

Mister Ed

Goes to

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Washington



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first encountered the name of the present mayor of New York City, Ed Koch, in a study I did of US representatives in the 92nd Congress (1971-72). I was checking out the "showhorse/workhorse" hypothesis. The question at issue was this: Are legislative work and media publicity mutually exclusive? Many experienced observers had alleged that they are. They believed that the members of Congress who get the most publicity—the showhorses—slight their legislative duties, while the hard-working legislators—the workhorses—get relatively little media coverage. To test this notion (I am, you see, a political scientist), I developed an index of publicity that measures a legislator's nationwide newspaper coverage and an index of legislative work based on the total minutes spent in committee and subcommittee hearings. The results, published in the Northeastern Political Science Association's journal, *Polity*, confirmed the "showhorse/workhorse" hypothesis quite dramatically. Those

members of Congress who garnered a great deal of publicity were below average in legislative work.

Included in the sample of 71 House members was Edward I. Koch, then a second-term congressman from Manhattan's Silk Stocking district. On the publicity index, Koch came out a clear showhorse. His 1972 nationwide newspaper publicity score was 50.8, over twice the average for all members of Congress. And, sure enough, his committee participation was low: 1,735 minutes, which was 800 minutes below the general average of 2,589 minutes.

Koch's low score on the legislative work index seemed, however, to contradict the opinion widely held among reporters that Koch was an especially hard-working legislator. Further analysis explained the likely cause of the reporters' misperceptions. When committee hearings involved a prominent witness, such as a cabinet secretary, Koch's participation was *above* average. Reporters thus observed Koch to be active in those rare sessions they attended and apparently assumed that he was also active in all the hearings they missed. They were, of course, wrong.

One always wonders about the validity of studies such as this: Do the numbers truly reflect the real-world circumstances? The numbers suggested that Edward Koch was a rather negligent legislator. His failure to attend committee and subcommittee hearings probably reflected a broader pattern of inattention to legislative detail. They also suggested that he may have reacted to legislation on the basis of its superficial appeal (he clearly wasn't spending much time at hearings to learn about the details and long-term effects of legislation). And if that were the case, many of the policy choices he made were probably ill-considered and counterproductive.

Normally, it would be impossible to substantiate such broad speculations. In this case, however, Koch himself has confirmed their validity. He became mayor of New York in 1977 and began to witness the indirect and long-run effects of the policies he had advocated as a legislator. As mayor, Koch found them to be destructive and loudly said so. Journalist Richard Reeves wrote in 1979: "You can't go anywhere these days without hearing someone griping about how government is ruining the country. Take dinner the other night with Ed Koch. 'It's insane,' he said. 'They're ruining us. . . ."

"Washington just sits there and tells us to do this, do that, do it this way, do it that way," Koch said as we sat around with some of the highest officials of this

city. 'They're looking over our shoulder all the time, threatening to take us to court all the time. Keep the hospitals open even if they don't have any patients or we'll cut off your aid. Help the handicapped, help the children. Put white teachers in black schools. No, we changed our mind, put black teachers in black schools. Teach in Spanish. Now we have English and Spanish treated equally in the schools. It's crazy. It never ends.'

"'But Ed,' interrupted his counsel, Alan Schwartz, 'you voted for all those things in Congress.'

"'I know that,' Koch continued. 'I was dumb. We all were. I voted for so much. . . . Who knew? We got carried away with what the sociologists were telling us.'"

On another occasion, Koch said, "I didn't understand what I was doing when I was in Congress because in Congress, you spend other people's money."

Apparently, our showhorse theory is right on the mark. Koch's inattention to legislative detail led, as he himself declared, to "dumb" votes and endorsements of "insane" policies.

Yet, remarkably, no one seems to have minded! Koch's declarations of prior failings have not dampened his political popularity; if anything, his confessions of past ineptitude have further endeared him to the voters. When he ran for reelection as mayor of New York City in 1981, he was the first candidate ever to run on both the Democratic and Republican tickets, and he won a smashing victory.

Only in politics, it seems, is such an outcome possible. In other fields, incompetence ordinarily limits one's career. If a surgeon says after a muffed operation, "I was dumb," do we laugh it off and give him a second try?

One of the reasons that politics operates so perversely is the electoral process itself. In other occupations, those doing the hiring and firing have considerable knowledge about the individuals they are selecting. In politics, the personnel officers are the voters, who usually have little real, direct information about the candidates. Most voters, therefore, base their "choice" on extremely superficial cues such as name recognition and image. Showhorse candidates are adept and energetic at building name recognition and projecting an appealing image. As a result, voters usually prefer a showhorse, however inept he or she may be as an administrator or policymaker.

Edward Koch may have helped saddle the country with "insane" legislation, but no matter. He is feisty and colorful and eats blintzes with reporters, and therefore he advanced to the next rung.

On the other end of the scales from Ed Koch are the workhorses in our system. They are becoming increasingly rare, but they have not disappeared altogether. For example, in the study that revealed Koch to be a showhorse, the champion workhorse was Fred M. Schwengel, a Republican congressman from Iowa. Few people ever heard of him, because he was not a publicity seeker—his nationwide newspaper coverage score was 5.2, about one-tenth of Koch's publicity level. Schwengel's committee participation, however, was 7,314 minutes, over four times Koch's and highest of the 71 legislators in the sample.

What, the reader may wonder, became of Fred M. Schwengel, this Olympic gold medalist of legislative labor? Like Koch, he ran for reelection to the House in 1972. Unlike Koch, who won by over 70,000 votes, Schwengel lost—by 15,000 votes. Such are democracy's rewards for diligence. □

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Freedom Factor

(Continued from p. 36)

capitalist "exploitation," multinational corporations, and the lack of a welfare-liberal or socialist world government. Rigorous research rather strongly indicates, however, that they have turned things around: the combination of political liberty and capitalism is most peaceful, not least; the combination of political liberty and a socialist economy is less peaceful, not most; and the combination of political repression and a planned economy is least peaceful of all.

Given, as I believe can also be shown, that a free society best promotes the welfare and happiness of its members and best promotes social justice, there is now an additional powerful argument for freedom: *peace*. For to spread freedom from one state to another is to extend an oasis of nonviolence between states. As far as our science of peace has come, then, *the path to minimizing global violence and creating a world free from war appears to be an extension of civil liberties, political rights, and economic freedom*. There does seem to be reason to hope that the remaining two horsemen of the apocalypse—war and violent strife—can be defeated after all. □

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THE TRUE MOTHERS OF FEMINISM BY WENDY MCELROY



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The roots of American feminism are individualist. Observers of the contemporary scene may find this a startling claim. Whereas the emphasis of individualism is on individual rights to life, liberty, and property, mainstream feminism deemphasizes or even denies the rights of individuals in order to assert the rights of women as an oppressed class. This distinct focus translates directly

into a quite different attitude toward government. For the most part, today's feminist views government as a vehicle of protection and power. She may condemn the present government, but her main thrust is toward more government—new laws such as nondiscriminatory hiring laws, new policies such as pay-equalization policies, and new benefits such as government-subsidized day-care centers.

In contrast, the individualist feminist sees government as the problem, not the solution. It is government laws, says the individualist feminist, that have oppressed women directly and supported their oppression by other elements in the society. It is government policies that have kept women locked out of professions and activities. If women are to be free, the power of government must be rolled back, not increased.