

## Charlotte Sun Editorial: Mahoney earns distinction for centrist record

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**OUR POSITION:** Mahoney deserves credit for pursuing an agenda not beholden to partisan politics, but the good of his district.

In these bitter political times, moderation is a rarity. Dialogue and debate gravitate to the extremes on both sides of the political spectrum. We saw this when vocal opponents of Sen. John McCain railed against his presidential campaign because he has broken with the Republican Party on many issues conservatives hold dear. We saw this in the Democratic primary when liberals broke with Hillary Clinton and the centrist Democratic Leadership Council.

But moderation and independent thinking are not extinct. In fact, according to an analysis of congressional voting records, Rep. Tim Mahoney, the Democrat who represents most of Charlotte County in the House of Representatives, is the poster boy for moderation. The analysis, done by the National Journal, a nonpartisan publication that covers Congress and public policy, found Mahoney ranked exactly in the middle of his Democratic and Republican colleagues and named him its "Man in the Middle."

The analysis covered about 100 votes cast by Mahoney and his 534 House and Senate colleagues, including minimum wage, embryonic-stem-cell research, illegal immigration and the alternative minimum tax.

The recognition, which came in the March issue of National Journal, coincided with another honor bestowed by Congress.org, a non-partisan policy watchdog organization based in Washington, D.C. Congress.org called Mahoney the "most effective" new member of congress in its 2008 power rankings. Mahoney scored a 25.89 in the group's ranking, 110th of the 435 members of the House. The average for Florida's congressional delegation was 17.18.

Mahoney, who allies himself with a group of moderate Democrats known as the Blue Dogs, has impressed us with his independence and information-based decision-making. Instead of blindly railing against the situation in Iraq, he flew there, visited with generals and privates and returned to concede the controversial "surge" made some progress. Mahoney has since voted for bills setting benchmarks and a timetable for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq, but voted against his fellow Democrats' plan to force a three-month withdrawal last May.

Instead of bowing to powerful cornbelt congressmen over U.S. ethanol policy, Mahoney pushed for and won funding for research and development of ethanol produced from agricultural waste, such as citrus peels that could provide a substantial new market for Florida's agricultural industry. The 2007 Farm Bill contains language setting goals for such cellulosic ethanol.

On immigration, Mahoney has sided with Republicans who favor heightened border enforcement. He also split with Democrats on the alternative minimum tax extension because the measure was funded with a tax on investment management firms.

Make no mistake, Mahoney is solidly Democratic, voting with his party 90.4 percent of the time, as often as die-hard conservatives such as Rep. Tom Feeney vote with the GOP. And Mahoney's independent streak hasn't gained him any clemency from partisan attacks or political challengers. Three Republican opponents are vying for the nomination to run against him in November.

But in an era when opinions are often formed about politicians based on the capital letter D or R after their name, it's impressive that Mahoney has refused to retreat to the safety of the Democratic fold. In a district with more Republican than Democratic voters, his tenure in Congress may be brief, but he has served with intelligence, integrity and conviction.