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My Take - Voting without thinking

MIKE LOZON

Laketown Township —

Sad to say, but last week's election results reveal that the majority of Holland-area voters still prefer to look in the rearview mirror than out the front window when driving down life's political road.

By favoring the Republican Party, most voters in Allegan and Ottawa counties clung to the conservative, provincial ways of those who settled this area.

This time-honored practice of voting without thinking bars the doors to a diversity of candidates and ideas. As a result, this region deserves its reputation as a political backwater when compared to more forward-thinking areas of the nation.

The majority of Holland-area voters missed a historic opportunity to join others across the nation in electing Democratic candidate Barack Obama as the next president of the United States. Most area voters cast their ballots for Republican John McCain. Running a down-and-dirty campaign, McCain failed to provide realistic solutions to domestic and foreign problems that have festered during the eight years of a failed Bush administration.

In contrast, Obama represents the best hope of putting America back on track at home and abroad. Obama is an inspirational and intellectual leader who is capable of uniting people and formulating a vision of greatness that this country so desperately needs.

Area voters missed an opportunity for further positive change in Washington, D.C., by failing to elect Fred Johnson, a political newcomer and Democrat, for the 2nd District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Johnson, a Hope College professor, represented a fresh alternative to Republican incumbent Peter Hoekstra, who has served in that position since 1993 and who favored the disastrous war in Iraq.

In Allegan County, fear trumped capable experience in an ugly campaign for 48th Circuit Court judge. Backed by The Campaign for Michigan Families, attorney Kevin Cronin defeated incumbent William Baillargeon, who was appointed in 2007 to fill the position of a retiring judge. Baillargeon is highly respected among his peers in the criminal-justice system. But his credible job performance was not enough to mute the petty attacks on his character, which emphasized his connection to gay and lesbian organizations.

The majority of Holland-area voters also missed an opportunity to join other Michigan residents in amending the state constitution to address research using human embryonic stem cells. The proposal allows people to donate excess embryos left over from fertility treatments for stem-cell research. Most of those embryos are eventually discarded as human waste.

Swayed by the sanctity-of-life argument, voters in Allegan and Ottawa counties rejected the proposal by convincing margins. But those who opposed the measure, including Right to Life of Michigan, are walking a very thin moral line. They declare a concern for life, yet condone a medical procedure that produces far more embryos than can possibly be implanted or adopted, as advocated by Right to Life. Offering the possibility of medical cures, the proposal approved by Michigan voters allows a life-affirming use of embryos that otherwise are destined for destruction.

Of course, a good share of the region's voters did not approach that issue or the selection of candidates with an open mind. Instead, those voters chose to travel the well-worn political road mapped out by the rigid-thinking residents in this area who came before them.