

Issues Matter

Rep. Mick Mulvaney

I learned a good bit last week about what's wrong with government.

First, I went to my opponent's 75-minute "education issues forum." I heard two sentences about education (my opponent likes charter schools, by the way). The other 74 minutes and 45 seconds were spent talking about some guy from New York who donated \$50,000 to a House campaign in Landrum last spring.

Then, I got a bizarre e-mail falsely accusing me of "digging for dirt" on my opponents' 9-year-old son.

To finish the "issues-driven campaign" that my opponent is running, I read in the paper that I am not a good Christian because some friends and I mowed grass along Highway 521 on a Sunday.

So we've got those "issues" covered: I am a bad person who terrorizes children and is bought-and-paid for by someone who hasn't given me any money. Isn't this a great way to pick our leaders?

I call it "distraction politics." It is pretty simple: don't line up well with voters on issues? Then don't talk about issues. Down in the polls? Use phone calls and e-mails to spread rumors and half-truths about your opponent. Is your opponent a decent person? Invent a boogey-man to run against.

Distraction politics controls the political process these days. Mostly because sometimes, it works. It's the reason why the person you meet on the campaign trail turns out to be a different person in office. And complaining that "they seemed so nice when we spoke at the festival," or, "they seemed so conservative at the debate," doesn't do you much good when that person votes to raise your taxes or allow gay marriage.

This is no time for distraction politics. This district and our state are facing tremendous economic challenges, with high unemployment, a tax climate that discourages businesses from locating and growing here, and an education system that is straining to provide our kids with skills necessary to fix those problems. These are real problems that require real solutions. Not distractions. Here are some of my ideas:

CAP GOVERNMENT GROWTH

First things first: let's stop runaway government. Over the past three years, politicians in Columbia have grown government by more than 40%. Think about that – has your paycheck grown 40% over the last three years? Mine hasn't.

Worse still, we didn't save a penny when things were good. The result is a spending rollercoaster – blowing every dime in good times and then cutting vital services when times are tough.

I support limiting the growth of government so that spending doesn't grow more than inflation plus population. Any surpluses (like we had two years ago) would be split into two piles: one returned to the taxpayers through rebates and tax reductions; the other used for capital needs and a rainy day fund.

If we had done that two years ago, we would have returned \$850 million to taxpayers, built \$450 million worth of schools, roads and prisons, and still had \$450 million in the bank...to help us get through this year's shortfall.

END WASTE

I could go on – much too long – about how spending priorities are out of whack in Columbia. For the sake of brevity, I offer a quick insight of what needs to change:

- 1) No more money for legislative slush funds that spend money on hot air balloon festivals;
- 2) No more money for taxpayer funded lobbying. Using public money to lobby the legislature for more public money from the legislature is fiscally irresponsible.
- 3) No more government sponsored advertising. We spent taxpayer money last year advertising SC to gay tourists in Europe. (Yes -- you read that right.)

The total for just those things is in the tens of millions of dollars. Folks, we don't have enough money to put gas in our school buses and keep criminals in our jails. This type of waste simply has to stop.

CUT TAXES

Our county property taxes are going up next year. We know that already. And if Barack Obama becomes president, you can pretty much bet that your federal taxes are going up, too. So here's a novel idea: let's cut taxes at the state level.

The idea is simple: you keep more of your money, and you grow the economy.

People ask me all the time: how can we lure more businesses and create jobs? The answer: put businesses in a position to make money and grow. Incentives are an important part of the marketplace today, but the bigger picture should include an end to corporate and partnership taxation. That's why I introduced a bill last year to do exactly that. I will do the same in the Senate.

Ending business taxes treats ALL businesses fairly. It doesn't give unfair advantages to the big companies, and it allows the hundreds of small, home-grown businesses that are the backbone of our economy and community to thrive. It would also provide much needed help to those

suffering under the unintended consequences of property tax reform, which left small business holding the bag when it comes to future property tax increases.

REFORM EDUCATION

Education has core problems --- broken families, disengaged parents, poverty --- for which there is no magic bullet. But that doesn't mean we don't have problems we can't fix: too much bureaucracy, not enough money into the classroom, and too few options for parents and students.

With less than 50 cents of every dollar getting into the classroom statewide, it's clear that we have a serious problem targeting our resources where they will make a real difference. By moving to a per-pupil funding system, we will dramatically increase the dollars going directly to teachers in the classroom, give local districts the flexibility they need, and eliminate layers of needless bureaucracy in Columbia. We should also reward teachers with merit-based pay raises, and give them access to real-time diagnostic results that will allow them to target individual needs of their students.

And we need more parental choice. That means more charter schools, virtual schools, and alternative methods (single-gender, year-round, Montessori). Charter schools --- which are public --- offer perhaps the broadest possibilities. That's why I worked hard last year to get a bill approved growing charter school options.

Notice the goal of all of that: strengthening public education. My guess is that is different than what you might have heard about me from my opponent.

PRINCIPLES, NOT POLITICS

Those are some of my ideas. In them, I hope you see my principles as well: smaller, responsible, efficient government; family values; personal responsibility; strong public education.

I hope you like those ideas. It would also be nice if you liked me as well (as it seems that my opponent's primary strategy so far is to get you to hate me.) Everyone wants to be liked. But I want you to vote for me because you share those same principles, and because you think my ideas make sense.

I close with a story: Last year I killed a legislative benefit increase by demanding a roll-call vote. Needless to say, that didn't go over too well with some of my colleagues. I remember telling the Speaker that I probably didn't make very many friends that day. He chided me, "You didn't come down here to make friends. You came down here to make South Carolina a

better place. And by sticking to your principles, you've made more friends than you could've ever expected. People know where you stand. And they respect that in this business.”

Principles and issues count. Not distractions.