

Wake up New Bedford (and the south coast)



Yesterday morning I headed over to the Democratic Gubernatorial Candidates Forum hosted by the New Bedford Democratic City Committee at the Zeiteron Theater. Five Democratic candidates fighting for the Democratic Party's nomination were there to answer questions. It was a big deal and I wanted to hear what they had to say.

It took 20 minutes to find parking at the streets were jammed with activity and the city's two parking garages were maxed. It was standing room only as 3,000 people tried to fill into the 1,200 or so seats at the Zeiterion Theatre. There was excitement in the air and the candidates were even seen peeking at the crowd from the red curtains that shielded them from view. These candidates were rock stars and whoever won the nomination would take New Bedford and the South Coast seriously.

Now let's step back into reality and review what really happened.

While I was excited to see the candidates, the turnout was dismal. The event started at 9 a.m., but due to prior commitments I showed up at 11 a.m. knowing that the candidates wouldn't start answering questions until around 11:30 a.m.

It was surprisingly easy to find street parking just one block away and the parking garages were empty. It was easy to find seating, even in the front row. In total about 150 people showed up (organizers claim 280) and that included local politicians, local media and of course the candidates' entourages. This group seemed to outnumber the everyday citizen and who the candidates were trying to win over. I'd estimate about 50-75 of these people showed up.



Let me explain why this matters and why this disinterest needs to change.

Candidates for governors are very smart people and the five I listened to today are some of the smartest candidates I've ever seen. They have great memories. This event was billed as a South Coast, Massachusetts event. That's a few hundred thousand people with New Bedford and Fall River alone being 190,000 people. It's all about the numbers with politicians.

The South Coast area is known for low voter turnout and we just validated that with someone who has a great chance of being our future governor.

By its historical voting record, the people of New Bedford and the south coast have already told Republican candidates, don't bother coming and now we've just told these five Democratic candidates that we are an irrelevant, disinterested people that only need attention because we are the #1 fishing port in America.

New Bedford has a history of parents uninterested in showing up to important school meetings. Earlier this year we had 15 and 100 people show up to two meetings with Superintendent Pia Durkin to discuss the turnaround plan at New Bedford High School with 2,600 students. Earlier this month **"maybe 30 parents" showed up to the same style meeting to discuss the future of three middle schools.** During last year's New Bedford elections, maybe 30 people showed up each night to the City Council and School Committee debates hosted at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

There are lots of excuses to the low turnout to debates, important school meetings and elections. The ones I hear most often are people stating they didn't get the word or that they had prior commitments. This may be the case for many, but the sad case is I can walk into Market Basket at anytime of the day and find 300 people. It's a matter of priorities. If we want to be taken seriously by the politicians locally, we must show up to local debates and important school meetings. If we want to be taken seriously by the politicians statewide and nationally, we need to show up to important debates and vote when the time comes. These politicians have great memories and will make decisions that affect us based on our actions and even more importantly inactions.