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## Women's vote could play key role Tuesday in Tampa mayor's election

By Richard Danielson, Times Staff Writer

*Mayoral candidates Buckhorn and Ferlita are working hard to gain their support.*

TAMPA - Republican and Democratic party involvement in Tampa's nonpartisan mayor's race has made headlines, but Tuesday's runoff could turn not so much on party affiliation as on how women vote.

Yes, Democrats outnumber Republicans almost 2-to-1 among registered voters in Tampa. But female voters outnumber male voters about 5-to-4. This has created a race in which Democrat Bob Buckhorn and Republican Rose Ferlita are working hard to compete for the votes of women, especially in the closing days of the campaign.

This is not a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to Tampa. At the national level, women have voted at higher rates than men since 1980, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

"That's a pattern we've been seeing in the last couple of decades, but it's intensifying," University of South Florida political scientist Susan MacManus says. Female voter turnout is higher partly because women outlive men, and voter turnout rises with age.

"On the other hand, the women's vote is not necessarily cohesive," MacManus says. "Gender is often less of a cue than is party or age or ideology."

In the mayor's race, both candidates tout the endorsements of high-profile women. Buckhorn is backed by Mayor Pam Iorio, who is leaving office because of term limits with an 87 percent approval rating. Ferlita has the support of Pam Bondi, a veteran Hillsborough County prosecutor who last year was elected Florida attorney general.

In the primary election, Ferlita often noted that she was the only woman running in a field of five candidates, and that distinction probably earned her some votes, MacManus says.

Buckhorn rarely fails to mention his wife, well-known South Tampa obstetrician and gynecologist Cathy Lynch Buckhorn. And he says he wants to create a Tampa that his grade school-aged daughters will want to come home to after college.

"I'm just a dad trying to make sure I leave this city in better shape than it was given to me," he says.

With such remarks, Buckhorn plays not only to women, but to married voters, who turn out at higher rates than single voters, MacManus says.

But marital status also has turned into one of the runoff's most hotly debated issues.

It began when what appeared to be a third-party campaign mailer surfaced via e-mail. It suggested that Ferlita's commitment to family values is suspect because she is not married. Ferlita says it was an insult and an affront to all single women. Buckhorn says he had nothing to do with it.

The flier's origins are as controversial as its message. The *St. Petersburg Times* received a copy of it as an attachment to an e-mail from Ferlita campaign consultant Anthony Pedicini, who received it from political blogger Peter Schorsch, who says he received it anonymously.

The flier bore the name of Less Government Now, a Tampa-based electioneering communications group that put out an anti-Ferlita flier before the March 1 primary. Democratic political consultant Jonathan Brill of Tampa worked for Less Government Now during the fall elections. But Brill, whom the Buckhorn campaign has paid for research, says he has not worked for Less Government Now

in the mayor's race. Both he and the group's treasurer deny having anything to do with the flier.

Meanwhile, the postal service says the flier had a fake postage permit number, leading Buckhorn to call it a hoax.

"It's a Trojan horse designed to attract attention to an issue that doesn't exist," he says. "There was no flier. It was never mailed."

Still, Ferlita says the flier is one of several reasons Buckhorn should apologize, and not just to her. The others: In a television ad rebutting one of her TV spots, he called her campaign "sleazy," and when he ran for mayor in 2003, he attacked Iorio's family values over a 1991 County Commission vote she cast opposing a proposed ban on T-back swimsuits in public places.

In a mailer delivered Friday, Ferlita describes Buckhorn's tactics as "a new low."

"This is an attack not just on me, but on all women," she says. "Bob's relentless attacks have been well-documented in his TV ads, calling me 'sleazy,' and in the flier, questioning my fitness to serve because I'm a single woman."

Iorio dismisses those arguments, including the one about Buckhorn's attack on her swimsuit vote.

"I have known Bob for three decades, and there is nothing anti-woman about him," Iorio says in an e-mail to the *Times*.

"As for the 2003 stuff, we laughed about it even then," she says. "I saw him right after he sent it, and we laughed and he said, 'Well, that was a mistake!' If I wasn't upset by the 2003 campaign, I can't imagine anyone else being upset."

Along with Iorio, Buckhorn enjoys the support of former mayoral rivals Ed Turanchik and Thomas Scott, Tampa's police and firefighters unions, the Associated Builders and Contractors and several of former Mayor Dick Greco's key supporters, including banker and philanthropist David A. Straz Jr., businessman John Sykes and retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Chip Diehl, who is active in issues related to MacDill Air Force Base.

Buckhorn also has the endorsements of the editorial boards of the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Tampa Tribune*, the alternative weekly *Creative Loafing*, the black-interest *Florida Sentinel Bulletin* and the trilingual *La Gaceta*, which has a heavy emphasis on Tampa's Latin community.

In addition to Bondi, Ferlita has the backing of Hillsborough State Attorney Mark Ober, former County Administrator Fred Karl and the Greater Tampa Association of Realtors.

On paper, the endorsements might appear to give Buckhorn an edge, but this election is not being played out on paper. Ferlita has a well-organized campaign. She can field scores of enthusiastic volunteers in Day-Glo green T-shirts to walk neighborhoods, wave signs on Bayshore Boulevard and help get out the vote.

"This case is going to be won by which candidate's followers have the greatest commitment and passion," MacManus says.

That means turnout will be key.

Only 22 percent of voters cast ballots in the March 1 primary. In previous city elections, turnout dropped in the runoff. But there are signs the city might buck the trend this year. Through Saturday, more people had cast ballots by mail or during early voting than did for the primary.

It would be good if those voters did not base their decisions on attack ads, which kicked in just before early voting began, says Scott Paine, a former City Council member and University of Tampa government professor. Buckhorn and Ferlita, he says, have set forth agendas and visions for the city that are distinct enough to give voters meaningful differences to consider.

"That's what ought to be at the heart of the conversation," says Paine, who does not support either candidate. "It's both a sign of the times politically and a function of early voting that the campaigns have degenerated to some extent into various attempts at character assassination. And that's unfortunate."

## **Tampa voter registration**

### **By gender \***

Women - 101,051 (54.6 %)

Men - 84,182 (45.4 %)

### **By party**

Democrats - 95,980 (50.3%)

Republicans - 51,377 (27%)

Other - 43,272 (22.7%)

\*Tampa voter rolls also include 5,396 voters who did not check a box indicating their gender when they registered to vote.

Source: Hillsborough County supervisor of elections.

## The mayor's race

### The job

The mayor serves a four-year term and is paid \$150,000 annually. Under Tampa's strong-mayor form of government, the mayor exercises broad authority over the city budget, personnel, economic development and public safety.

### The candidates

**Bob Buckhorn**, 52, was an aide to former Mayor Sandy Freedman and served on the Tampa City Council from 1995 to 2003. He owns a public affairs firm. Education: bachelor of arts in political science, Penn State University. Personal: married to Dr. Cathy Lynch Buckhorn; two daughters: Grace, 9, and Colleen, 5. Net worth: \$800,000.


**Rose Ferlita**, 65, is a part-time pharmacist at CVS and a consultant for the Agency for Community Treatment Services. She served on the Tampa City Council from 1999 to 2006 and on the Hillsborough County Commission from 2006 to 2010. Education: bachelor of science in pharmacy, University of Florida. Personal: single, no children. Net worth: \$1.1 million.


### Read the plans


**Buckhorn:** Go to [bobbuckhorn.com/main.html](http://bobbuckhorn.com/main.html), then click on "Changing Tampa's Economic DNA."

**Ferlita:** Go to [roseformayor.com](http://roseformayor.com), then click on "Bold building blocks," then on any block or on "Ferlita Administration's Bold Building Blocks in PDF Format."

### Watch the TV debates

 Florida This Week, 12:30 p.m. today on WEDU-Ch. 3.

 A League of Women Voters forum, 2 p.m. Monday on City of Tampa Television, Verizon FiOS Channel 15 and Bright House Networks Channel 615.

 A March 8 debate, sponsored by the *St. Petersburg Times* and Bay News 9, is available on Bay News 9 On Demand, Channel 342 on Bright House.

### Early voting done; more than 8,000 cast

Early voting for Tampa's runoff elections ended Saturday with 8,194 votes cast, the elections supervisor's office announced. That compares to 6,685 early votes for the March 1 municipal elections.

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