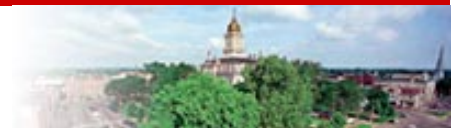




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Power imbalance stifles debate

By **MARC GUTHRIE**

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An imbalance of power allows partisanship and secrecy to prevail over good public policy at all levels of government.

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Recently, New York Times writer Paul Klugman wrote a column entitled, "What's the matter in Ohio?" Klugman's column focused on how political dominance by one party in Ohio and our federal government leads to corruption. You've heard the old saying about how power corrupts? Absolute rule by one party so often leads to governance "behind closed doors," which is driven by the arrogance of power.

Taxpayers often get tired of what they view as "partisan politics." Their frustration is understandable, because we all want to avoid conflict; however, it is important for the minority view to be at the table (and heard) when public policy is being made. If there is a significant political imbalance, such as exists in our state and federal governments today, the majority party can ignore the minority view. The majority gets drunk on power. It's simply not healthy for our government and it leads to corruption due to lack of oversight; the fox is watching the chicken coop.

I'm sure you remember when the Democrats were ousted as the majority party in the U.S. House of Representatives. The perception created was that the Democrats in D.C. were arrogant and non-responsive. Along came Newt Gingrich in 1994 and his "Contract with America" and out went the Democratic majority. Ironically, congressional ethics (and oversight) is now at an all time low, and the federal deficit and spending is completely out of control versus 1994; both of which were cornerstone issues in the Contract with America.

Politicians of a party that has a solid majority have a tendency to gloat and do business as they see fit. In other words, they just ignore the minority viewpoint. Though voters who support the party in power may feel good about their party being in control of things, they should also be concerned about balance and the importance of oversight.

In Ohio, every non-judicial statewide office holder is a member of the Republican Party. By clear majorities, both

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the Ohio House and Senate are controlled by the GOP. One party rule has prevailed in Ohio for more than 10 years.

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The recent scandal regarding the investment policy at the Bureau of Workers' Compensation is an example of why political checks and balances are vital at all levels of government. When one party controls everything (including the Supreme Court), elected officials have a tendency to be less aggressive toward "wrong doers" of their own party. They circle the wagons to protect their own. Though it is not right, it happens on a regular basis when political balance is non-existent.

Words of President James Madison apply today: "In Republics, where ... the majority govern, a danger to the minority arises from ... the sacrifice of their rights to the interest ... of the majority. No form of government, therefore, can be a perfect guard against the abuse of power."

These words from President Thomas Jefferson also ring true: "That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part."

Marc Guthrie is Newark's City Council president. E-mail him at mdguthrie@adelphia.net.

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