

Civility in Democracy: Election 2008

By Bonnie Beth Greenball, J.D.

Putting aside our political differences, we can all agree that we are approaching what is arguably among the most historic elections in United States history. This is the first election in eighty years without an incumbent President or Vice President on the ballot. Moreover, Americans have generated enormous support for the candidacy of a woman and an African-American man, one of whom will appear on the national ticket this November, which is clearly a major paradigm shift for a nation which first afforded universal suffrage for women and African-Americans less than a century ago.

Regardless of the outcome of November election, this year's political landscape indicates that our nation is moving toward more than a symbolic nod to the notion that all men, and women, are created equal. There is little doubt that the change in administration, no matter who is elected, will bring a new set of values, ideologies, and personality to the job of governing our nation.

Therefore, this seems the ideal moment to reflect as a community on the current shape of our democracy. This year, we have the unique opportunity, through "Civility in Democracy: Election 2008," a major initiative sponsored by partners, the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, and the Collins Center for Public Policy, to assess where we have been, where we are currently, and where we are headed in our national conversation on our democratic system.

Through a series of lectures offered from January through October, the greater Sarasota/Manatee community has been invited to participate in this dialogue. In this post-September 11th world, we are examining how a nation that pulled together in the wake of tragedy has become one mired in political gridlock and "gotcha" politics.

The Founding Fathers knew that power can corrupt and created a system where each of the branches of government formed a check on the other and where the Bill of Rights protected the citizens from over-reaching by the government. A seemingly inescapable result of such a system, where so many distinct leaders and constituencies have a voice in the process, is that discord is bound to occur. As a nation, we value and encourage divergent viewpoints and open dialogue to reach the best possible results for the electorate. As a result, however, one wonders whether such a system can ever truly be marked by civility.

The challenges of governing such a diverse and independent nation seem destined to result in frustration and "Washington fatigue." We often wonder, "When will they get it right?" Ultimately, politicians often argue that most of us want the same things, to be healthy, successful, and as happy as we can be. With such broad consensus for our overall goals, as

Rodney King, an African-American man whose treatment by the Los Angeles police sparked race-based riots, famously asked, “Can’t we all just get along?”

The endless bickering among candidates and cheap shot television advertisements threaten to send all our newly registered and energized voters away from the polls and back to safety zones, such as iPhones, video games, and reality television. Why do we live in a country that cares as much, or possibly even more, about who will be crowned the next American Idol as we do about who will lead us?

With the year-long “Civility in Democracy” program we are striving to reach a comfortable place that we can all agree on. We all want to be engaged citizens. We don’t want to struggle to be heard above the din of bickering and unrest in our political process.

Everyone in the community is free to complete a short survey (available at the Gulfcoast Community Foundation’s website at www.gulfcoastcf.org), which aims to determine the community’s views on the topic of civility in democracy. The results will be published in a follow-up report in the fall. Additionally, USF Sarasota-Manatee students will be studying this topic in a Special Topics course beginning in May.

We hope that the “Civility in Democracy” programs will help create a space of engaged civic participation and a heightened sense of the voter’s significance in the democratic process. Our system functions best if we feel we have a meaningful role in the political process. This is our opportunity to find our political voices and to encourage our politicians to get beyond rhetoric and to be responsive to the needs of their constituents.

Senator Bob Graham, “Keep it Civil: We CAN all Just Get Along”

With the campaign season in full swing, the Institute for Public Policy and Leadership invited Senator Bob Graham to cool our jets and level our heads to make it through the grueling endurance race of selecting our next President. He was the first in our “Civility in Democracy” series in partnership with the Gulf Coast Community Foundation and the Collins Center.

Graham stated moments before he took the stage, “I have a theory that all political reporters are frustrated sports reporters.” Simply put, it seems that the basic human desire to be the first to call a winner obfuscates our search for the truth about a candidate and our understanding of his or her political platform.

Teri Hansen, Executive Director of the Foundation and member of the IPPL Advisory Board, called Graham a “voice for civility” and mentioned that brain research has indicated that our “intention is contagious” and “we can affect each other for good or for ill.” In introducing Graham, David Klement, IPPL director, referred to Graham’s reputation for consensus building, not partisanship, and echoed the sentiment that Graham, whom he called a “gentleman and a master of public policy,” was the right choice to inaugurate the series.

Graham began his remarks by referring to what he called his “audacious” run for President in 2002. In the run-up to the campaign, Graham sought a routine health exam only to learn that he needed open heart surgery. With self-deprecating candor, Graham said that when he made the public announcement that he would be unable to seek the nomination, he disappointed his supporters. He smiled, “both of them were going to be there.” He said, “As citizens, we need to conduct some surgery, [which is] necessary to get us to a state of a healthy democracy.”

Among our nation’s problems, Graham stated, is our lack of domestic reserves of oil. As a result the United States has been “held hostage to that level of dependency on foreign oil.” He also sounded the alarm on the health care crisis, stating that almost 50 million citizens lack health coverage. Additionally, our taxed infrastructure is resulting in calamities such as the damage to the New Orleans levees after Hurricane Katrina and the collapsed interstate bridge in Minnesota. He further stated that we are “teetering on the edge of defeat in Afganistan” and are “vulnerable to catastrophic terrorist attack.”

He then shared some eye-opening statistics. In 1885, when his father was born, the national debt represented \$10 per citizen; in 1936, when he was born, the United States owed \$80 per person; and now, the youngest of his 11 grandchildren was born into a nation owing \$32,000 per person.

Graham stated that the Presidential debates aren’t teaching us much and that he favors “scrapping” the system and developing issue-based debates with experts in the topic of the day asking the questions. He added that the current voting system is in a “free fall heading toward collapse, [and] we Floridians happen to be the billboard for this collapse.”

He emphasized the importance of a civics education and stated that “democracy was never intended to be a spectator sport.” He said that Americans “need to recapture that spirit of [an] involved, engaged citizen,” and he commended the attendees for their citizenship when there were “so many competing activities” on a Friday afternoon.

Greg Huber, PhD, “A Skeptic’s Guide to Election Media Coverage

Gregory Huber, Associate Professor of Political Science at Yale University, took the audience on a wild ride through a political scientist’s approach to analyzing Presidential elections. As for the scientific aspects of politics, Huber contended that there are often a variety of factors that may affect the probability of particular outcomes during an election that may be overlooked in the media coverage frenzy.

Huber discussed the pitfalls of relying on common claims made when it comes to elections. First, we are always told the importance of “getting out the vote,” and candidates spend money on so-called robo-calls, leaflets, mailings, and door-to-door campaigns. Often the significance of these candidate contacts is overestimated, because it is, often, an issue of memory, i.e., people who are more likely to vote are also more likely to remember being contacted while others may just immediately recycle the advertisements or disregard the calls. Additionally, candidates may contact precisely those whom they already have determined are likely to turn out to vote. Therefore, there may be an over-reporting of the importance of this kind of contact. However, Huber has been able to determine that if a voter is contacted by a live person paid to discuss the candidate, this would cost \$53-\$90 per vote; phone calls made by

volunteers would cost \$38; and door-to-door canvassing, which costs \$29 per vote, is the “best bang for the buck,” because face-to-face contact is considered highly persuasive.

As for the negative campaign advertisements which seem to grow nastier as we get closer to the election, Huber said that contrary to popular belief these advertisements do not in fact turn off voters to the election process, because he has found “no correlation between the amount of negative ads and the turnout rates in real races.” He noted that for those who ask, “Can’t we all get along,” during campaign season, he would respond, “Well, then it’s not politics.”

He also dispelled the notion that the debates have an impact on candidate selection. He said, “Nobody watches the debates, who is not interested in politics, [and viewers] rarely change their minds.”

Huber stated that the media tend to reinterpret newsworthy occurrences during an election such as Senator Hillary Clinton crying in New Hampshire and Howard Dean’s fateful scream during the 2004 election, and these events become “magnified in importance.”

The most important factor for undecided voters is when a candidate receives an endorsement from the voter’s friend, colleague, or respected local leader. Huber stated that “existing social networks are very important” in candidate selection. He noted that Senator Barack Obama’s campaign is utilizing this phenomenon by requesting that supporters contact people in their own communities on behalf of the candidate.

Larry Sabato, PhD, “Sabato’s Crystal Ball”

“I think this election is going to be very substantive on key issues, [and] that’s all to the good,” said Professor Larry Sabato, who has been dubbed “probably the most quoted college professor in the land,” when he spoke to over 200 participants during a luncheon at the Ritz Carlton sponsored by the Institute for Public Policy and Leadership, Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, and the Collins Center for Public Policy.

Although Sabato is an active participant in the election process in his role as the Director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics, he traditionally casts his vote for Thomas Jefferson as President to stay true to his non-partisan credentials. He is known for predicting winners in his “crystal ball,” but as he told the audience, “If people tell you they’re good at picking winners in February [when the lecture was held], they’re lying.”

Sabato relies on what he calls the four “north stars” to “guide us during the election season,” e.g., 1) war and peace, 2) the economy, 3) scandal, and 4) hot button issues. He also said that “this is the age of scandals, and millions of Americans only care about #4 (of the north stars).” Sabato also debunked the myth of the “independent” stating that those who are registered “independent” vote for the same party seven out of ten times. He said this phenomenon is “very American, ‘don’t fence me in.’”

When push came to shove, Sabato did predict that Democrats will gain seats in both houses. “They can’t blow this one. They can blow the Presidential race. They have a lot of experience with that.” He also predicted that John McCain, whom he says will gain a new first name “Bush,” as in “Bush-McCain policies, will have to “depend on mistakes by Obama.”

Sabato stated, “If we have a civil, issue oriented election, a little less partisan and less ideological, then maybe, just maybe, we can shake up this static election map.” He believes that a match up between two “relative centrists,” Obama and McCain, would “encourage people to break down these barriers” between parties, and he joked, “I’m starting to sound like the celestial choir,” in a passing reference to Clinton’s criticism of Obama’s style of oration. He said Obama and McCain both “by their nature, want to come together.”

In conclusion, he proclaimed America a “bottom-up democracy.” He continued, “Some ‘supposed’ democracies are top down, but Americans are bottom-up. We are active at a grassroots level.”

Following Sabato’s lecture, the discussion continued in a breakout session with panelists Klement (IPPL), Carson Cooper, host of “Morning Edition” for WUSF radio, Liana Fernandez Fox, PhD, Professor of Mathematics at Hillsborough Community College, and Darryl Paulson, PhD, Professor of Government at USF St. Pete. This additional hour of discussion gave the audience an opportunity to continue the discussion of civility in the political system and to ask questions of the panelists.

Carl Hiaasen, “Civility, Life, and Politics in Florida”

To lighten things up, a sold-out audience was treated to an afternoon with acclaimed writer and Florida favorite son, Carl Hiaasen, who remarked, “I’m an odd choice for this subject.” He did, however, discuss to the great amusement of the audience, the many ways in which Florida politics is, in his opinion, entirely uncivilized. “The process of evolution,” he said, “has come to a grinding halt at the Georgia/Florida border.” Hiaasen has built his career skewering Florida politics in his regular column in The Miami Herald and in his 11 novels, two of which were written for children. As for his brush with Hollywood, two of his widely divergent novels, Hoot, about a young environmental activist, and the infamous Demi Moore vehicle, Striptease, became major motion pictures.

Hiaasen said that Florida, which “seems like a scary place,” has a “magnetic attraction” for “good people with a dream” and the “sleaziest forms of humanity.” In a nutshell, Hiaasen described Florida as a “vortex for weirdness,” because when it comes to every “major news story” that we hear about at the national level, “eventually,” he said, “the shoe drops in Florida.”

For example, several years ago, we learned that nine of the hijackers who participated in the attacks on September 11th “lived, worked, and trained” in Florida. Hiaasen imagined Osama bin Laden “in his cave” examining a map of the United States asking himself “Where is the bar of bad behavior so high that these bozos will never be noticed?” Hiaasen said, “He was right too.”

Hiaasen said we need stable families moving to Florida who will grow roots in their communities rather than people who move here “to rape and pillage and then leave.” He regaled the audience with tales of corrupt politicians from his books and said that although in real life, “a lot of the bad guys walk away, in my books, they’re always caught and something hideous happens to them.”

Hiaasen's hope for a greater level of civility in the future rests with the young people who write to him after reading his books or seeing "Hoot," which tells the story of a young boy who moves to Florida and feels compelled to help his friend protect the habitat of burrow owls. He always writes back to anyone who sends him a letter, and he loves to go into schools and work with students.

Peter French, PhD, "Role of Civic Culture in Kenya"

During his talk on March 13, Dr. Peter French stated that he believes the political stability in Kenya, relative to other nations in Africa, many of which are currently experiencing widespread genocide, is attributable to the long history of a civic culture in that country. He further stated that the recent bloody election in Kenya was aberrational and that the violence ended relatively quickly because of the tradition of civility in Kenyan politics. French discussed the link among Kenyans maintaining civility in political interactions, their ability to sustain a civic culture, and the country's long-term political stability and peace.

On the lighter side of civility, French claimed that human beings need to mix an interest in politics with a healthy dose of national past-times, such as the National Football League games, "American Idol," and March Madness, because "full time participation in politics would wear us out." We need to "manage" our political involvement with distracting "parochial interests."

He said that certain "social conditions" such as "outgoing character, freedom to communicate, generosity, and cooperation and trustworthiness" serve to "undergird civic competence" in politics. Kenyans refer to this notion as "adabo," that is "good manners, politeness, and proper behavior," which ultimately results in "civility."

Kenyan government is marked by 40 years of relative stability with only three presidents and peaceful transitions between administrations, French noted. In 1903, the Legislative Council in Kenya instituted universal suffrage, and thus Kenya was the "first place on the planet where women got the right to vote." Kenyans, French stated, "have never dissolved Parliament, suspended free press, [and have made] minimal use of preventive detention." For the most part, even though there is most certainly corruption in Kenya, they have managed to work in small groups to settle their disputes. The leaders largely rely on the connections they developed, in one of three high schools that Africans attend, to help them achieve consensus in decision-making.

According to French, Kenya has "105 years of parliamentary experience [and an] appreciation for the rule of law and civil service codes." French also attributed the political stability to the "existence of a strong middle class," because many Kenyans began buying land from Europeans, who were leaving the country, many years ago. The middle class, he said, "wants calm." He felt that the violence last December was the result of a consolidation which went beyond Kenyans' "normal order and structure" built on years of civic culture in "a

consensus-oriented society.” In conclusion, French stated, “civility” results from a “foundation for civic order” or as the Kenyans say, “adabo.”

*Robert Semple, “Election Musings, A View from **The New York Times**”*

The New York Times opinion editor, Robert Semple, visited the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee campus to discuss the state of our current electoral cycle, particularly in light of The Times’ controversial endorsement of one-time front-runner and current underdog of the Democratic Party, Senator Hillary Clinton. Semple said this is his 12th Presidential election and perhaps his “last as a working journalist,” and said that his very first vote was for John F. Kennedy, “much to [his] father’s displeasure.”

When he was a young man, Semple said ours was a “smaller, simpler, more homogeneous nation,” and at that time there was “general agreement by the rulers of both parties about how the country should be run.” Now, he said, the Iraq War is in its sixth year, “the nuclear threat has metastasized” and there are terrorist forces in Pakistan and Afganistan, which he called the “single greatest policy threat.” We are currently in an “ideological warfare of the sort I cannot remember in any of my younger days,” said Semple.

Semple further remarked that “only one of the three candidates bears any resemblance to candidates I grew up with,” which he called “not entirely [an] comfortable prospect, but it’s very, very interesting.” Ultimately, however, he said the diversity of the current candidates is “greatly reassuring.”

He explained the process by which The Times decided whom to endorse. In the past, The Times did not endorse candidates, because, as Semple said, that “might tie our hands down the road. “However, approximately 20 years ago, the editorial board decided that while they were “urging people to decide on leaders” they were “similarly obliged to make choices.”

In an effort to describe his own thought process when the opportunity came for him to vote in the newsroom, he referred to what he called, “Semple’s theory of plausibility” which is “who you could see in the Oval Office pulling levers.”

In the Republican camp, he evaluated the candidates, and said John McCain has “seriousness, gravitas, a great degree of political and legislative experience, and [is not] easily pigeonholed.” The Times board handily selected McCain to endorse. However, when it came to the Democrats, he said, they had a “far more lively far more extended discussion.” He said they voted “decisively for Hillary Clinton,” because she is a “New Deal centrist” and she is “our senator and has been a fairly good one.”

As for Senator Barack Obama, he said that back in February, his only impression was that he stood for “hope and change, was a great orator, but that essentially was it.” Although he said that not much has changed since then and that he believes that Clinton is “more comfortable, more fluid, and far better versed on policy issues,” Obama represents the “prospect of real change in political structure and how we conduct our national conversation.”

As for civility, he said of Clinton, “Behind that cool exterior lies one truly angry lady,” because this “was supposed to be her year.” Instead, he said, “riding out of practically nowhere, famous mainly for a simple speech and one book,” Obama toppled the front runner, resulting in what Semple called

“indignities to Clinton’s legendary sense of entitlement.” He cheekily said the leaders of the Democratic Party have advised her to back out and “retire to a hotel room with a glass of whiskey and a revolver.”

In the meantime, Semple said, he is relishing Clinton’s resurgence as a “blue collar heroine, a post-modern Rosie the Riveter” and admires her “willingness to do almost anything to get the prize she wants.” But, what he finds less than pleasant is what he called her “constant taste for combat.” It was precisely his fatigue of what he called, “24 years of intensely partisan struggle” that swayed his outvoted support for Obama. “No more, I can’t handle this,” he said, “give me the smooth guy.” He continued, “End over two decades of ideological warfare.”

He referred to what he called Obama’s problems, “experience, race, and elitism,” and said “possibly he is seriously out of touch with everyday Americans.” However, he continued, “If you want my two cents worth, [and I] don’t represent the editorial board, in January, I suspect we will be welcoming Barack Obama into the White House.”

“Civility and Voting Technology in Democracy – ‘Making Every Vote Count’”

Voting is “where the rubber meets the road,” said Teri Hansen, Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, when introducing the April 17th afternoon installment of the ongoing “Civility in Democracy” series. We only truly have a democracy if every eligible person has both the opportunity to vote and to have their vote accurately counted. Therefore, the “Civility in Democracy” discussion cannot be complete without a discussion of the most fundamental aspect of a working democracy, *i.e.*, the voting process itself.

Floridians are uniquely aware of the problems with voting, and we share continuing concerns as to whether our votes will be accurately counted. Stephen Ansolabehere, PhD, who teaches political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is a member of the Cal-Tech/MIT Voting Project (the “Voting Project”), which was established in 2000 as a joint effort by the two universities to address the hot-button issues of reliability, uniformity and quality in the voting process from an academic perspective. This effort is, as Ansolabehere stated, “emblematic of what is happening at universities” where cross-disciplinary projects, such as this one where engineers and social scientists come together to try to resolve many of the complex problems facing our country. “Call on the Academy as you need us,” he said.

Amid the audience’s laughter, he joked, “You know the extroverts at MIT, when they talk to you they look at **your** shoes.” Ansolabehere said that the significance of the Voting Project is that it resides squarely in the Ivory Tower, because academics “can take a step back” to look at voting at the macro level. Academics, he said, don’t have “too much of an axe to grind” when evaluating voting procedures at a nationwide level.

Ansolabehere’s good news is that after studying the voting systems across the nation “the probability of failure is very small.” As a nation, our voting system is a “sixth sigma,” meaning that it is six standard deviations away from the mean, *i.e.*, “sixth sigma is a methodology for minimizing mistakes and maximizing the value.” He further stated that only “one in every 500 elections end in the courts.” However, when it comes to Florida, the system is not working as well, and he estimated that the state is at a “three sigma,” which means there are a greater number of opportunities for error. He said, “Florida’s

been unfortunate. I'll let the Secretary discuss why," referring to the keynote speaker, Florida Secretary of State Kurt Browning.

Ansolabehere said some measure of error is inevitable, because the "demands for reliability and the demand for heightened security are unlikely to be met by computer science." He also referred to two groups, blind voters and United States military personnel, who are "not well suited" to standard voting procedures.

Over the next 10 years, Ansolabehere sees several trends in voting. First, is "the rise of absentee voting, which will mesh well with the internet." This year, one third of voters will vote absentee, and Oregon and Washington already vote entirely absentee. As it stands now, absentee voting makes it "more difficult to call elections," and voters are not "using standard techniques," so these are issues that will need to be resolved as this trend continues. The second issue is the rapid pace of changes in technology. As he said, "Computers just don't last that long," in fact, they only generally last four to five years, so there is an enormous cost involved for states to purchase new computers to calculate voting every five years. Florida is one of 11 states not currently reporting the number of people who vote in that state. Third, the United States needs to update its method of contracting with companies that provide voting technology. Currently, he said, "You contract county by county" for the technology, which he called a "very bad contracting model."

The next panelist, Doug Chapin, founding director of electionline.org, a non-partisan, non-advocacy-based organization, said that his organization is able to provide a "30,000-foot view on elections in this country" and uses that vantage point to advise, think about and write about the election process. He said the "big three" issues in voting today are: voting machines, voter lists, and voter identification. He also said the "pace of change in election technology is dizzying" in light of the fact that we are now using the "third separate voter technology in as many presidential elections." He called this "staggering."

Voter lists, said Chapin, are an "essential element," because they are the "admission ticket to the election process." They are complicated to deal with because they involve the exclusion of people through other lists, including felony records, change of address, Social Security and immigration records. The good news, he said, is that it is "easy to make the matches," but the bad news is that it is "difficult to deal with the consequences." He continued, we "need good old fashioned human interaction" whenever a "red flag pops up." Additionally, the Supreme Court, (since the lecture) upheld the state of Indiana's requirement that voters provide a form of identification at the polls, which civil rights advocates believe adds another potential impediment to people, often minority voters, who have not traditionally come to the polls.

Perhaps the single biggest unknown this year is the effect of voter turnout on this election, which Chapin called "unprecedented." Chapin declared that the groundswell of voter enthusiasm reminds him of the famous line from "Jaws," when Roy Scheider, faced with the size of the infamous shark, declares, "We're going to need a bigger boat!" There are a myriad of potential issues which may arise at the polls, including but not limited to, parking, accessibility, voter identification, long lines, limited staff, and a ballot shortage. During this precedent-setting election, he said, "are likely to be off the charts," and warned local election supervisors, many of whom were in attendance at the luncheon, to be prepared.

Chapin concluded that “election administration in this country is very much a moving target, and at the same time, we are in an era of competitive partisan politics where razor-thin margins are more common.” He said that we need to begin viewing voters as consumers and to ensure that they are educated about the procedures before they get to the polls.

Secretary of State Browning began his remarks by stating that he’s become weary of discussing elections in recent years, because of the problems Florida has had with the election process. However, he said that he is very proud of the reforms the state has made since the year 2000. Yet he maintained that there was “nothing wrong with the 2000 election. It was a very close election on a very high-profile case.” He said only 537 votes separated President George W. Bush from then-Vice President Al Gore in 2000. The experience, he continued, gave him a great deal of “insight into the application of election law.”

The election process in Florida, said Browning, is basically decentralized. He continued, the “action is in the 67 counties,” and he has “little if any authority” over the supervisors of elections in each county. He said that his office serves as a clearinghouse for the election process.

Browning joked that when he wakes up every election morning he recites what he called his “election supervisor’s prayer, which is, ‘Lord, I don’t care who wins, just let them win big!’” In order to avoid controversy, you “want the margin of victory to be incredibly wide,” because recounts are unequivocally problematic.

To ease the potential recount process, in 2007, paper ballots became mandatory statewide. Florida moved from touch screens to optical scans so that there would be a paper trail of election results. By 2010, election supervisors across the state will have entirely phased out the touch screen system. Two other reforms that should ease crowding at the polls are that one no longer needs to have a reason or excuse to request absentee ballots, and early voting has become more prevalent. Browning said that this is a “good thing [because it] allows you more time to manage the numbers of people” who are coming to the polls.

Browning further stated that Florida now has a “voter intent rule,” whereby the legislators have “gotten into the minds of voters.” Another significant and necessary change is an improvement in poll worker training, because as Browning stated, you “can have the best voting system in the world, but unless you have trained, and trained, and trained poll workers and voters, your election is at risk.”

Browning concluded his remarks by stating that the most important part of his job is ensuring that voters have a “high level of confidence in the system.” He said it “takes a long time to build something up, but it takes one misstep to tear it down.” However, in response to the proverbial question, “Will we ever have perfect elections?” he admitted, “the answer is ‘no.’”

During the discussion, panelists Carson Cooper, host of “Morning Edition on WUSF 89.7, and Susan MacManus, PhD, Distinguished University Professor in the USF Department of Government and International Affairs, discussed some of the nuanced issues of the day’s lecture.

Cooper referred to his own concerns about the effectiveness of technology having experienced, one too many times, what he called, the “blue screen of death from Windows,” when his computer inexplicably shuts down and his work is lost. He was also very concerned about the level of accuracy one

can demand in the election process. Chapin said that “the only way to tell if a race is within a rate of error is if the loser sues.” Ansolabehere stated that the problems are not with the machines themselves but rather “the way in which the human being interacts with the machine.”

MacManus expressed her concern as to whether adequate funding has been budgeted to handle voter education and wondered whether the Secretary of State felt prepared for the upcoming election in light of limited budgets. Browning agreed that he had not received enough funding; however, he reiterated that, in spite of the limited funding to prepare for this election, the state must continue to “educate, educate, educate; you can’t take anything for granted.” Florida, he continued, as a result of its missteps and mishaps, is actually a model for other states now and is at the “cutting edge of elections in this country.”