



Capitol Comment-Oct. 1

No Regrets

By State Rep. Mike May

A couple of weeks ago a group of super young men and their terrific coaches honored me with an invitation to speak to them just before their first district football game.

While I was putting my remarks together, it occurred to me that some politicians have a lot to learn from many of our young people.

I passed on to these football players my personal view that one of the more important things in life is passion and a sense of urgency about the things we care about, and to do it with honor and civility, and then to accept the outcome without regrets and move on to life's next challenge.

As much as these high school seniors love football, they realize that most will never play organized ball again and that, no matter how good or bad their season record ends, they must leave the sport with a sense of honor, a spirit of no regrets for their behavior and effort.

Sometimes I wish that message could be driven home to the world's politicians. The

feeling gets stronger as I watch the developing political races in this frantic election year.

With hard-to-find exceptions, our political campaigns have one of the qualities I mentioned -- passion -- but lack honor.

Modern techniques of marketing candidates the way we market toothpaste or the latest pop-song CD have led to campaigns which are increasingly expensive, vicious, and divorced from the real problems government is meant to handle.

The vitriol excludes many qualified citizens who just don't want to expose their families to vile personal attacks.

Do you suppose the men and women running those campaigns ever have regrets when its over? Win or lose, was it worth it?

State elections are not much different from what we see on the national stage. Much is at stake, and some candidates and party leaders believe their ends justify any means, however ignoble. And most of these candidates have powerful allies in the people financing their runs and the hordes of high-priced political "consultants" who craft the races.

There are more than a couple of problems with that, but the two I think we need to focus on are these: (a) The financiers are frequently not interested in honest, legitimate government for its own sake; they too often have an agenda which is focused on their own self-interest (check your candidate's out of state money) (b) the so-called political consultants are salesmen, plain and simple. Their expertise is taking a product -- any product -- and making it sound good.

Most of you probably thought that was the way the system worked, and it gives me no pleasure to confirm -- from my viewpoint-- that you are absolutely correct.

There may be some consolation in remembering that this is nothing new and that America became a great nation despite a lack of personal honor in the business of seeking office.

Well over a century ago a hard-fought White House campaign demonstrated the aggressiveness of politics without ever mentioning a real issue of government. James G. Blaine had been accused of unethical business dealings. His opponent, Grover Cleveland was believed to have sired a child out of wedlock (it was true; Cleveland was a bachlor at the time).

The Cleveland slogan: "James G. Blaine, that monumental liar from the state of Maine."

The Blaine slogan: "Ma, Ma, where's my pa? He's in the White House, ha ha ha."

Catchy phrases that are somewhat amusing, and probably changed a few votes (Cleveland won), but what, pray tell, did they have to do with any legitimate question of how our Executive Branch of government should be administered or how the nation should address the problems of 1884?

So what's new? Why should we be concerned?

I think the answer -- or part of it -- lies in ourselves, the people in general and the unbelievable sophistication of the 21st Century media.

We are "busier than any time in our history -- busy with just earning a living, surviving, and also with distractions unheard of in our grandfathers' times. Televised sports, sitcoms, late-night comedy shows, tube movies beyond the wildest dreams of kids who might have been able to scrounge up the dime necessary for a Saturday afternoon matinee at the local theater just a few decades ago (I remember ten cent movies).

With almost unlimited entertainment options, it can be difficult to work up interest in politics -- leaving us vulnerable to the cute but thoughtless sound byte, to the 30-second attack ads that foul our political debate.

What to do? I wish I knew.

One lowly state representative can't change the culture. Neither could a hundred of us. I guess the answer lies in ourselves. If enough of us demand honor in political campaigning -- just as we demand honor in our young student-athletes -- we can hope that over time we will progress to what we all claim to want: government by men and women who are objective enough to identify real issues and honorable enough to campaign on them.

Iowa House District 6: A district of political character. I like that thought for a start.

Congratulations Spencer

My congratulation to the Spencer Community for being selected as one of Iowa's "Great Places". The presentation to the judges was terrific and community support was outstanding. Spencer, you are truly one of Iowa's great places and I am honored to serve you.

Spencer will be recognized this week in Des Moines.

Mike May
State Representative