

Mark O'Brien: If you think Congress is tough, try serving on a condo board

It's political season and candidates are telling us about their valuable education and experience in the military, business and government, all reasons we should make them our leaders.

But I want someone who was part of a homeowners association.

Not one of those suburban homeowner associations where they gather once a year to sip wine and congratulate each other on having above-average children and the same political philosophies.

No, I want someone who has been in the trenches, doing battle in a condo association where people with competing values duke it out on a regular basis.

“Raise the monthly fee; invest in the building!” “Cut fees, cut costs!” “Let dogs live here!” “Ban animals!” “No children, no noise after 8 p.m. No satellite antennas!” “Live and let live!” “We should recycle.” “This ain’t Woodstock. Go back where you came from!”

Yes, I’m talking about someone who has endured the condo wars of Florida, great training for honing political skills because the nice little old lady in Unit 955 actually is meaner and sneakier than your average terrorist. Also, that polite young man in Unit 1142 apparently is selling heroin and meth, to judge from the quality of people visiting him at 3 a.m.

Serving on a homeowner association board is tough duty. A congressman can hide behind his aides, but life isn’t so sheltered for the person who is elected or chosen to set rules and establish finances for buildings full of people.

Get a tough skin or get used to sneaking out of your condo at odd hours to escape the neighbors — constituents — who want to complain about a visitor parking his car in the wrong spot or the tattooed woman who doesn’t make eye contact in the hallway.

Then you have the people who won't clean up after their dog or who insist they should be able to bring glass to the pool or keep the sauna party going until all hours.

A Senate filibuster by Ted Cruz is nothing compared to the monologues of angry residents at condo board meetings, and there are no special interest groups to line your pockets at feel-good cocktail parties.

Make a wrong vote at a condo board meeting and you won't just be voted out of office. You may have to move elsewhere to escape critics with long memories.

Get a few years experience resolving issues like these and then you will be ready to whip Congress into shape.

Mark O'Brien is a writer in Pensacola. Column courtesy of Context Florida.