



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Sent Sept. 18)

Capitol Comment

Running Unopposed -- A Mixed Blessing

By State Rep. Mike May

Running unopposed is an odd feeling for a political candidate.

Campaigning is viciously expensive -- in time, in money, and in the draining emotional strain when things turn nasty. So I am grateful beyond words to the people of Clay and Dickinson counties for creating the political climate which allows me to skip the worst of the battle this year.

On the other hand, I recognize that I have no "right" to represent you in the Iowa House. You have simply given me that privilege for the third time.

The other consideration is that the lack of a hard-fought campaign deprives you of the vigorous debate inherent in two or more citizens competing for office. This vacuum can tempt the unopposed office-seeker to assume that his answers are the right answers beyond all question. And that is absurd in every possible way.

I try to do my best to avoid that kind of arrogance. It helps to remember that while I

am proud of having tried to represent your values to the best of my ability, I have certainly made missteps, and I have sometimes perhaps neglected to explain clearly the basis for the votes I cast and the statements I make.

So, with no opponent to hold my fingers to the fire, I'd like to talk with you here and in a future column or so about your 6th District representative's approach to governing.

Political labels can be so misleading, but the people and the media have made it almost impossible to avoid them, so I plead guilty to wearing the label "conservative," -- unabashedly so. I believe as both a moral and practical matter that good government is small government -- the smaller and less intrusive the better.

Sometimes I even ponder with a certain affection H.L. Mencken's crack that, "All government is, in its essence, is organized exploitation, and in virtually all of its existing forms it is the implacable enemy of every industrious and well-disposed man."

That may go too far, but it contains a germ of truth. We might well remember a bit of our recent political history -- both Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan who, whatever their faults, made it plain that no government, anywhere, any time, can give you anything without taking something away from you or your neighbor.

When, down in the state capitol, we vote to give something to someone, it's too easy to forget that we have nothing to give except what we take from you. If we could teach our children only one thing about civics, it should be this: "Government produces nothing. It can hand out money only by first taking it away from the citizens who produced it."

That tells us we need to take a much harder look at some of the things we do, perhaps beginning with our "economic development" efforts. I've seen some economic initiatives by government -- tax handouts, basically -- which may be working reasonably well and others which were miserable boondoggles.

Maybe more important, I've wondered by what authority 150 state lawmakers and the governor have the right to determine which private businesses succeed through state handouts and which are left to struggle in the free market.

And that's the important question. "By what authority?"

If we believe any part of the great American story, we believe that government authority is a gift of the people to men and women who, at the moment, hold government office. We believe that the people have the absolute right to rescind that gift.

That all comes from our two basic, founding documents, The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The Declaration sets out those rights in general. The Constitution is the Founders way of trying to prevent government from ignoring those rights.

They believed that such a Constitutional guarantee was necessary because men and women who govern are, after all, only fallible human beings, selfish as nearly everyone is, anxious to increase their own power and importance.

I consider it a pity that some of the most basic principles of our earliest political beliefs seem to be in disrepute among so many of our people. It is explained by changing circumstances, a changing culture, and the political hullabaloo to which any office holder must sometimes accommodate himself if he or she is to continue to be effective. If, however, in the end, we abandon our hard-rock devotion to freedom above all, we will have scuttled all that made us the envy of the world.

Let me add one thought I hope you will consider. Changes are needed in the way government is run. Period. However, change without principles, will have chaotic results.

I hope I haven't lost anyone with this little essay on some of the principles of government. It may seem abstract and dry to some, but it is a core belief that no one -- especially politicians -- should ever forget. If we do, the price is high -- our liberty.

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