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Tazewell County Board

*Continuing a Family Tradition of Community Service*

June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010

### *June ASO Magazine Column*

## *Lessons Learned; Experience is Always a Good Thing*

The time after each election gives those of us in politics an opportunity to sit back and review the events and upgrades in technology and strategy that have just taken place so we can watch for them in future campaigns. One that sticks out to me this time happened to a close friend of mine; the charge of being a Professional Politician.

First, let's review what the historical role of professional politicians are. Shortly after the primary election, I was listening to a local radio station and found a caller's statement funny. He claimed that proof that we do not need professional politicians is that the Founding Fathers were just a gathering of common citizens. Well then, let's review a few.

**Thomas Jefferson; Virginia State Legislature (1769-1774), Continental Congress (1775-1776), Virginia State Legislature (1776-1779 & 1781), Governor of Virginia (1779-1781), Minister to France (1785-1789), Secretary of State (1789-1793), Vice President (1797-1801), President (1801-1809).**

**Samuel Adams; Writes protest of Stamp Act (1765), Massachusetts Legislature (1765-1774), Founder of the Sons of Liberty & leads political opposition to Tea Act (1773), Continental Congress (1774-1776), United States Congressman (1776-1781), Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor (1789-1793), Massachusetts Governor (1794-1797).**

**Richard Henry Lee; Justice of the Peace for Westmoreland County (1757), Virginia House of Burgesses (1758-1775), Continental Congress (1774-1779, 1784-1785 & 1787), Virginia State House of Burgesses (1777, 1780, 1785), United States Senator (1789-1792).**

**Edward Rutledge; Continental Congress (1774-1776), South Carolina Assembly (1776-1796), South Carolina Senate (1796-1798), South Carolina Governor (1798).**

**Philip Livingston; New York City Alderman (1754-1763), Albany Congress Member (1754), New York Assembly (1759-1768), New York Assembly Speaker (1769), Continental Congress (1775-1777), New York Senate (1777-1778).**

These five were just the first I picked to research and I thought at this point I have made my point on why I found that calling the Founding Fathers amateurs is funny. The fact is this collection of genius did not just meet at a bar and design this great nation, they had years of experience in running political offices and fine tuning the political craft that they were so great at. They were professional leaders, professional politician.

When I hear the term professional politician used in current conversation, the individuals are usually talking about longtime, entrenched politicians that rely on that political position for their financial prosperity; names like Daley, Madigan and Durbin, just to name a few. The people doing the talking are usually pushing for term limits as the only solution, often forgetting about the option of just voting them

out of office. They also usually forget to mention great professional politicians of the past like Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, George Herbert Walker Bush, Ronald Reagan, Everett Dirksen, most of the founding fathers, and many more.

As I have stated in previous columns, we need to diversify politics. We need to hear the voices of more farmers, hard working factor workers, middle class citizens and others and less from lawyers, the wealthy and the professional politicians. But we do need to hear the voices of the lawyers, the wealthy and as much as we hate it, we need the professional politicians. Politics was meant by the Founding Fathers to be a cross section of America. While that cross section is not 85% lawyers, we do need to have some lawyers in congress.

Another consideration, would you really want to go to an amateur doctor if you are sick? Do you really want to rely on an amateur home builder for your dream home? Of course not, we want the professional expert. Politics is an art form and some individuals are better leaders than others. Abraham Lincoln said of his own political desires when running for the Illinois State Legislature "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem." For Lincoln, Honor and esteem was the highest reward, and honor and esteem came through service to the public; Professional Political Service.

Richard Striner, Professor of History at Washington College, points out in his book *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery*, "politics is the art of the possible, and Lincoln was a consummate politician, a shrewd manipulator who cloaked his visionary ethics in the more pragmatic garb of the coalition-builder. He was at bottom a Machiavellian prince for a democratic age. When secession began, Lincoln used the battle cry of saving the Union to build a power base, one that would eventually break the slave-holding states forever."

What is the lesson to be learned here? This is not the first time we have seen wrongful political fads used in political campaigns. Think back to the Red-Baiting and McCarthyism of the 1940's and 50's. As with that example, the fad will move on once the public realizes the falsity and manipulation that is being attached to such labels.

We need as voters to be watchful and hesitant to jump on these fads and research all of the candidates, especially in the primaries. I have often found that the individuals that use this tactic of attacking the character of the other individual usually do so when they have no real political issue to attack them with. If these individuals have no other reason to run for the political position, no goals and/or objectives, do you really want them in the office? Issues need to be the focus of our decision and not claims, accusations, and personal attacks.

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