

Fleer: Citizen Involvement Does Make Impact In Government

"What would you do if someone came to your door and said he had the power to take 25 percent of your income and to send your children — or you, if you're the right age — to war?"

That's the question Dr. Jack Fleer put to the audience at Haywood Technical College's Tuesday night forum, explaining that the federal government holds both those powers

over the individual. "Would you just sit back and wring your hands, maybe cuss a little bit and then say, 'Go ahead?'" Fleer asked. "I think not. These are very important questions, and you want to have your say."

"Having your say" is what the forum was all about. Titled "How to Get Government to Stop Long Enough to Listen to What I'm Saying," the session

covered the range of citizen involvement in the political process and examined the apathy which often surrounds government.

"Americans are turned off and turned on to democracy at the same time," Fleer said. "These are really two sides of the same coin. Each of them is a way of acting on dissatisfaction, either through passivity or participation."

There's even evidence that

citizen involvement in politics increases at the same time apathy mounts. "The decade of the '70's saw citizen alienation, distrust and withdrawal from government," Fleer said. "But there's also been an explosion of citizen interest groups in an effort to make government more accessible, more accountable and more responsive to the people."

Citizen participation assures better communication of needs and desires to the government, he explained. It also serves as an educational device to broaden the perspectives of individuals in the political system. And there's a personal benefit from the involvement, Fleer added.

"One's self-esteem is damaged if there's no participation in the decisions that affect one's life."

Decisions made on a political level influence every other aspect of a society, Fleer said, from housing and health to recreation and education.

"Politics is always conflict," he added. "That means you've got to try to find a solution that will please the greatest number of people,

and in so doing, you'll probably displease everybody a little."

There are several ways of becoming involved in politics without hitting the campaign trail, Fleer said. There's voting, working in a campaign, contacting public officials to express your views, serving on advisory boards and banding together with other individuals to work toward a goal.

"There are numerous opportunities for citizens to become decision-makers," Fleer said. "And citizen activity does make a difference in what public officials do."

Input is particularly effective when individuals work together and provide information to back up their suggestions, he said. Voting, by itself, communicates little information in a high pressure situation, he explained. "But combining voting with other information leads to more responsiveness (of elected officials) to the public."

"What governments listen to and what they hear depends on who they're listening to and what they're saying," he said. Fleer encouraged educational

programs to train youngsters for involvement. "It's curious and unfortunate how little time our education system spends helping people become effective policy makers," he said. "We need these people to enhance the stability and vitality of our political system."

"We need to do more as a society to prepare our young people to be informed, enlightened and interested in public policy making."

During a question session moderated by Dr. Ralph Feichter, Fleer said he opposes the concept of initiative and referendum as outlined by United Taxpayers of Haywood County.

Ted Skaggs, secretary-treasurer of the taxpayers' group, defined initiative as a bill drawn up by the voter for popular vote, and referendum as the right of the people to petition and vote to accept or reject a bill passed by government.

"I don't support it," Fleer said. "I think too often initiative tends to simplify issues (that's what I think was done in California's Proposition 13), and you can't have a

responsible response to most contemporary problems in a simplified way. They deserve better input."

"Initiative is a concept that's good in theory, bad in practice," Fleer concluded. United Taxpayers president Gerald Barnes disagreed. "It's been too long that lawmakers have made laws for lawmakers and not for the people," he said.

"The people who wrote the Constitution objected specifically to the idea you're talking about," Fleer responded. "They wanted representative government, not a direct popular democracy."

"I do not think we elect the type of official we really want in office," Dr. C.J. Overbeck said. "We're very careful when we choose a doctor or an

electrician, but we work on hunches and pay no attention except whether a person's Democrat or Republican when it comes to electing men to represent us."

"And the only solution I can see to that is a slow one. We need to educate our future voters so we don't have these problems."

The role of the media in political campaigns, administrative regulations passed down by bureaucrats and the benefits and drawbacks of one-term elective offices also drew the attention of the 50 forum participants.

"Whether through voting or more active participation, my feeling is we need to increase the number of people who have power," Fleer said. "And that's you."

Cat Can Get Rabies

You thought only dogs could get rabies, right? Think again. Cats are susceptible, too, and should be included in Haywood County's Rabies Clinic this week, according to veterinarian Dr. Mack Setser.

State law doesn't require cats to be vaccinated for rabies, but they should be," Setser said. "They do get rabies. They're out in the woods as much as dogs — and they're more vicious than dogs when they do get it."

Haywood health department director Dr. Stuart Roberson. No cases of rabies have been reported in cats here, Roberson said, "but Clover, S.C., is getting mighty close."

A Clover woman is undergoing rabies treatments after being bitten by her cat. The painful series of shots is spread viral disease which affects the central nervous system, is almost always fatal if untreated.

Setser said he heard of two more cat rabies cases while in South Carolina over the weekend. "I believe they were

in York and Aiken counties," he said.

"I was listening to the news on the radio, and they said that brought it to 25 cases (of rabies) this year," he said. "They told people not to be too alarmed, that they'd just had 25 cases all year."

"That many cases — or even one — that would tear us out of the frame up here," Setser said.

Kittens may be vaccinated once they reach the age of four months, he explained, and the rabies shot only lasts one year.

Washington Report

by Congressman Lamar Gudger Eleventh Dist., N.C.



The wisdom of the aged was prevalent about the halls of Congress recently as two Western North Carolina senior citizens joined about 300 contemporaries for a two-week stint in Washington.

Mrs. Lucille Burnette of Marshall, a retired schoolteacher, and Ellsworth Rathburn of Columbus, a former aluminum-company official, represented the 11th Congressional District in the Senior Citizen Intern Program. Both are chairmen of their county's Council on Aging, and they represented planning-council regions B and C.

The intern program proved to be a great success, and we plan to make our sponsorship of Senior Citizen Interns an annual affair. Next year, Regions A and D will select interns to participate. Lucille and Ellsworth will be relating their Washington experience to many senior citizens' groups in the district over the next few months, and they welcome inquiries from interested persons about applying for one of the internships.

Lucille Burnette may be contacted by writing Rt. 7, Barnard Rd., Marshall 28753. Ellsworth Rathburn's home address is 11 Holly Hill Dr., Columbus 28722.

JACKSON AIRPORT: Jackson County officials got the best news they reasonably could expect to hear last week when they met with Federal Aviation Administration officials over plans to shore up the county airport.

While FAA representatives stopped short of promising \$785,000 in funding and approving the county's pre-application for the project, they did pledge to expedite the application and to try to free funds in the fourth quarter. Given the current fiscal climate in Washington, the news was good.

The county is seeking to stabilize the mountain on which the airport is constructed and to revamp the drainage system.

LAND PURCHASE: Testimony before and Interior Appropriations Subcommittee last week sought release of Land and Water Conservation Fund monies for a planned 39,000-acre purchase of Jackson County forestland.

The U.S. Forest Service acquired an option on the Balsam Bonas-Defeat Lands early this year. The privately-owned land lies within the boundaries of Nantahala National Forest.

The Forest Service was set to proceed on the purchase, but funds were impounded by the Carter Administration. The Appropriations Subcommittee will decide on whether to release funds for the transaction, which appears to have the support of many local groups and individuals.

BUDGET CONFERENCE: Congressional budget conferees agreed last week to a narrowly balanced budget for fiscal 1981, including large increases in defense spending.

The action came after the House approved by 338-to-62 a vote to authorize \$6.2 billion more in weapons spending than sought by President Carter. There is some concern that the conference report will receive opposition in the House, where many Members have decried cuts in social programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on these or other topics, write us at 428 Cannon House Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20515, or call toll free, 1-800-452-2821, to our District Office.

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