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What Will Matter to Me in the Coming Presidential Election

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What Will Matter to Me in the Coming Presidential Election

By Melody Bowman
UCF Forum columnist
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A few weeks ago I made an early morning trek to a college campus two hours from where I live. I was scheduled to facilitate a discussion about academic leadership with colleagues around the state. I set my radio to C-SPAN and was soon listening to a morning call-in show. The host asked female listeners to share the policy issues that would matter most to them in the coming presidential election.

I listened for a while and heard a diverse group of women from around the country commenting from multiple perspectives about reproductive rights, environmental issues, immigration, health care, and more.

After listening for a while I pulled off the road to gas up and place my own call. When I had my opportunity to speak, I noted that one thing I will be watching for as I evaluate candidates will be their responses to women's issues. I said that as an educator I see many young women out-achieving their male counterparts in college, but finding themselves far behind them in terms of salaries and workplace influence five and 10 years later, and that I want to see leaders who do what they can to support environments that make it possible for both men and women to achieve and lead.

My comments didn't spark any great response — most callers wanted to either dispute something said by a previous caller or simply have their own ideas heard.

As I continued to digest this conversation, I thought about the coming presidential election, and its relevance to the conversation I was anticipating with my colleagues.

After reading many books and articles about leadership in times of change, I boiled key tenets of good leadership down to this list:

- Be credible, transparent and reliable
- Be honest as you assess yourself and others
- Recognize and value differences in leadership styles
- Value other kinds of difference as well
- Clarify goals/values/mission and align them with those of your organization
- Take risks; be proactive and optimistic
- Be open to unexpected opportunities
- Pay attention to interpersonal relationships
- Be attentive to details or find and listen to someone who is
- Empower others to lead
- Listen to others
- Be assertive when taking your own positions
- Manage conflict productively
- Take responsibility for outcomes

I realized that this list offers a good guide for evaluating candidates, and I made a decision to approach this election with this rubric in mind.

In the past I've ranged from being very actively involved in campaigning (including being a campaign precinct co-leader) to minimally involved (pretty much just voting on the day of the election). This time I want to strike a balance.

Below you'll see my pledge for this election cycle. I'd love to hear from others about their plans and commitments.

- As I assess each candidate, I will attempt to keep in balance my sense of her or his personal integrity and track record as a policymaker.
- I will endeavor to avoid the temptation to be a cynic and a nihilist. I'll try to believe in the possibility that things can be better and that elected leaders can play an important role in improvement.
- I will remember that no democratic government can make change happen without grassroots efforts by citizens who are committed to supporting a positive environment and willing to collaborate despite their differences. Leaders need support and action from those they represent.
- I will try to have a sense of humor and show sincere respect when friends, colleagues, neighbors, and others close to me express views that are different from mine. I will remember that we all arrive at our perspectives through our life experiences and that diverse views are productive.
- I will be mindful of what a privilege it is to have the time and freedom to explore complicated political ideas; I'll be grateful that I have the resources to learn about the issues and the opportunity to express my opinions.
- I will try to set aside exhilarations with previous wins and frustrations from previous losses and consider the current issues and the best leaders given my understanding of the current realities.
- I will remember the high stakes associated with this election cycle — the cases that will come before the Supreme Court, and the economic, social, and other implications of

legislation that will be brought forward in the coming years — and take my responsibility seriously.

As we enter this stressful time of receiving conflicting and confusing messages, I hope others will use pledges like this to guide their decisions and actions, and both be and choose effective leaders who will govern with compassion and intelligence.

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