Reflections of an Ex-Candidate

Many persons worked tirelessly for many months to elect a Democratic Assemblyman in the Eighth Assembly District. Hence, disappointment is to be expected at falling just short of our goal on November 4th — and no one feels this disappointment more keenly than I! In our disappointment, however, we should not overlook our accomplishments of the past few months:

1. Repudiation of the notion that our Party should be content with presenting a mediocrity, amiable or otherwise, as a candidate for our state legislature.

2. Stimulation of new interest in the basic problems of our City and State in the community.

3. Winning more community support for our efforts to improve our Party and to produce solutions for community problems.

4. Executing an effective campaign completely by citizen participation in politics — an excellent omen for our Party and our community.

5. Amassing a significantly higher percentage of votes than any other Democratic candidate in our District in the face of the Rockefeller landslide and the "efforts" of Part B's "Democratic leader" and his palace guard.

In view of this record, there is no cause for disappointment to turn to dismay. Indeed, as we observe the contrast of Democratic triumph elsewhere (including Connecticut and New Jersey) and Democratic debris here, our chief regret in not winning should be our inability to provide a dramatic, rather than an involved statistical, illustration of the type of Democrat who can win here, the type of Democratic organization which can win here, the type of Democratic campaign which can win here.

The Republican Party has been rightfully rejected in this time of crisis for its failure to provide creative, imaginative (or perhaps any) leadership in foreign, domestic and local affairs — and has salvaged its few victories by a combination of skillful personality projection and appropriation of the liberal Democratic record. The result is to grant an opportunity and responsibility to our Party to fill a vacuum of leadership — and we will resume our winning ways here and continue to win elections elsewhere by successfully exploiting that opportunity and carrying that responsibility.

That responsibility cannot be carried by "following Faubus", tolerating the perpetuation in power of the ineffective machine gray's of the stripe of the 8th A.D.'s Jim Farley — or by whooping anew the war cries turned cliches of battles won in New Deal-Fair Deal days, or by automatic application of yesterday's brilliant policies to today's taxing problems. By following this road to the end, we arrive at the same destination as the Republican Party of 1958: rightful rejection by the people.
No, our Party's responsibility can be fulfilled -- and our opportunity for revival here and perpetuation elsewhere realized -- by following the spirit of our Party's best liberal tradition and by application of that liberalism to today's problems at home, abroad and in each locality. Our Party must attempt to resolve the great problems confronting people today, e.g., world revolution, cold war, unemployment in the latest phase of the industrial revolution, urban complexity, education, booming population, civil rights, by creative, imaginative policies the focus of which is the welfare of all of our people.

For those of us living in the Eighth Assembly District, the immediate task, of course, is to depose Farley and replace his "organization" with one prepared to work for the revitalization of our Party in New York and equipped to wage an effective campaign in New York City in the middle part of the Twentieth Century. And there are similar gardens to be cultivated by others elsewhere in the City and State. In addition to the care and feeding of our respective grass roots, all of us with more than a vocal interest in revitalization of our Party should, it seems to me, communicate with each other more. In my view such communication should break the strait-jacket of "regular" and "insurgent" and extend beyond Manhattan to the suburban and upstate areas. The exchange of ideas and information will, I believe, enhance the prospects of (a) persuading top Party leaders to adopt the view that the Party's success depends on acceptance of liberalism, (b) creating in our City and State a Party organization suitable for today's campaigns and (c) projecting new, and necessarily some younger, faces on the political scene as candidates.

Needless to say, I shall work as hard for these specific and general goals as a member of the rank and file as I did as a candidate in the Summer and Fall to win an Assembly seat for our Party in the Eighth Assembly District.

Paul Bragdon