



NINTH JUDICIAL COMMITTEE

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October 6, 1992

John D. Feerick, Co-Chair
Coalition for Effective Government
c/o Association of the Bar of the City of New York
42 West 44th Street
New York, New York 10036-6690

Dear Chairman Feerick:

We noted with interest your participation at the recent program held in White Plains, "Paralysis of Politics: Reinvigorating Democracy", reported by Gannett newspapers.

Due to the fact that we were unaware of the program in advance, we did not send a representative from the Ninth Judicial Committee. As the enclosed articles indicate, the consensus from the speakers was that citizens must seize the initiative and force government to be responsive.

Since we assume that you were one of the articulators of this view, we suggest that it would be useful if, in the future, the Coalition would bring events of this type to the attention of member-groups. In such fashion, groups such as the Ninth Judicial Committee could provide the public with positive role-models for meaningful citizen involvement.

We understand from Jim Whelan that a Steering Committee meeting of the Coalition has been scheduled for October 16th at 8:30 a.m. at the City Bar. With your permission, we would be most interested in attending--and in contributing our ideas as to how the Coalition might improve its effectiveness.

On another subject, we are most distressed that we have not heard from you--in your capacity as President of the City Bar--as to the evidentiary issues presented by the critique we submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee last May.

EX "K"

October 6, 1992

Although almost five months have elapsed since our critique was forwarded to you, there has been no public announcement by the City Bar retracting its approval of Mr. O'Rourke's judicial qualifications.

Under your leadership, we expect the City Bar will not only recognize its responsibility to the public in this matter--but will take special pride in the extraordinary accomplishment that our pro bono citizens' group has rendered by its critique.

Yours for a quality judiciary,



ELENA RUTH SASSOWER
Coordinator, Ninth Judicial Committee

Enclosures:

- (a) "Forum Panel Sees An Electorate Angered By Lack of Choice, Trust", Gannett, 9/21/92
- (b) "Exercise Your Right to Exorcise Paralysis", Gannett, 9/27/92

cc: Jim Whelan, Coalition

THE REPORTER DISPATCH

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Staff photo/Wilbur Funches

Skip Mendler of Armonk and Joe Lesly of Hastings wait to address the forum as Irwin Brussel-Smith makes a point.

Forum panel sees an electorate angered by lack of choice, trust

By John Reinan
Staff Writer

► Excerpts from forum, A12

It was a scene that brought back fading memories of the turbulent '60s.

One after another, the speakers rose and denounced American politics as dirty, dishonest and devoted to serving the greedy rich. The crowd of about 200 repeatedly broke into applause as the assembled orators blistered the hides of politicians from Albany to Washington.

But this wasn't a bunch of hippies shouting through bullhorns in a park. The speakers at Community Unitari-

an Church at White Plains yesterday ranked among the nation's most distinguished political journalists and commentators.

In their pessimistic, at times angry, assessment of the American body politic, however, they demonstrated why this has been the most chaotic election year since the Vietnam War dominated all other issues in 1968.

The occasion was a public forum, "The Paralysis of American Politics: Reinvigorating Democracy." Spon-

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FORUM

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sored by the Westchester County League of Women Voters, the White Plains Religious Leaders Association and Gannett Suburban Newspapers, the forum sought to shed light on why so many Americans shy away from participating in their democracy.

It didn't take long to find out why.

"There's something deeply and fundamentally wrong going on in America," said Gordon S. Black, the first speaker. Black, chairman of a polling and research firm in Rochester, maintained that the Republican and Democratic parties "have conspired among themselves to eliminate political choice."

"Without choice, you do not have democracy," Black said, calling for the formation of a third political party. Black said that he and others already had taken steps to form the Independence Party, a centrist party of reform.

David S. Broder, a Pulitzer Prize-winning political correspondent for The Washington Post, said Americans were frustrated by a political system that they have come to see is dominated by insiders.

"We have a system of 536



Lawrence K. Beaupre



Gordon S. Black



David Broder



Murray B. Levin



Louis D. Boccardi



John D. Feerick



Harold Bruce Pierce

Forum excerpts

Some excerpts from yesterday's forum on the paralysis of American politics:

Lawrence K. Beaupre, vice president and executive editor of Gannett Suburban Newspapers in his opening remarks: "How far we have strayed from our nation's ideal of citizen participation was dramatized to me at a barbecue this summer when a personal friend, a man about my age, a well-educated officer in one of Westchester's better-known companies, told me that he had never voted in his life. I was astonished, and I asked him why. His answer boiled down to two statements: 'All politicians lie, and my vote won't change anything.' We have a distinguished panel this afternoon to test that assertion and, I pray, refute it."

Gordon S. Black, chairman and chief executive officer of the Gordon S. Black Corp., a national politico-

political parties," Broder said, referring to the president and Congress. "Each regards himself as a political party of one."

The clearest measure of the system's failure, Broder said, is the budget deficit, now somewhere over \$4 trillion. In order to pass the 1990 budget agreement that sought to slow the deficit's growth, Broder maintained, Congress and the Bush

administration "had to pay off so many political entrepreneurs that the agreement is not worth the paper it's printed on."

Our problems with politics are linked to deeper problems in our culture, said Murray B. Levin, a professor of political science at Boston University.

"Negative and brutal campaigning is a reflection of the negativity and brutality of Amer-

ican culture," Levin said. "What kind of politics do we expect when we have this kind of culture?"

"We have to bring back a sense that we can deal with each other — that we can trust each other." Citizens must take charge of change, Levin said, noting that many of America's historic social movements — abolitionism, civil rights, feminism — sprang from

American politics except that public support for the political system was collapsing."

Murray B. Levin, political science professor at Boston University and at Harvard University in the Division of Continuing Education: "Our profound super-patriotic love of what we regard as our fundamental truths prevent us and make it very difficult for us to take a good look at our political and economic systems. And the first step towards reforming a nation, a culture, a political system, is to be able to look at it openly, and I think it's very tough for us to do that."

Louis D. Boccardi, president and chief executive officer of The Associated Press: "I think that we in the press, broadly speaking, are trying to do this time a different and better job, and I think we're being moderately successful. I think there is much more concentration this time than last time on issues. There's a much more vigilant attitude toward political advertising, much more vigilant than there was before. ... So I

think there's reason to say that we are doing, visibly, a better job."

John D. Feerick, dean of the Fordham University School of Law: "We have to find ways to bring different groups together, groups that have common interest because we're not going to be able to change the system this election or any other election unless those inside the government understand from those not involved in the governing roles that it is important that we construct a fair system."

Harold Bruce Pierce, associate professor of criminal justice and police science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York: "We are a people who have consistently believed we would be allowed to dream the dream and make the dream come true. And you've heard every speaker here say today that if you go home and talk to your children and your grandchildren, you are revising that approach with much pain and much disappointment."

added he had seen "the difference that the independent spirit can make."

Others participating in the forum were Louis D. Boccardi of New Rochelle, president of The Associated Press; John D. Feerick of Mount Kisco, dean of the Fordham University School of Law in the Bronx; and Lawrence K. Beaupre of South Salem, vice president and executive editor of Gannett Suburban Newspapers.

Gannett Sept 27, 1992

Exercise your right to exorcise paralysis

Last Sunday's public forum on the "Paralysis of Politics" was not an entirely dismal assessment of the low state of our political system.

The forum, co-sponsored by the Westchester County League of Women Voters, the White Plains Religious Leaders Association and Gannett Suburban Newspapers, lived up to its subtitle, "Reinvigorating Democracy" — at least by implication.

True, the speakers and most of the panelists painted a gloomy picture, but each also held out hope of improvement if only citizens will muster the spirit and energy to participate in the process.

► Political writer David Broder of The Washington Post acknowledged an enormous distrust of politics and government among the many voters he speaks with routinely. He attributed this to the rise of political entrepreneurs whose primary motivation is re-election rather than any shared political agenda that can be translated into policy. The

federal government today is made up of "536 political parties," he declared. "Everyone from the president to the most junior representative sees himself as a government of one."

But he observed that Americans are not apathetic. They are frustrated. In that assertion, there is cause for optimism. One can deal with frustration through action.

► Pollster Gordon S. Black contended that the two major parties "have conspired to destroy political choice" by twisting the system in whatever ways will guarantee re-election — gerrymandering, political action committee laws, franking privileges. "We tolerate it. We allow it to happen."

But Black announced that he is forming a third-party movement, with the goal of injecting real choice into elections. Black's solution, whether realistic or not, optimistically assumes that citizens, in fact, will respond to a call to action.

► Murray Levin, a political science professor at Boston and Harvard universities, and author of books on voter alienation, was the most downbeat of all in analyzing the problem as flowing from a culture that has enshrined capitalism and democracy as virtual reli-



LAWRENCE K. BEAUPRE

LETTER TO THE READER

gions, with reform tantamount to heresy. But even he allowed that the culture could be changed by instilling the values of tolerance, courtesy, mutual trust and aid in our children. It was a little vague, I thought, but at least even he seemed to be holding out hope that citizens who care and do something about it can change the system.

Members of the reaction panel also voiced hope:

► Louis D. Boccardi of New Rochelle, president and CEO of The Associated Press, observed that news coverage of the election this year was more thorough, more vigilant and more issues-oriented than in some past years. That means citizens are more likely to be armed with accurate information upon which to assess candidates and act.

► John D. Feerick of Mount Kisco, dean of the Fordham University School of Law and chairman of the former New York State Commission on Government Integrity, pushed a legislative program of open government, ethics reform and public financing of campaigns. His solution: an outside, bipartisan commission with a sweeping mandate for change.

► Harold Bruce Pierce of Yorktown, associate professor of criminal justice and political science at John Jay College, made the point most directly in calling on citizens to get involved, to volunteer, to monitor the process and to assume their responsibilities as the instruments of change.

And my own feeling? I'm an optimist by nature, and no less so when it comes to politics.

I believe citizens can make a difference, but it is up to us to do so. We can't sit on the sidelines and carp about what's wrong with a system in which so

many refuse to participate. We are the system.

Less than 50 percent of eligible adults bothered to vote in the last presidential election. In forfeiting their citizenship, they surrendered whatever right they have to complain about the decisions made by others who do fulfill their democratic responsibilities.

At the public forum last Sunday, a member of the audience asked David Broder what people can do about such a dismal political system.

We are not powerless, Broder responded. "What you represent today in concern and commitment is *power*, and politicians will respond to that."

The power Broder was talking about was the ultimate source of power in a democracy: the ballot box.

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We are trying to do our part in our news coverage, in editorials and in co-sponsoring Sunday's forum.

We published an extensive series of articles last month assessing the performances of state legislators, most of whom are up for re-election (reprints available upon request). Our issues-oriented coverage of political campaigns is under way and will culminate with our annual Voters Guide on Sunday, Nov. 1. For the past several weeks, we have given readers essential information about how and where to register and vote. We have published editorials about the need to vote.

Beginning today, we will publish a daily reminder on the Editorial Page about the looming deadline for voter registration. This will be followed by a daily reminder to vote Nov. 3.

But no matter what all the experts and reformists say at political forums, and no matter how many words we devote to covering politics and government, and no matter how much you are nagged about registering and voting, it will all be meaningless if you sit out this election.

For then you will get what the pundits say is your due: the government you deserve.

And if you don't exercise your right to vote, then you will have little right to complain.

Lawrence K. Beaupre is vice president and executive editor.

