

Why Did You Wa

Idaho Senate President Pro Tem Robert Geddes: I grew up in a politically active family. My father served in the Legislature for 24 years. I guess part of me continues to have him as my role model. I've served 16 years, and I'll turn 55 next year. I've tried to balance that with a profession and family. It's rewarding. It gets into your blood and you always think you could do a little more to make our society better.

Florida House Speaker Mike Haridopolos: I love my state and my family. As the son of an FBI agent and a college instructor, I believe in public service. I wanted to lead as Senate president because I have a conservative vision for our state and felt that now, more than ever, we need leaders who recognize that people spend money smarter than a large bureaucratic state. These are tough times, and if we lead in an inclusive, unselfish way, anything is possible.

Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan: I am asking for my constituents' support because we have some great challenges facing us that can be best addressed by experienced leadership.

New Jersey Speaker Sheila Oliver: I sought public office because I want to help create an inclusive environment where all ideas can emerge and be respected. I want to establish, in no uncertain terms, that leaders in public office need not conform to stereotypical images that portray them as self-serving and self-promoting people who don't care about their constituencies. And just as important, I want to help establish the fact that women and people of color are capable of accomplishing anything and everything possible.

Q. What's your vision for the state?

Geddes: I'm a conservative Republican. My vision is that we need to continue to do what we can in three key areas: public safety, infrastructure needs and education. Everything else is probably not as high a priority. Certainly we have responsibilities in other areas, but in my opinion in those other areas we have diminished people's ingenuity and personal responsibility. We cannot continue as a state to do as much as we have done in the past. That means we're going to limit our resources to what people have the ability to pay for rather than saying this is nice program and should be funded. So my vision for Idaho is to continue to be fiscally responsible and to evaluate all the programs we have in place to determine if they're necessary

and still functioning as they're supposed to. The ultimate question is whether we still can afford them. We have to be sustainable and doing the right thing.

Haridopolos: My vision is to ensure Florida places no impediments on fulfilling someone's dream—whether it be creating a start-up business, starting a family or starting another chapter in life. With no state income tax, being a right-to-work state and now in the top 10 in education performance, Florida is poised to attract new jobs. My vision is to make our state the place to do business. With a strong conservative majority we must lead by example. If we offer predictability and certainty—meaning a promise of no new taxes, the reduction of government red tape and common-sense health care reforms—we will fulfill that mission.

Madigan: My vision includes the need to fashion a bipartisan effort to more fully address the unprecedented fiscal troubles facing the state.

Oliver: The vision I have for New

Jersey is to eradicate the ideological and geographical divides. Our state is home to both some of the wealthiest and poorest citizens in the country—from new suburban enclaves to the third oldest city in the nation. I want to continue to help plant seeds that will allow a not-too-distant generation to experience a New Jersey where there is inclusion, diversity of thought, and a focus on creating the best possible quality of life for everyone—regardless of socioeconomic status, political affiliation or geographic location.

Q. What keeps you up at night?

Geddes: What's worrying me more than anything else is how we're going to be able to continue balancing the budget. We expect an even bigger challenge next year because funds we had socked away in rainy day funds are depleted.

Haridopolos: I worry about Floridians who have been hit hard by these tough times. There's such a domino effect when one person loses a job and can't find another one. As we've seen, it leads to home foreclosures, additional demands on social services and declining tax revenue, which affects every Floridian. I fear that if Washington continues its spending, we might not have the flexibility as a state to make the changes we need. The best example of this is the health care bill that will increase our state Medicaid rolls by 50 percent.

Madigan: I worry that the havoc caused to our social service system—especially mental health workers—might be hard to repair.

Oliver: While some people may insist that they actually thrive on stress, I am not one of them. Many years ago, I learned how to handle stress because I realized that stress and worry are counterproductive to problem-solving and living a healthy and productive life. So I am able to sleep soundly and wake refreshed, ready to tackle another day.

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Q. What do you think of partisanship in today's legislatures?

Geddes: The Republicans currently have a super majority in the Idaho Senate. We work well with the minority 98 percent of the time. There are just a couple of issues on which we have some significant disagreement. But I would say our relationship and ability to work with all legislators is pretty professional.

Haridopolos: No points of view should ever be stifled. Legislators were elected to represent their con-

stituents, and they should have a voice. Admittedly, there has been a loss of civility in this process. Differing viewpoints are encouraged. Personal attacks should always be off limits. That is why we pride ourselves in the Florida Senate on our ability to work together, and even when we disagree, both sides are always heard.

Madigan: Extreme partisanship has made it impossible to address major fiscal problems. Sadly, we

have seen Republicans stripped of leadership posts merely for voting for minor measures to give the state some fiscal breathing room.

Oliver: I am becoming increasingly disappointed at both the level of the discourse and the lack of mutual respect or tolerance for all points of view. There is absolutely nothing wrong with espousing divergent points of view. There is something wrong with engaging in the kinds of infantile, ignorant and even gutter-level behavior we are seeing around the country. We must shake off this reality show mentality and remember why we are in public office.

Q. How do you lead in a time of crisis?

Geddes: I think now is a time of crisis, and it's not that much fun. What helps me more than anything else is that, in the Idaho Senate, we have extremely talented people with wide experience and a healthy amount of good common sense. Leading is not so much leading as it is knowing where to find the best resources to manage through the crisis we're facing.

Haridopolos: Facing challenges head-on during a crisis is a true sign of leadership. We're elected by our fellow citizens not to mark time but to tackle the issues of our day. Florida, like most other states, has been hit hard by the current economic meltdown. We're faced with declining budgets, high unemployment, and the economic impact of this summer's oil spill in the Gulf. While it's tough to see Floridians suffering, we have an opportunity to put our great state back on the right track. With crisis comes an opportunity

to make the necessary changes to remove government barriers to job creation. The best thing we can do is lead by example and tighten our own belts first. That is why in the Senate, we have already cut our own pay over the past few years and saved more than \$1 million by reducing our own staff.

Madigan: My approach in difficult times is the same as in less difficult times: Apply common-sense solutions, solicit broad-based input and ideas, and expect big problems to be solved gradually.

Oliver: Leadership is the only ship that doesn't return to port when there is a storm. During times of crisis, I believe that leaders must stay the course, remain at the helm, and navigate the rough and uncharted waters. I also never lose sight of the fact that I am a public servant charged with doing what is best for the people of New Jersey, and that helps provide the fuel to keep me going.



**Idaho Senate President Pro Tem
Robert Geddes**

Robert Geddes was first elected to the Idaho Senate in 1996 and has served as president pro tem since 2000. Following this interview, he announced his intention not to run again for the the post of Senate president pro tem.



**Florida Senate President
Mike Haridopolos**

Mike Haridopolos became president of the Florida Senate following the November 2010 election. He was first elected to the House in 2000 and the Senate in 2003. Haridopolos teaches history at the University of Florida.



**Illinois House Speaker
Michael Madigan**

Michael Madigan, first elected to the Illinois House in 1970, became speaker in 1983. He has held that post ever since except for the period from 1994 to 1996. Madigan is a lifelong resident of Chicago, where he practices law.



**New Jersey Speaker
Sheila Oliver**

Sheila Oliver was first elected to the New Jersey Assembly in 2003, was deputy speaker pro-tem in the 2008 and 2009 sessions and became speaker in 2010. She is the first African-American woman to lead a legislative chamber in New Jersey and only the second in U.S. history to lead a legislative chamber.