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From Personal Experience Running for Office is Hard Work

JEFF BRINDLE | September 27, 2022, 10:33 am | in [Caucus Room](#) , [Columnist](#)

Anyone who has run for elected office in New Jersey knows how much time, energy, and work are involved in earning the support of county committee members to gain their endorsement for a place on the ticket.

Having run for the Assembly, I know this first-hand.

Though having spent several years contributing to party politics, including serving as a municipal party chairman and volunteering to help numerous candidates in their quest for office, the challenge of earning a spot on the ticket to run for the Assembly at 28 years of age still proved to be daunting.

Obstacles, notwithstanding, and the disappointment in losing the general election, the experience was well worth it, helping to gain a better understanding of campaigning, and best of all, getting to know many good people who put themselves out there in furtherance of their beliefs.

An added benefit was in gaining first-hand knowledge that a party is made up of a coalition of people who sometimes agree and sometimes disagree over specific issues even if they share basic principles.

In other words, a political party is not monolithic. It is comprised of a tapestry of individual citizens working to present their views and to influence the direction the party would take.

So, the chairman or chairwoman, the leaders of the party, must learn and employ the same skills as leaders in government to bring disparate opinions, ambitions, and voices together in common to work toward a single goal.

For all intents and purposes, political parties are training grounds for future elected officials and leaders in government. Bringing about unity and coalition building within the party is tantamount to what is needed in government.

Gaining support from the party to run for office is undoubtedly foreign to many people. Most citizens have no idea how much time and effort it takes to earn the backing of those who make endorsement decisions.

Personally, it did not occur to me at first, either.

Truth be told, the notion to run for Assembly occurred in late December of the year prior to the election. Naivety shown through in being unaware of others who were chafing at the bit to run for the Legislature in a district dominated by the other party.

This certainly was a miscalculation as there were indeed others seeking a slot on the ballots, not only others within the county, who it turned out, were favored by party leadership, but would-be candidates from another county that had municipalities within the district.

During the process a deal was offered by the county chairman suggesting support for a freeholder slot (now county commissioner) in return for withdrawing as a candidate to be endorsed for the Assembly.

I declined. It was not difficult to grasp that winning an Assembly seat would be difficult but that winning a freeholder seat in the county would be all but impossible.

Being involved in athletics teaches the lesson of never taking anything for granted. This attitude was applied to the challenge of obtaining the endorsement for the Assembly.

The first task was to assemble a small group of friends and potential supporters, which took place on a cold January night in my attic apartment on Redmond Street in New Brunswick.

During the months prior to the county convention, a significant effort was put forth contacting, and keeping in touch with, municipal party leaders in an effort to speak to every municipal party committee and every local party club in the district.

Almost daily, I reached out to municipal party leaders, other party faithful throughout the district, and most importantly, county committee men and women, to gain and keep their support.

Ultimately these efforts bore fruit as the grassroots turned out at the county convention. A majority cast their votes on my behalf for one of the spots on the legislative ticket.

Though obtaining the party endorsement took several months of hard work, slogging through the district, designing a campaign strategy, and keeping in contact with the party faithful, the hardest part was yet to come.

The summer and fall months were spent ringing doorbells, shaking hands in front of grocery stores and bakeries, distributing fliers, airing radio commercials, making speeches, attending fundraisers, and analyzing voting patterns. This became a daily routine.

In the end, it was all for naught as the effort ended in defeat.

Yet, in hindsight, much was gained from this experience, both in learning first-hand what it means to be a candidate, to run a race, and in gaining insight, and respect, for the party faithful, and the party system.

Perhaps because our technology has so transformed society, elections- and candidates- have changed dramatically over the years.

Everybody seems to be in a hurry these days.

In politics it translates into individuals jumping the line, desiring to run for U.S. Senator or Governor with no prior experience in local government or party politics, in proposals designed to ease the way toward party endorsement, in plans to formalize support from interest groups with a ballot position, and in changing electoral rules to potentially negate the ability of the most popular candidate from winning election.

All of this is understandable as our politics is not perfect and in fact is most polarized now. The political party system has been less than perfect and has been the target of skepticism since the beginnings of the Republic and before.

However, despite these weaknesses, it may be worth looking toward traditional institutions like political parties to provide guidance as to how to improve government by supplying it with leaders who have been trained through party politics.

Recently legislation, S-2866, was brought forth that would strengthen political parties and balance them with independent groups that have become increasingly influential over the past two decades.

Through bi-partisan efforts led by two Senate leaders, both astute in party politics and with many years of experience, the “Elections Transparency Act” came close to passage, indicating the capacity for government to work effectively through the cooperation of leaders with both parties, as well as, governmental backgrounds. Hopefully, it will win final enactment this fall.

For the future to brighten politically and electorally, this bipartisanship that carries with it debate and disagreement, but ultimately ends up in compromise, is in the best interest of the people and government, and hopefully will persist. It would stem from a party system that fosters discipline within the legislative body to bring about policy decisions beneficial to the public.

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The opinions presented here are his own and not necessarily those of the Commission.

