

Choosing a Candidate for my vote

From the bumper crop of lawn signs and newspaper ads springing up across the county it is apparent that election time is upon us once again. This year it seems that most of the community is running for County Commissioner.

Which means you and I will soon be standing in a voting booth confronted with that ongoing dilemma: who to vote for? What criteria will we use to determine who gets our vote?

Look at all the adjectives the candidates use to describe themselves: Energetic. Committed. Hard-working. Proven Leader. Dedicated. Experienced.

Well now. The Devil himself is a committed, dedicated, experienced, hard worker with proven leadership ability. That doesn't mean I'd vote for him to be County Commissioner.

The corrosive and corrupting nature of power has been observed by most folks at one point or another in the course of life. Power and authority, even in small doses, can wreck havoc on a person's demeanor and personality. Witness how often someone assumes a new position, sometimes of even trivial influence, and wind up becoming an entirely different person. Or the frequency that power struggles between groups effectively destroy boards or committees of good causes and organizations.

Now most of us don't think of the County Commissioner seat as a source of dramatic power and influence. But it seems to have become that for some of our incumbents. Consider how they have lapsed into the micro-management of county departments such as the Sheriff's office and the Court room, examining such detail as why a certain deputy is posted to a particular position, or having the Judge come to a meeting and defend and justify his desire for an armed bailiff in the courtroom. I wonder if they are having the shop foreman come in and explain why he needs so many half-inch bolts, or why the County Attorney needs so many reams of paper.

But I wouldn't be surprised if they were.

Overseeing the county budget and function is one thing. Making every minute decision is another. Many successful business people have learned an essential truth about being successful in their work: hire competent people, and then get out of the way and let them do their jobs. Set budgets, goals and parameters, and then let workers figure the best way to accomplish the task. That means they have to let some of the power go from their hands, and entrust it to the people doing the work. Sounds easy enough, but often proves to be a hard thing to do.

One of the ways that power corrupts is in its addictive nature – the more you have, the more you seem to want. And you can never have enough. To keep it, you have to keep the benefits flowing to your friends and supporters – from making sure they have jobs and contracts, to

“bringing home the bacon” into your district or region. Think of how many political ads are little more than a litany of projects the incumbent managed to get funded in his region

So when it comes to voting, it’s not how committed, energetic, experienced or hard working the candidate is that motivates me to vote for him or her. I expect them to have those qualities. Why would I vote for someone who is passive, lethargic, apathetic and lazy?

What counts is character and integrity. I want a candidate to have Character in the sense that they have the disposition and moral fiber to resist the impulse to feather their own nest in some regard, and to oppose those of their peers who might want to. If I’m to vote for a person, I want them to possess Integrity in the sense that they have the veracity and reliability to work with everyone for the good of the citizens in the most effective, efficient and economical ways possible. Not to engage in bare-knuckle power struggles to win their private battles at all costs.

An important principle often lost in our day is that authority or power must always be inextricable tied to responsibility. If a person is given the responsibility to carry out a task, they must have the necessary authority to do the job. That includes the money, people and materials necessary to do the job. To commission someone to a task and not give them the resources to do it is unjust at least. To later use their inability to complete that task and assert their incompetence is immoral.

To put it another way, authority without accountability is tyranny. Responsibility without authority is slavery. Too often political office is used to exercise power over others, making them virtual slaves. We need neither slaves, nor tyrants, in Lake County, or anywhere in Minnesota. Authority and responsibility must not be separated

Fortunately, our Founding Fathers instituted a system by which tyrants can be held in check, and slavery can be abolished. It’s called an election. And while a little revolution is good on occasion, we have the blessing of participating in non-violent revolutions, and installing leaders who have the proven character and integrity to perform their jobs in spite of a siren call to use it for their own benefit, or the benefit of friends and family.

I haven’t completely decided (yet!) who I will be voting for in the coming election. I am more concerned with the candidates character and integrity, than some of their other qualities. I also know that if the word INCUMBANT appears next to a person’s name, I will probably put my X in another box.

Greg Hull is a sawyer and philosopher-at-large and has voted in every election since he turned 18. Contrary to rumors, he is NOT running for County Commissioner.