



# City of Cambridge

40.

IN CITY COUNCIL

May 3, 1999

COUNCILLOR BORN  
COUNCILLOR DAVIS  
MAYOR DUEHAY  
VICE MAYOR GALLUCCIO  
COUNCILLOR RUSSELL  
COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN  
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY

RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record commending Meredith Osborne, Harvard '02, for her fine editorial in the Harvard Crimson of April 16, 1999, "The Politician in Your Neighborhood," a perceptive analysis of the importance of local politics and the magnitude of Mayor Francis Duehay's accomplishments in this arena. (see attached)

In City Council May 3, 1999.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "D. Margaret Drury".

D. Margaret Drury  
City Clerk

# The Politician in Your Neighborhood

By Meredith B. Osborn

The type is easy to identify. Fast-talking and usually well dressed, pre-presidential candidates distinguish themselves on campus by their vast store of past and current political knowledge. They spend a lot of time at the Institute of Politics shepherding around national and world leaders. They know what the polls are predicting a year and a half before the election, and they know what spin to put on every issue, what sound bite to use in every situation.

What they, and in a larger sense, we, are missing is the immediacy of politics. Those who are well-versed in political tactics and maneuvering (and that includes all of us in this day and age) are clueless when it comes to the hard-to-solve rhetoric-free problems that pervade a local politician's consciousness.

Such a politician is Mayor Francis H. Duehay '55 who announced earlier this week that he would retire after his term expired on Jan. 2, 2000. Duehay is a politician who spent his life working to solve those kinds of problems. His battles, his triumphs and indeed, his existence tell us one thing: The buck stops at City Hall.

While many theories and books have been devoted to the study of our federal government and its heroic leaders, there is often precious little talk about those who do the bulk of the governance in this country. While the Senate and the House are arguing with the White House, local politicians all over the country are quietly and persistently attacking the nation's toughest problems—poverty, homelessness, crime and education—with creativity and vigor.

But that is not news. They have been doing it for a long time. Duehay, born and raised in Cambridge, is not an exception to the rule; he is outstanding precisely because he epitomizes the unrecognized successes of local government.

Often the celebrity status of our federal politicians obscures their duty to their constituents. National politics is filled with posturing and vitriol, and as far as most historians tell it, it has been for a long time. On the other

hand, while local politicians certainly use the bully pulpit, they have far less incentive to pontificate at great length, or reduce an issue to a catchy phrase to be repeated again and again.

Rather, they have much more to gain by sitting down and hashing out solutions, making

plans and addressing issues based on facts, not images. What is so admirable about local politicians like Duehay is their persistence in doing this work despite the petty argumentation and rapid mood swings in Washington. In many cases, a bill gets passed in the Capitol, and by the time a local politician sees its effects, it is being repealed by a new regime.

In other cases, a city tries to improve its education standards, only to see the state budget for education get cut and sliced. And who gets blamed when Timmy's test scores fall? Well, hopefully the state politicians do, but often it is the mayor and city council that bear the brunt of the people's wrath. They are, after all, the most convenient politicians in sight—easily accessible and personally known—they, more than any other elected officials are supposed to fight for their constituencies. A senator or representative is more affiliated with their party, whereas many local politicians like Duehay are an odd amalgam of political beliefs and positions. Those amalgams come about when you have to face problems in your hometown that defy the party line, problems which the party line has done nothing to solve.

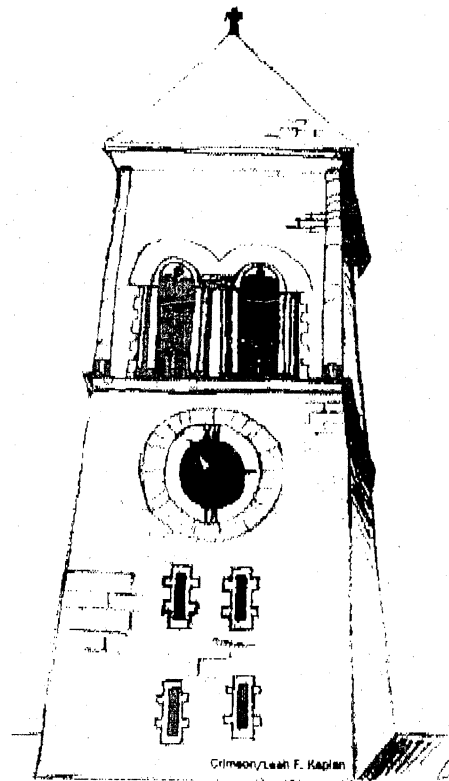
The point is not to assign blame or point fingers. But when hotshot Ivy-leaguers vie for higher office the moment they have graduated from college (apparently there are several students already angling for my state representative's seat), you have to wonder: If they win, will they be able to address their constituency's needs? Of politicking they know much, but of their people, they will know little.

To a certain extent, I blame this trend for the current lack of leadership in Washington. President Clinton began his political career with an unsuccessful bid for Congress. How would he be faring on educational issues (which he has ignored so far) if he had started out as a member of the school board?

The tendency to start out shooting for the top is indicative of the general attitude among Harvard students in general. Pre-meds dream of becoming surgeons although it is family practitioners that are needed most. Others want to become the next Bill Gates, instead of that high school teacher who dramatically changed the way they thought about the world.

Students looking to make their mark in higher office would do well to heed Tip O'Neill, who said, "All politics are local." Or, they could take the example of Duehay, a Harvard graduate who dedicated his life to local politics, and indeed, made his mark.

Meredith B. Osborn, a *Crimson* editor, is a first-year in Greenough Hall.



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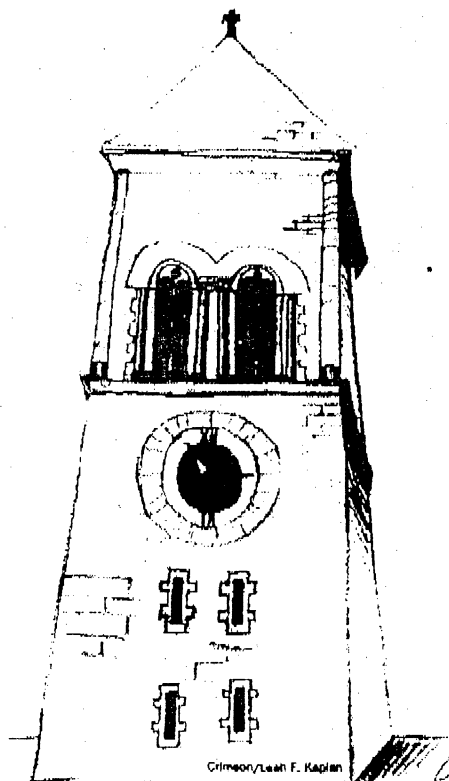
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Crimson/Leah F. Kaplan

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Consent Order #40 574R

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In City Council May 3, 1999

**ORDER ADOPTED**