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Our say

City law on picking acting mayor could use some changes

AT FIRST GLANCE, you might conclude that the Black Political Forum is trying for this year's Much Ado About Nothing Trophy.

The forum on Tuesday called for Alderman Samuel Gilmer to be named acting mayor while Mayor Alfred A. Hopkins recuperates from triple-bypass surgery.

Its argument was that Mr. Gilmer — as the senior member of the mayor's party on the City Council — should have gotten the nod instead of the alderman Mr. Hopkins picked: Ward 1's John R. Hammond. Mr. Hammond has more years of service but, unlike the mayor and Mr. Gilmer, is a Republican.

City Administrator Michael D. Mallinoff promptly labeled the forum's argument "specious," and we can see why. Mr. Gilmer has already served twice as acting mayor, a post that, during brief absences by the mayor, gets handed around almost as casually as a tray of after-dinner mints at a banquet.

This absence may be a bit longer than usual, as the mayor is expected to need several weeks to recover from surgery. But Mr. Hammond is the senior alderman and the person who, as chairman of the council's Finance Committee, holds the city purse strings. He's a logical choice as a temporary replacement.

Still, Mr. Gilmer — who, by the way, is not a member of the Black Political Forum — raises an interesting point: What happens if a mayor is incapacitated and can't name an acting mayor? "You could be left in limbo," he said.

Well, not really, according to City Attorney Jonathan Hodgson. If the mayor is incapacitated and can't name an acting mayor, he said, the City Council can meet and designate one.

But even if the legal loophole Mr. Gilmer talks about doesn't exist, we're not really comfortable with the law as it stands now. It sounds like a recipe for adding to a crisis — having a mayor suddenly incapacitated — by having a battle royal over who will hold the reins of city government, possibly for years.

After all, we've managed to have an argument and bruised feelings now, even though the mayor's absence is temporary, and even though he was able to pick an acting mayor.

So perhaps city law should be changed so that the council, at the start of each term, designates one of its members as a permanent vice mayor, or mayor pro tem, or whatever — someone who automatically assumes the responsibilities of the mayor when the mayor is out of town or unable to function.

That way the city can avoid the bruised feelings that seem to result when the acting mayorship is handed out like a party favor. And it might help things operate more smoothly in the future.

Baker's strategy poisons the campaign

You can begin to see James Baker's impact on President Bush's re-election campaign. And, as I feared, Baker seems to have decided that for Bush to win, the public must lose its chance to hear a serious discussion about the nation's future.

What was said here a few weeks ago, when Baker's shift from secretary of state to White House chief of staff was announced, unfortunately is turning out to be true. Baker's history as a campaign manager of stripping out substance and detouring the dialogue from important policy choices into short-term political diversions is being repeated in 1992.

Baker is not to blame for the meanness and emptiness of much of the rhetoric that filled the prime-time hours at last month's Republican National Convention. He was still in transition then.

But he is responsible for two September decisions that will go a long way toward determining what value this campaign has for the voters. Baker's hand is clear in Bush's refusal to spell out the tax and budget policies he will follow if given a second term. And it is equally clear in last week's threat to scuttle the plans for presidential debates.

Others announced these decisions — Bush in the first instance, campaign chairman Robert Teeter in the second. Operating behind the curtain always has been Baker's style. The election returns will tell whether these decisions help Bush. But they are clearly not in the public interest.

The greatest challenge facing the next president, whether it is Bush or Clinton, is dealing with the runaway national debt. Already more than 60 cents of every dollar of personal income taxes goes simply to pay for the interest on that debt. Nothing of any consequence can be done to improve Ameri-



David Broder

ca's competitive position, its education, its health care system or anything else unless and until we stop the hemorrhage of deficit spending.

Clinton needs to be pressed on how he would deal with the deficits. His numbers do not add up. But instead of entering that debate, Bush has said three things that stymie hopes for the needed dialogue.

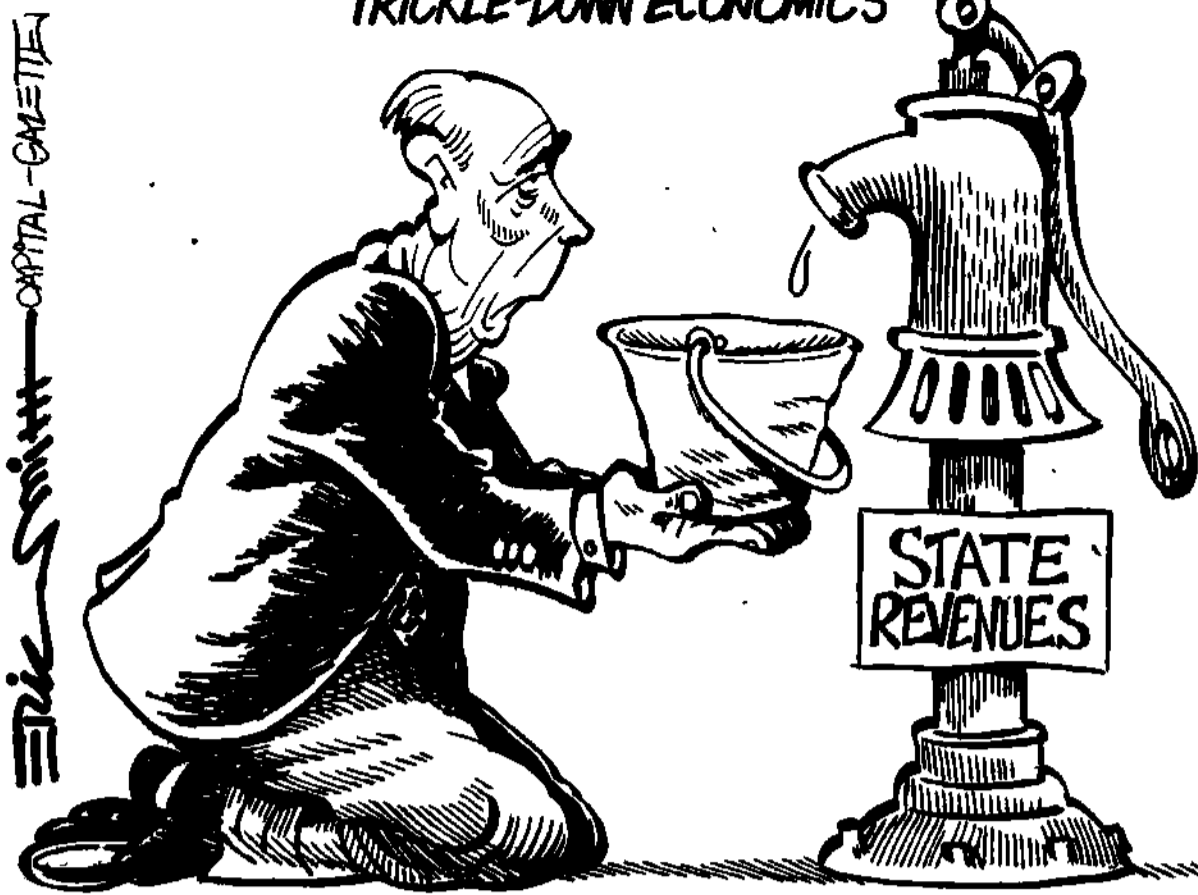
He has renounced the 1990 budget agreement, which combined tax increases with tough spending controls. The controls in that agreement have worked for the first time — the Democratic Congress has not weaseled out of the limits.

But Bush, under pressure from the Right, now says the agreement was "a mistake." And he runs around the country promising added spending to benefit grain producers, aircraft workers and hurricane victims — and who knows who else next week.

Looking ahead to a second term, Bush also has promised an across the board tax cut, of undetermined size, financed by unspecified spending reductions. And he has promoted a scheme that would let taxpayers earmark 10 percent of their taxes for debt reduction, forcing further spending cuts.

When asked, Bush has said he will not give any further details about the tax or spending cuts until next year's budget. That is, if he is still in office.

TRICKLE-DOWN ECONOMICS



Readers' views

Advice to Bush

I am very disappointed with President George Bush. Our country is in a state of crisis, with inadequate health care, an alarming increase in crime and poverty, and the need for more AIDS education and improved education for our youth — not to mention the incredibly high unemployment rate.

Mr. Bush missed a wonderful opportunity at the Republican convention to address these issues. He needs to give the American people some indication how we as citizens, along with government, can work together toward a common goal to help solve the problems facing us today.

We collectively need to take the government back and let it work for us. We need a leader with the vision to help us accomplish this task. I believe we all have a responsibility to work with our next president in solving the problems facing our coun-

try. So, Mr. Bush, if you want a second chance, then take a second look.

CONNIE BRADLEY
Annapolis

Abortion vote

On Nov. 3 Marylanders will have the opportunity to uphold the pro-choice law (SB 182) that was passed by our state legislature and signed by Gov. William Donald Schaefer in 1991, by voting for Question 6. This law codifies the principles of *Roe vs. Wade* and adds a parental notification clause that requires a physician to notify parents of an unmarried minor prior to performing an abortion.

I believe women must continue to have the right to make their own reproductive choices based on their own values and beliefs, without government intrusion. It is a private decision and must remain so.

Please join me in fighting to protect the rights of all women to make their own choices. Vote for Question 6 on Election Day.

LINDA A. NELSON
Arnold

City planter

How disturbed I was to read in *The Capital* recently about the planned removal of the brick planter on the corner of Main and Francis streets in downtown Annapolis.

This planter adds color to the area with beautiful pink flowers and greenery. My thanks to Annapolis Federal Savings Bank for the care its employees take in maintaining this asset to Annapolis.

What a shame to tear it down and replace it with a single tree. Wouldn't the money used for this unnecessary project be put to better use in Homestead, Fla.?

PENNY DIGHTON
Annapolis

A few points for Clinton to clear up

Herewith some questions which, were Clinton to answer them, might — or then again, might not — make it easier for millions to vote for him without wincing.

Ronald Reagan was criticized for promising painless progress — self-financing tax cuts so stimulative that accelerated growth would guarantee increased revenues from lower rates. Aren't you promising self-financing spending — on infrastructure, education and other things — that would "pay for itself" through increased productivity?

About your tax increases on "the rich": If the money you covet remained with "the rich," almost all of it would be invested. Why do you think government spending of it would be better for America's economic efficiency than the decisions of private investors? Or is "fairness" rather than efficiency (growth) your priority. When "fairness" and efficiency clash — you do admit that they can clash? — which do you favor?

Asked to "name someone you would like to appoint to the Supreme Court," you named Mario Cuomo. Does that not vindicate Republican charges that Democrats, disregarding the core constitutional principle of separation of powers, do not distinguish between legislative,



George Will

executive and judicial functions, regarding all powers as simply and equally political?

You named Cuomo "because he is a legal scholar who also understands the impact of the law on real people's lives." Please cite Cuomo's jurisprudential scholarship that impresses you.

You criticized the nomination of Clarence Thomas because he lacked "the requisite experience." Thomas was a judge. Cuomo has no judicial experience. What experience is "requisite"? You said Thomas' appointment was "ideological" and "political." How would your nomination of Cuomo not be? Now that you have named one person who meets your judicial criteria, you can have no principled reason for not naming others. Will you?

Mrs. Clinton praises Anita Hill's "courageous testimony." Mrs. Clinton clearly believes Thomas committed perjury. Clearly, moderate Democratic senators who supported Thomas — Georgia's Nunn and Fowler, Oklahoma's Boren, South Carolina's Hollings and others — disagree. Do you agree with Mrs. Clinton or with those moderate Democrats?

(At one point your position exemplified what critics consider vintage high-in-the-straddle Clintonism: "I'm not sure that both of them in some ways weren't telling the truth through the lens of history." But seriously...)

Ever wonder why people detest government? The health commissioner of Washington, D.C., says school nurses will dispense condoms to students even if parents write letters requesting that their children not be given them.

Picture, say, an immigrant family of Hispanic Catholics, struggling to raise upright children in an inner city. Picture their 15-year-old daughter showing her 13-year-old brother the condom her school dispensed.

Your position is: If school boards decide to dispense, you support them. More Clintonism. You support local control of policy but duck discussing policy. Please: Is dispensing condoms a good idea? If so, why? Because it "works"? How, given that increased availability of sex education and contraception has coincided with an epidemic of teen-age pregnancy and sexually communicated diseases?

OK, you were not under oath when you said your running mate's book, "Earth in the Balance" is "magnificent." But if Gore is serious about what he wrote — and he is nothing if not painfully serious — he is the most radical person ever nominated by either major party. If, like him, you think a "wrenching transformation of society" and a change of "the very foundation of our civilization" is imperative, will you discuss details before November?

The outlines of some new congressional districts resemble the outlines of raccoons run over by 18-wheelers. These districts are drawn to virtually guarantee that the elected representatives will be from government-favored minorities, generally blacks or Hispanics. Cynical Republicans eagerly collaborate with ethnic politicians in Balkanizing the electorate to ghettoize Democratic voters.

This new "entitlement" — congressional seats set aside in the ethnic spoils system — results from what many people consider a perversion of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. What do you think?

Critics say you have an incontinent enthusiasm for government, having been in it since shortly after you were in diapers.

And political scientist James Q. Wilson says "there has been a transformation of public expectations about the scope of federal action, one that has put virtually everything on Washington's agenda and left nothing off. If you doubt it, try thinking of a human want or difficulty that is not now defined as a 'public policy problem.'" Can you?

Finally, it is said Britain's royal family has never made a single remark "indicating the slightest understanding or appreciation of anything at all three inches below life's surface or two inches off the beaten track." Can you say something — anything will do — indicating there is something in you other than ambition and alkaline batteries? Take a risk. It might be prudent.

10-mile race

Congratulations go out to the Annapolis Striders Running Club for conducting another fantastic Annapolis 10-mile road race recently. Nearly 3,000 runners traveled through downtown Annapolis, the Naval Academy and across the old Severn River Bridge on a perfect day for running. The organizers of the race should be proud of their accomplishment of making the Annapolis 10-mile race the fourth-largest 10-mile road race in the country.

As far as the weather, you had to

think that Pat O'Brien was smiling upon us and helped us endure another Annapolis 10-miler.

KEVIN MURNANE
Glen Burnie

A great response

A few weeks ago, you printed an announcement in *The Capital* that the Salvation Army was seeking donations of exercise equipment. Since then, we have been blessed with daily phone calls and deliveries of every type of exercise equipment imaginable.

Now we shall be able to fulfill our

dream of setting up a workout room here at the Salvation Army Community Center on Hilltop Lane and offering regular exercise programs to both adults and children.

We cannot use any more exercise equipment at this time, but do want sincerely to thank each and every one of you who made a donation. God bless you!

MAJ. JESS L. DUNCAN
Commanding Officer
Salvation Army
Annapolis

Job program

This is a letter from a very grateful unemployed lady. The "thanks" go to the YWCA Women's Center for its most rewarding and gratifying Job Search Class.

This class is offered to displaced homemakers, women and men looking to better their job positions, and probably, now more than ever, women and men who have lost their jobs. I believe any one of us could derive a very large amount of encouragement and knowledge from this six-week course.

I want to especially thank Karen Crawley-Buckholtz, for her devotion and help in this time of need.

I encourage any woman or man who is in search of a new job, wants to expand their present one, or has a desire to enhance and broaden their horizons, to visit the YWCA Women's Center to learn about some of the outstanding courses available to them. I still have a great amount to learn about the YWCA, but this has been an extremely enlightening start.

Thanks again — your encouragement will always be kindly remembered.

CAROL SAPPINGTON
Annapolis

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