

## The Breakfast Club

### Constitutional Minute for 30 November 2021

#### Choosing Candidates for Office

*"If men of wisdom and knowledge, of moderation and temperance, of patience, fortitude and perseverance, of sobriety and true republican simplicity of manners, of zeal for the honor of the Supreme Being and the welfare of the commonwealth; if men possessed of these other excellent qualities are chosen to fill the seats of government, we may expect that our affairs will rest on a solid and permanent foundation."* Samuel Adams, 1780.

*"When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers, "just men who will rule in the fear of God." The preservation of government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; if the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizens will be violated or disregarded. If a republican government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the divine commands, and elect bad men to make and administer the laws."* Noah Webster, History of the United States, 1832.

We The People have been given plenty of guidance by America's founders as to the type of representatives needed for good government, yet we are not doing a particularly good job of electing "wise, knowledgeable, moderate and temperate" people to represent us.

Mark Twain once observed: *"It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress."* There is certainly some evidence Twain was right. Many of the people we have elected to Congress arrive there with criminal records<sup>i</sup> and many others add changes once in office.<sup>ii</sup> I think we can do better.

I have talked in several past essays about specific questions we should be asking candidates for office. Since I am primarily a constitutionalist, these questions have focused on things like the role of government and some specific Constitutional questions. Let us now look at this issue more generally. What sort of person, as a human being, do we want representing us? Obviously, we want the best representatives we can get, but we must keep in mind, as Romans 3:23 reminds us, there is no perfect human being currently walking the earth. What moral qualities should we look for? Should we settle for a "good Boy Scout," someone who is "trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent?"<sup>iii</sup> Or are there other criteria we should consider?

We must also keep in mind that, while we may have the ideal candidate in mind, others may be seeking someone entirely different. [Alcee Hastings](#), who died this last April, was impeached by the House of Representatives and removed from the federal bench in 1988 for accepting a bribe (there were actually 11 counts of impeachment approved: he was convicted of 8). Unapologetic, he ran for Congress four years later and the good people of Florida's 23<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District sent him to Washington as their representative. I am not making this up.

“Trust” has to be high on the list of go/no-go qualities. Can we trust what this person says? Can we trust they will follow through on their campaign promises? Can we trust they will work towards the common good rather than cater to special interests?

“Faith” has to be high on the list as well. As both Samuel Adams and Noah Webster insisted, is this individual a person of faith? Do they operate in “*the fear of God?*” Will they place God’s natural and revealed law superior to positive, man-made law?

“Respect” is incredibly important. Will this person respect the office to which offer their candidacy? Will they respect the Constitution? Will they respect the hopes and aspirations of their constituents?

I am sure you can produce your own list of attributes, your own criteria, and I don’t suggest my list is complete in any way. Perhaps this would be a good topic for discussion at an upcoming Breakfast Club, before we invite candidates for the 2022 mid-term elections come speak to us.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://time.com/5447854/accused-criminals-elected-congress-2018/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.ranker.com/list/all-corrupt-congressmen/lstone>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://scoutsmarts.com/12-scout-law-principles/>.