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## I still like right-leaning liberal Rocco Rossi for mayor

By MICHAEL TAUBE

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Many Toronto-area conservatives are lining up behind two good mayoralty candidates, Sarah Thomson and Rob Ford. But I'm not one of them.

I recently crossed the ideological divide and endorsed a right-leaning liberal, Rocco Rossi.

His fiscally conservative platform — including proposals to sell off Toronto Hydro, outsource municipal services, and freeze wasteful spending on Transit City — impressed me. That's why I gave the former Liberal party national director a public nod in another newspaper Sun readers love to hate.

At the time, Thomson's campaign was still in its infancy, and Ford, now the frontrunner in the race according to the latest Nanos Research poll, hadn't yet declared.

I've since received a few ... um ... pleasant calls and e-mails asking if I would reconsider and switch allegiances.

Nope.

I would be content with either Thomson or Ford as Toronto's mayor. They both have strong credentials and would both do a good job.

But in each case, there are sticking points I can't get past.

Let's start with Thomson. After leaving home at 15 and working in a gas station, she eventually started a multi-million dollar company to help improve struggling service centres. She then founded Women's Post in 2002. It's a glossy, nationally-circulated news magazine for professional women, with columns from diverse writers like the Sun's Michael Coren.

But good business acumen doesn't necessarily translate into good political insights.

Toll roads

Thomson's key policy proposal is to extend the TTC — and pay for it by making the Don Valley Parkway a toll road. While it's a creative strategy, it's bad economic policy. Toll roads are popular with left-wing politicians (such as former London, U.K. mayor "Red" Ken Livingstone), and toll fees are an unnecessary, additional tax.

It's one thing having the 407 ETR, a privately-run toll highway, quite another making people pay for driving on public roads.

But what bothers me most about Thomson is this rather nice woman doesn't seem to have the political skills for the job. Her political style and media savvy are remarkably amateurish. Watch some videos of Thomson on YouTube and see if you agree.

Rob Ford is a different political animal. He's a confident speaker and gregarious individual. He has vast experience in business (helping build up the deco adhesive company started by his late father, former Tory MPP Doug Ford) and municipal politics (10 years as an Etobicoke councillor).

He's also the most fiscally conservative candidate in the race, barely spending a dime of his annual \$53,100 office budget.

Plus, his campaign is chock full of good ideas: Cutting government waste and excessive taxation; making the TTC an essential service; eliminating the vehicle registration and land transfer taxes; cutting municipal council in half.

So, what's my concern? Ford's steady stream of outrageous comments. He once labeled fellow mayoral candidate Giorgio Mammoliti a "Gino boy." He mused more women may be getting the AIDS virus by "sleeping with bisexual men." He crudely claimed "Oriental people work like dogs ... they're slowly taking over, because there's no excuses for them."

I don't believe in political correctness, but these statements are over-the-top. Ford has apologized, but I'm concerned he'll keep doing it as mayor. We've already had Mel Lastman's foolish comment about seeing himself "in a pot of boiling water with all these natives dancing around me" in Mombasa. Let's avoid a repeat performance!

Fiscal conservative

Rossi (in fourth place according to the Nanos poll, but with 40% of voters still undecided) may be a federal Liberal, but he's intelligent, outgoing, fiscally conservative, and untainted by controversy.

So, with all due respect to Thomson and Ford, I see no reason to switch camps.

— Taube is a public affairs analyst and commentator