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Jr. Chamber*

HOW YOU CAN ENJOY POLITICS

By Gerald R. Ford, Jr.
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It always seems to amaze my friends that one can enjoy politics. When I returned from my first year in Washington the question was frequently asked: "Aren't you pretty disillusioned with the trials and tribulations of a Congressman's life?"

Frankly, I'm not disillusioned. There's nothing to be disappointed about in politics if you approach the problem with a certain basic realism. Politicians are no worse and no better than other human beings. That's one proposition you must accept if you're going to enjoy political life.

There are other realities one must face. Don't hope to have much privacy in your day to day living. You are a public servant, and as such you must be accessible, in fact you should make it your business to be available. Remember this: the individual problem of every distraught constituent is most important to the person seeking advice or assistance. The officeholder must put himself in the shoes of his constituent rather than visualize himself as the "big" man whose aid or advice is desired.

Forget the glory of politics - there's none in it. Just take it as you would any other difficult job, and if you like to work you'll be happy. There is no "social security" in holding office. You must be ready to accept any and all disappointments.

Many a past Congressman has given vent to bitterness when the public turned him to pasture. I can never understand or appreciate this attitude. Part of the game is a gracious smile if you get licked at the



polls. Chances are, however, you won't get licked if you've done an honest, intelligent and energetic job.

Unfortunately most private businessmen are afraid of politics. Relatively few qualified young men have the desire or confidence to give it a try. My advice is, if you like people, if you're interested in human relationships, if you have physical stamina, go to it! America constantly needs new blood in the political arena. Any antedated officeholder should welcome a contest on the issues when a qualified, young and more energetic citizen is willing to be a candidate. The public at all times should have a choice. The voters are entitled to the best possible representation. When a change is desirable and necessary the public is entitled to a chance to make it. Elections by default are unhealthy for all concerned.

Inevitably questions arise when friends quiz me about politics. "What about machine politics? Are all politicians indebted to someone?" To the first question my answer is very simple. Only lazy officeholders and officeseekers can be controlled by machine politics. Such men try to find the easy road to public leadership. Such individuals sell their souls because they are too lazy to do the essential work that builds personal strength at the polls or because they are just plain dishonest and don't care.

Must a politician necessarily be the puppet of any group or clique? My answer is an emphatic "no". The career of our own Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg is perhaps the outstanding evidence for this point of view. Our senior Senator was never indebted to anyone except his many personal friends and admirers who have repeatedly helped him succeed in his successive bids for office. He has always been intelligently independent and rightfully successful.



A lack of proper preparation is a serious mistake made by most aspirants to public office. A successful candidate must know literally hundreds of people and they must have confidence in him. He can only be independent if he personally is in contact with hundreds of voters. The fear of being defeated because some "big-wheel" threatens to turn votes against him is the undoing of many a politician. No matter what the pressure group may be - a county or state machine, an organized lobby, or a hostile newspaper - an honest politician will rise or fall on the number of personal friends he can rally to his fold. The strongest weapon in a political campaign is the good credited to you by word of mouth. If you know enough people - and they feel they know you - there's hardly a political machine or pressure group in the country that can defeat you. Such a fundamental foundation, of course, means hard work, but that's part of the game.

Becoming financially obligated to any group or faction is perhaps the quickest way of hitting the skids toward political dependence and eventual oblivion. It's a simple axiom - control the purse strings and you control the man. Too many otherwise honest officeholders have slipped on that banana skin. When a politician accepts more than a few dollars for his campaign from any one individual, he's treading on dangerous ground. Popular support through many small contributions is infinitely better than a "Daddy" who will hand over one big check.

Even though campaign funds are most helpful, money is not necessarily the Open Sesame to office. A hundred friends who know the



candidate and believe in him are more valuable than an equal number of costly billboards. It's surprising how a hundred friends multiply into a thousand or more. Money is not the key to political success.

Swinging back to the Washington scene, a Congressman is frequently asked what of the lobbyists who are reputed to wield so much power over our federal legislation. The greatest lobby in the world is the public itself and that's as it should be. A strong member of the House is not intimidated by pressure groups or minority factions screaming for special privileges. Anyone who pretends to control two, three or five thousand votes is a fraud in 999 instances out of a thousand. Americans are not sheep to be led around blindly in this manner by some self-styled lobbyist. The lobbyist who tries to threaten a representative is an imposter. However, I do find lobbyists useful in many respects: put two lobbyists on opposite sides of the fence working to prove their point and you'll have two of the most thorough researchers you can find. Lobbyists can and should be used in this way. That is their legitimate function and nothing else.

The Administration has done a great deal of talking about the vile lobbies that are allegedly roadblocking the enactment of desirable legislation. Lobbyists are said to be lurking behind every door on Capitol Hill. Regardless of the propaganda that has been spread, registered lobbyists who must identify their master and their income, are not all powerful. Actually the greatest single and most dangerous group of lobbyists are those in the federal government itself. When the bureaucrats set out to pressure for an appropriation or a legislative proposal, Senators and Representatives should be on guard.



Government experts should be called upon to testify before Congressional committees but the bureaucrats should restrain themselves thereafter. Unfortunately, some top bureaucrats do not so limit their propaganda activities and when on the warpath their techniques are pretty ruthless.

The fear of insecurity in office has been at the bottom of most scandals involving public officials. However, the occasional spectacular cases of infidelity which come to public view should not be taken as a norm of what politicians are like. I know quite well most of the young men in the House of Representatives and can honestly say they are a fine group of citizens and devoted to their particular political philosophy. They will remain in Washington just as long as they keep working toward the true spirit of their jobs: namely, to serve the public intelligently, honestly, and with courage.

It is regrettable that more young men do not make a career of politics. Likewise, it is unfortunate that young businessmen who have a great stake and interest in their community do not see fit to give more time to routine political affairs. All businessmen today have a vital stake in the political affairs of the nation. The tax situation alone necessarily affects practically every decision.

You don't have to be an officeholder to enjoy politics. For most citizens it's satisfaction enough to know that their public affairs are in the hands of capable leaders. But what can a young businessman contribute to politics if he hasn't time to run for a full-time office? The answer is really simple - devote some leisure time to political affairs. You will find it is fun and won't cost anything except a few hours' work.

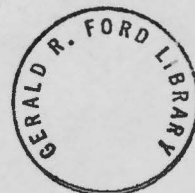


It's always surprising how few people really understand what makes a political party what it is. Assuming that you're not 100% sold on the policy statements or even the candidate or candidates of the party you have supported at the polls, what are you going to do about it? Where do you start?

First of all, there is no such thing as a political party aside from the citizens who participate in its essential but routine activities. Traditions, principles and other elements do carry on ad infinitum but the participants, the true fibre of a political party, are always changing. In my opinion, one of the greatest faults of our two major parties is that they are dominated by professionals rather than amateurs. Greatness in party politics is always at its highest measure when nonprofessionals get in and throw their weight around. Professional politicians loath amateurs - they belittle them and pooh-pooh their idealisms and accomplishments. The explanation is simple. They fear amateurs. And why not? Amateurs can not be bought. Although you as an amateur may not find yourself welcome at the first party gathering you attend, don't be brushed off or intimidated. Be patient and persistent. There's a place on the team for you and your friends.

How would you go about spending some leisure time on politics? Where would you start? What would you do? The answers and suggestions require a brief review of the fundamental political organization chart.

If you have never had any experience in politics there's a fair chance you've never heard of a County Convention. In Michigan the key to the situation is the County Convention. Each voting precinct - that's

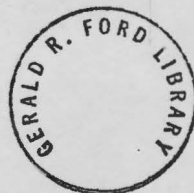


your own neighborhood area - elects a delegate to the County Convention. Somewhere in an obscure corner of the primary party ballot you will find a name or two tucked away and more often than not fifty votes for one candidate will elect him.

How many times have you gone into a voting booth and wondered whom you should elect for "delegate"? You've probably never heard of the individuals who have taken the trouble to put their own names on the ballot as a candidate for delegate to the County Convention. The requisite petitions can be obtained from your County Clerk. Twenty-five signatures on a petition filed with the County Clerk puts your name on the ballot. In altogether too many cases someone with a selfish motive has bothered to sponsor a number of delegate candidates. Professionals and "bosses" know where to pit their strength. The county delegate is the key to "bossism". If you want an uncontrolled local convention get a bunch of delegates in the field. Why not run yourself for delegate this spring? It takes only a few minutes to nominate yourself by circulating your petition and letting your friends know you want to participate in the affairs of your government. The experience will prove most interesting.

Next, let's assume that you've decided to run for delegate. Your petitions have been filed. You round up fifty friends in your neighborhood and get them to pull your lever. Yes, you're elected. It's probably that simple. Now you're in politics and the fun begins.

Your chief duty as county delegate is to attend the County Convention which is held within a week or ten days after the primary election.



As a duly elected delegate a notice will be sent from the County Clerk giving you the details as to time and place.

The County Convention should be a vital gathering of citizens interested in the true representative government. Unfortunately in many instances such conventions are formalities where the professionals in the past have carried out an established routine.

The delegates to the convention elect a chairman and other convention officers. Frequently delegates will adopt party platforms similar to the policy statements approved at state and national conventions. In most instances, however, a county convention will not draft an all-inclusive party policy statement but rather approve individual resolutions pertinent to the area and its problems. This is where well-informed amateurs can be constructively helpful. If you are a delegate and want to promote a specific point of view on a local, state or national issue, by all means come to the convention with your resolution and the necessary facts to support your idea.

The County Convention in addition has this important function. Each county in Michigan sends a number of delegates to the party state convention. Kent County precincts and townships elect approximately 150 delegates to the County Convention and in turn send about 80 delegates to the State Convention. The state delegates normally are those who were elected at the precinct level and who want to participate in the party deliberations with others from all over the state. A little personal campaigning at the County Convention usually insures designation as a delegate or alternate to the State Convention.



The State Convention is where the character of the party is largely determined. A party is pretty much what its delegates and candidates make of it. At the party State Convention this fall the following officers will be nominated: Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Treasurer, and Auditor General.

Although these men are not the "top brass" of the party, for there are the Governor and Lieutenant Governor who are nominated by the direct primary method, their conduct in office has a lot to do with the public's estimate of a party's qualifications for future approval.

After attending one or more state conventions you should have the "feel" of politics. You will have an insight on how local and state political problems are handled. Your initial reactions might not be too satisfactory but please be patient. More good will result from your participation than from your absence.

Because State Conventions are large and unruly affairs - in our own state there are approximately 1500 delegates - quite often some individual or group assumes a position of leadership behind the scenes. This can be, and usually is, a self-appointed leadership but the influence is only as great as the number of delegates that can be influenced. A "state-wide machine" cannot exist unless delegates are willing to follow a certain individual and his cohorts and one of the easiest accomplishments that amateurs can achieve is the break-up of the nicely planned strategies of professionals. Professional politicians blow their coxes when amateurs mess things up so to speak. Like the witch in the Oz books, they dissolve in water - they can't get to first base if independents throw a bucket over them.



It has been my observation that most of the time the only reason the "bosses" of a convention get what they want is because delegates are indifferent or uninformed. A qualified candidate can be promoted and nominated at a State Convention when delegates are well-informed as to his merits.

Regionalism plays a big, and perhaps an essential, part in a State Convention. Figuratively speaking every town and city seeks a man on the party slate and when the horse-trading begins various delegations may vote in blocks. However, this is not compulsory if you are a duly qualified delegate and want to act independently. If the individual delegates in a delegation elect to vote independently, they may. Such independence is an anathema to professional politicians for it breaks up the well-laid plans of the super statists. If there are no "blocks" to be traded, it is well nigh impossible for any one person to dominate the convention. A qualified candidate with a hundred personal friends in a convention has an excellent chance of getting nominated, especially if those friends are scattered liberally about the state. It is wholesome that a man seeking office at a state convention need not necessarily be obligated to any boss or faction. Strong candidates can stand alone.

Like a pyramid, the building blocks of which party politics is comprised build upward to the national convention level. Delegates to national conventions, at least from Michigan, come from the "grass-roots". Some states bind their delegates to vote for the Presidential candidate in whose name they have been elected. Others are free to do as they see fit. Many sincere party members feel that a national convention invariably



comes up with the wrong man for the party and the nation. Something can be done about this situation but it takes a tremendous effort by a group of amateurs working tooth-and-nail for a worthy candidate to put him over. It would be tough to rid a party of the professional "king makers" on the national level, but they can be defeated. I personally feel it's about time the Republican party had another amateur-dominated convention like the one that nominated Wendell Willkie. When he went to the convention the "boys" said he didn't have a Chinaman's chance. Amateurs made him a Presidential candidate and under different circumstances he might well have prevailed.

You can enjoy politics if you do not lose your patience. You will seldom be disappointed if your motivations are unselfish. Seldom do many modern politicians enter the fray expecting political spoils and cash gains. The more common failing is greed for fame and prestige. Dozens of spectacular political figures have sowed the seeds of their own demise by being too ambitious without warranting the public trust they sought.

Voters are not dumb. Despite the absurd interpretations of national politics with which Hollywood regales us from time to time, incompetents do not get very far in this game. Recall for the moment the truly great figures of American political history and measure them as you see fit. Is there any great man in the annals of our history who was not sincere? Is there any great man who was not honest? Is there any great man who was not down to the core a devoted amateur who had as his only motive service to his country in the best way he saw fit? If there are, they are not great by my definition. Greatness in the end is



measured by a man's independence and courage of conviction. They enjoyed politics, certainly. They enjoyed it or they never would have endured the hard work and exacting self-discipline that public office demands.

Politics can be fun. It can be one of the finest sources of personal satisfaction a man can experience. To serve others well is after all one of the highest motivations in our civilization.

Let me urge your participation. Begin by running for precinct delegate in your own neighborhood this fall. Our nation is going through some of the most critical years in the history of mankind. The problems we face call for leadership of the highest calibre, and the public as a whole deserves a choice between candidates. In the ranks of those who belong to the Junior Chamber are men who can provide the sort of leadership America needs. You too can enjoy politics - just take it step by step; be patient and persistent, and above all don't be discouraged if it takes a little while to bring about the changes you deem necessary. The changes you and others desire undoubtedly should be made. Who else but you can bring them about?

