

STINKING THINKING: PART V

We are at the end of our election time series on 'Stinking Thinking', a voters' guide where we have explored the various ways politicians may make it hard to know where they really stand and what life might be like if they got some time at the helm.

We have a diverse group presenting themselves for office. Ages vary widely, some have long careers in law enforcement, some in business, some in politics and many are taking their first run at elected public service.

Prior to this election we will see columnists, writers of letters to the editor and members of various political groups exchange both favorable and unfavorable characterizations of policies, personalities and positions of those in office as well as those who wish to be. Some may be factually based; some may be heavily biased and some may be tough to understand.

I find the following perspectives helpful for me as the election bears on us. Present council and those who wish to be are neither one-dimensional, cure-alls, nor evil men blindly nudging our little hamlet into hell while they gleefully fiddle over the fire. Furthermore, running for public office entails sacrifices, tempts the temper and sometimes strains the soul. Campaigns and governance are at the very least challenging, council office is not financially rewarding and the work entailed is often underappreciated.

In the first four parts of this series we talked about how those who clamor for our votes may be guilty of stinking thinking and the importance of us recognizing that. Nonetheless, there are two overriding issues we must all remember. Politicians are just as human as you and I and we are all just as capable of 'stinking thinking'.

The key ingredient to our representative republic is how well the ultimate power behind the throne avoids 'stinking thinking' in exercising the greatest right of all. That power is us, the voters, and the right is our vote

Will we fall prey to apathy and not become informed about the candidates and the issues, assuming it does not matter? Worse yet, will we not vote at all? After we vote, will we follow through on expecting our elected officials to perform honestly, ethically and consistently with their promises? Will we subscribe to the City of Fairfield's web site and be attuned to council agendas, recorded council videos and press releases and the like? Will we follow the issues online or in print, show up and speak when agenda items that matter to us are scheduled? When the call goes out for folks to sit on committees or commissions or give input on major issues, will the sound of silence in city hall be our absence?

Will we weigh our positions thoughtfully on measure Q or candidate X or will we selectively omit evidence or arguments we might not like or that challenge what we thought was true? Will we employ wishful thinking as regards our city's financial situation or carefully look at the consequences of our vote

and work on ways to creatively deal with them? Will we carefully examine the pros and cons of change? Are we discounting experience or defaming innocence in our choices of candidates?

Are we making hasty generalizations or listening to attacks against persons rather than positions? Do we want a council of same thinkers or diversity? Do we understand that complex problems such as crime, the best use of land, after school issues and transportation and economic development, to name a few, are clearly interrelated and require rolled up shirt sleeves team work and that we are part of that team?

The target of this five part series has not been only those who seek out public service. It has been me and you. The foulest stinking thinking is when we fail to know well the smell of our own 'stinking thinking' too. Vote wisely.

Kevin Ryan is a retired Colonel, physician, musician and author who lives in Fairfield.