollster, "I am an unregistered

Democrat," but decide Tuesday to go to his local polling place, register to vote, and then vote in the Republican primary for John McCain.

Another flaw that has occurred in numerous races in recent years is that polling will miss the mark when an African American candidate is in the race. This is known as the Bradley effect. This theory is named after former Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley. Bradley was a popular African American mayor and running for Governor of California. Polling showed him with a handsome lead all the way up to Election Day. However, when the votes were counted he lost.

This theory espouses the political opinion that white voters will tell a pollster they are going to vote for an African American because they do not want to be perceived as a racist, when in actuality they will not vote for that candidate in the privacy of a voting booth. The Bradley theory has some plausibility. This theme has recurred repeatedly in races throughout the country in the past decade. The Doug Wilder race in Virginia and more recently the Harold Ford contest in Tennessee are examples of when polling prior to the election showed much higher projections than

the reality of Election Day.

Regardless of how accurate the polling projections proved to be in yesterday's primaries, it appears that the time has now come to start counting delegates. As the dust settles from the Mega Super Tuesday voting, after all the votes have been counted, how do these votes equate into actual delegates to the conventions when the nominees are actually selected? Each state has a different formula for allotment of their delegates. Some states allow for the winner of the primary to get all the delegates. However, most states are like us and apportion their delegates based on a percentage of the votes received in the primary. This is the fairest way in my opinion.

We will be weeding out the complicated calculations over the next few days and all the trudging through the snow in Iowa and New Hampshire for momentum and media exposure will be only memories. The new story will be who actually has the most delegates and then on with the show.

See you next week.

Steve Flowers is Alabama's leading political columnist. His column appears weekly in 70 Alabama newspapers. Steve served 16 years in the State Legislature. He may be reached at www.stevflowers.us.

Stephen's Stuff

I went to an article on *The Dothan Eagle's* website on Tuesday or Wednesday morning to read and see what the comments were in reference to the Stephen Preacher's plea agreement. As I expected, some of our finest just had to open their mouths and insert their foot about how the DA in Geneva County should have prosecuted the case rather than agreeing to a plea deal. I knew it was coming. District Attorney Kirke Adams knew it was coming.

I had planned this column last week after the plea agreement was announced and officially agreed to.

Adams contacted the father, DHR and VOCAL about the possibility of a plea and they all thought it was the right thing to do considering the circumstances around the case. The problem is what I said

in the previous sentence - "the circumstances surrounding the case."

Kirke Adams wanted to see Stephen Preachers behind bars more than anything. This was his first big case as the DA in Geneva County and he clearly wanted to set an example. Plea agreement or a sentence of life without the possibility of parole, he did just that.

The circumstances in this case involve a mother who could leave enough reasonable doubt in the mind of a jury these days and that is just too risky to try.

It's no secret that Gail Whitley, the mother of Angel Marie Whitley, is behind bars for several recent convictions that likely would get brought up in court. It's also no secret that during the trial of Preachers that she was put on the stand and questioned about whether or

not she desecrated her own daughter's grave. She was also questioned about threatening Glen Whitley, the father of Angel Marie Whitley.

Why would any District Attorney in their right mind choose to try a case once again like this when all it takes is just one juror to say "not guilty". I am certain that if this had happened and anyone knew that a plea agreement could have been reached would have been making comments that

Adams shouldn't have tried the case.

You have to use some judgement when deciding what to try and what not to try and what not to try again. Adams did that in this case and should be commended for getting thirty years rather than ever trying to take this back to court.

Another interesting twist in this case to me is why the case had to be retried again. The reason was because of the makeup of the jury. I can define it a

little clearer in saying that there wasn't a black on the jury. Stephen Preachers is white. It is hard for me to comprehend why our legal system felt that this case had to be overturned because of that issue. It actually is on the line of being absurd if you ask me.

Finally, there will be other cases to come up and we may or may not agree with the decision made on the case. I can tell you that our District Attorney Kirke Adams and his staff including Assistant DA's Stephen

Smith, Bill Filmore, Al Danner and Cathey E. Berardi are working hard on each and every case. They also are consulting with the victims in the cases and doing everything they can to see that justice is being served.

The next time you think a case should have been handled differently then you might want to do a little fact checking. You might find that Adams and his staff did the right thing after all. Just like they did here!



From the House

Letters to the Editor

Letter to the Editor: Pray for our Children

I have in the past read some of the letters sent to the editor in the *Dothan Eagle*, and have often thought about replying and just never have, until I read the paper last week and realized that now was the time.

It was so sad to read how a father had thrown his children from a bridge, a mother found with the bodies of her children in her home. We hear everyday about a child being kidnapped, abused, tortured and murdered by child molesters. Our families are being torn apart by drugs and alcohol. As a child, I was so blessed to have a praying grandmother, as many of us had. Now it is our turn to take the place of the long past praying grandmothers.

Satan is after our children and our families, it is time to say enough is enough. As praying grandmothers and families we can all stand together to stop this torture of our children and grandchildren. Jesus said where two or more are believing and praying together with like minds, he will be in the midst of them. I will come together in agreement with you for the safety of our children and grandchildren. We can do this if we stand in the gap and build a hedge around them for protection from Satan and all of his kind.

Our children are our gift from God. Diane Campbell Geneva, Ala.

Letter to the Editor:

Silent Gratitude isn't much use to anyone. As one of the newest members of the hospital board and a native of Geneva County, I would like to thank the employees of Wiregrass Medical Center. I know now how difficult it has been for the staff to feel their jobs could be in jeopardy and then be asked to put aside their personal plans and feelings.

It takes imagination to be inspired. Yours has been shown by your commitment to the hospital and to the people of Geneva County. These are positive reflections on our hospital and our community. Again, thanks to each of you!

Our great county has always overcome hardships through families loving one another, no matter where they might live in the county. I, for one, hope that the teachings and feelings we all learned in our early years have not fallen by the wayside.

My official word is that I will remain on the board. I am committed to the success of our staff and hospital, and most of all to the wonderful people of Geneva County. As I have always said, you can't live life as a dream; but you can't live life without a dream.

Bobby Don Pugh Hospital Board Member Slocomb, Ala.

Last Tuesday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the much-anticipated economic stimulus legislation by a solid 385 to 35 margin. By the time you read this, the U.S. Senate should have voted on the bill and possibly made some changes. The stimulus package, as passed by the House, is tailored to help ignite the sluggish economy and deserves to be quickly enacted into law with as few changes as possible.

Last week, President Bush called on Congress to swiftly pass the economic stimulus plan so that its tax rebates and small business incentives can quickly provide the most good to our slumping economy. Taken as a whole, 117 million American taxpayers should receive some form of rebate from the House-passed stimulus. This includes 1.8 million Alabamians. Small business will also benefit from more generous expens-

ing provisions.

Generally speaking, the House stimulus package includes tax rebate checks for individual federal taxpayers earning up to \$75,000 and married couples earning up to \$150,000. Rebate checks will include a base amount determined by the greater of two options: (a) Income tax paid in 2007, with a maximum rebate amount of \$600 for a single taxpayer and \$1,200 for married couples; or (b) \$300 for an individual and \$600 for a married couple, provided the individual or couple earned income of at least \$3,000 in 2007. Anyone qualifying for the base amounts listed above would also receive an additional \$300 for each child with no cap on the number of children.

Small businesses would be allowed to fully expense \$250,000 in both new and tangible property in the year it is purchased up to an overall investment limit of

\$750,000. Furthermore, the stimulus package would provide a 50 percent bonus deduction on new equipment in the year it is placed in service, with certain exceptions for "long life" equipment.

These rebates and incentives should prompt a healthy rise in consumer and business spending to help our economy avoid a possible recession. Similar rebates and tax incentives were passed in 2001 and 2003 and proved effective in reenergizing the economy. It is hoped that the Senate will allow the House version of the economic stimulus plan to pass without major changes which might slow down its ultimate approval or make the legislation too costly.

One misconception about the economic stimulus plan that is spreading around the country via the Internet and talk radio is that illegal aliens would be

able to receive tax rebates. This is absolutely false. If illegals or anyone else files taxes based on stolen or fraudulent information in order to collect a tax rebate check, then they are committing tax fraud and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

One area of criminal activity that the public should be aware of is the potential for "phishing" for your identifying information by persons posing as IRS workers either on the phone or by email. The IRS has received reports of Internet phishing scams and phone calls in which criminals asked for people's bank account information in order to deposit a "rebate check." In some cases, phishing emails were linked to fake "IRS" web sites. The IRS's real website is www.irs.gov. The public is reminded that the IRS will not be emailing or calling them to request such information.