

The Election Fog Begins to Lift

Written by Jack King, BT Contributor
December 2018 - Last Updated December 2018



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o say that I've been a political junkie all my life would be quite an understatement, but spending the past two years enmeshed in the race for president, along with all the other political dramas, has really taken its toll on me. Quite frankly, I'm glad it's over. It could have been worse if my team had lost.

But then again, you should be careful what you wish for. The country has more serious problems than we've seen in many years, and the solutions will not be easy or quick. Can Barack Obama turn the country around? I hope so, and I certainly hope the country will give him the time and the support needed to make it happen. This is not politics. This is country.

But speaking of politics, I, like many others, was deeply disappointed and *mad* with the

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Republicans' selection of Sarah Palin for the vice president's slot. I know political motives are always in play and that vice presidents seldom make it to the White House, but this year was different. John McCain is 72 years old. He would have been the oldest person ever elected president. Palin herself is completely incompetent, other than her impersonation of Tina Fey, and she had no business being that close to the presidency. She even made Dan Quayle look good.

Closer to home, the three amigos -- Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen -- were reelected with better margins than I'd anticipated. That's the good news for them. The bad news is that they'll be going back to Washington as the minority party, which doesn't bode well for our neighborhood. The three amigos did little for us when they were in the majority. Now they'll have zero chance of helping South Florida.

I think you'll see a new Cuba policy, and that is long overdue thanks in no small part to the three amigos. Over the past 30 years, millions of dollars have been spent and thousands of hours frittered away to make sure Fidel Castro doesn't win whatever he is supposed to win. That fact that he lasted 50 years has so infuriated the anti-Castro forces in Miami that they'll do anything to make sure he looks bad and they look good -- no matter how many Cubans suffer, both here and on the island.

With any luck, this will be the three amigos' last term in Congress. In light of Democratic Party dominance in Washington and demographic shifts down here, I don't think the three amigos will run again in 2010. What we need is a new group of young Hispanics from both parties to put this nightmare to rest once and for all. South Florida deserves better.

Last month's ballot at the county level included a number of initiatives designed to give county Mayor Carlos Alvarez a real job. Most passed, but some didn't. I'm curious as to how that will play out. Actually, the county has been trying to straighten out this mess since 1954, when we adopted the current government structure based on a weak mayor. It's still a mess. Anybody got some ideas?

Another ballot initiative that went down in flames was a proposal to consolidate all the fire rescue services under a county umbrella. Of course, when it was first proposed, the big cities with fire departments cried foul. As a result, they were removed from the deal. These kinds of battles have also been going on for decades -- county and city governments fighting over responsibility for services. Over the years, it's become so bastardized that I'm not sure any of it

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works.

The odd thing is that consolidating the fire and rescue services really does make sense. Miami-Dade County doesn't have very many fires because the area is young and most buildings have been constructed with good fire-suppression equipment and nonflammable materials. The fire departments essentially have put themselves out of business because they have been so good. However, they still want their own little fiefdoms and will do most anything to protect them. Plus, they have lots of friends in high places, like former fire fighters Carlos Gimenez (Miami-Dade commissioner) and Luis Garcia (state representative).

The outcome of the presidential race may very well change the local political landscape. Obama's victory was largely due to Hispanic support, some of which was found right here in Miami. And almost immediately, Miami Mayor Manny Diaz's name was bandied about for a position in the Obama administration. I'm not sure if the leaks came from the Obama team or Diaz's press office. Whatever, Diaz is in his last year and can't run for re-election, but even if he could, he'd be unelectable.

So why not make a move to Washington? He has a Hispanic name, is the mayor of a Hispanic city, and has been fooling most of the people most of the time with his vague programs and even vaguer accomplishments.

But if he takes a Washington job, he'll leave the mayoral slot open, maybe for city commissioners to fill. They might select a new mayor for the remaining 12 months of Diaz's term. This is where the scheming begins. The city charter is unclear about exactly who selects a new mayor if the incumbent resigns, so city attorneys are poring over all that. Meanwhile, the three clowns on the city commission -- Joe Sanchez, Angel Gonzalez, and Michelle Spence-Jones -- are fomenting palace intrigue to make sure they stay in control.

It goes like this: Diaz resigns and heads to Washington. The commission appoints Joe Sanchez mayor. Sanchez, with the approval of Gonzalez and Spence-Jones, then selects his own successor as city commissioner. Commission approval is guaranteed.

There is a bit of fuzzy math here, but that has never bothered the commission. All they have to do is count to three. Three votes actually control it all.

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Happy holidays.

This column first appeared in December 2008.

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