

THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

For 99 Years The South's Standard Newspaper

RALPH McGILL, Publisher



EUGENE PATTERSON, Editor

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 1967

A Plan for Smoother Elections

We heartily endorse Rep. Grace Hamilton's bill to establish a new coordinator of elections for Fulton County.

Mrs. Hamilton's bill, which passed the House with Fulton delegation approval, would empower the county commission to select a director with overall responsibility for registration and elections. At present, Chief Registrar Leon Hay is in charge of registration and absentee ballots, while Ordinary Eugene Gunby has authority to conduct elections.

This bill may be construed by some as a reprimand of both Mr. Hay and Judge Gunby for their foul-ups in last fall's election. Indeed, their record in that election is not a happy one. The absentee ballots went out so late that some 2,000 voters were in effect disenfranchised. And in the most monumental snafu of a mixed-up governor's election, Judge Gunby failed to report to the Legislature some 17,000 write-in votes. Thus on the

record books, 17,000 Fulton County voters didn't have their ballots counted.

But this bill is not aimed at punishment. It simply recognizes that the conduct of elections is a complicated job for a professional. The introduction of computer-card ballots made that all the clearer last fall, when Fulton, with its "modern" equipment, was the last county in the state to report its complete returns.

As for Judge Gunby, we find him to have tremendous audacity as well as poor political judgment in asking for a \$4,096 raise at this session. His salary already is \$18,504 a year.

Sen. James Wesberry, in opposing the raise, said Mr. Gunby deserves to be docked for poor performance. The senator suggested a dollar-per-vote penalty on the 17,000 lost write-ins. That makes as much sense as a raise to \$22,000 a year.

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MONDAY, MARCH 20, 1967



Eugene Patterson

Rodney Cook

Served Well.

Just as House Speaker George L. Smith emerged as a power at the state level during the legislative session, Rep. Rodney Cook came out of it looking like the strong man in the 31-member Fulton County delegation.

Mr. Cook, a middle-road Republican, took command of the local option sales tax proposal during pre-session politicking and made it a close thing. It was the nearest that cities have come in modern times to getting a new tax source opened to them, so that they wouldn't have to go on existing on whatever scraps a rurally dominated state government might choose to throw them.

Nothing was changed in the end. Gov. Lester Maddox and the country boys killed the measure in the Senate. The cities wound up, as Bill Hartsfield used to say, able only to rattle their chains.

But Rep. Cook and his Republican sidekick, Rep. Mike Egan, saw their bill win in the House, at least, in a smashing repudiation of Gov. Maddox there. Cook couldn't have steered it to first base if Speaker Smith hadn't taken the bill under his wing, of course. But the very fact that an urban legislator was able to make an alliance with the Speaker of a Georgia House says something about Cook's effectiveness.

Some other Fulton lawgivers were impressive. Rep. Grace Hamilton led the fight that took responsibility for elections away from the office of the Ordinary, which had botched the job so badly Nov. 8. Rep. Tom Dillon got through a public defender system for the indigent accused.

But statesmanship was not a universal attribute in the delegation. Some measures ranging from bad to useless occupied the time of some.

Rep. John Hood pushed Sen. Leroy Johnson and Rep. Goodwyn (Shag) Cates onto the Atlanta Stadium Authority, when getting them free passes to ball games was about the only credible reason anybody could figure out for that.

Rep. Charlie Carnes, an effective legislator, used his effectiveness to the dubious end of passing a piece of special interest legislation favoring taxicab companies. While many other businesses must go on paying inequitable business license fees pending an overall reform now under way, the taxi people got theirs early, thanks to Carnes and other friends.

Rep. Cecil Turner, who signed his name twice to a bill that needed signatures, was a leader of the questionable move to put Fulton County into the parks business. This capriciously erodes the Plan of Improvement, under which Atlanta is supposed to handle park services.

It was Cook who led the main battle to meet the city's critical need—for some tax source besides property tax. Ironically, two Fulton senators helped kill that vital measure—Sen. Frank Coggin, whose vote, since he was Maddox's floor leader, was at least understandable, and Sen. W. Armstrong Smith, whose vote wasn't.

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House Gets Elections Chief Bill

An amended version of a bill stripping the Fulton County ordinary of election duties passed the Senate Thursday and was sent back to the House.

The bill sets up a bi-partisan election board with power to employ an election supervisor. The legislation removes the responsibility of elections from the jurisdiction of Ordinary Eugene Gunby.

An amendment to leave Chief Registrar Leon Hay as a department head—free from supervision of the board—was tacked to the House-approved legislation.

Hay actively lobbied against the section which would make him answerable to the election supervisor and board. His staff also got into the controversy—writing letters to the newspapers and legislators.

Rep. Grace Hamilton, author of the bill, said Thursday she was not pleased with the Senate amendment, but would go along with it. She said it was too late in the session to disagree.

The bill fails to correct one of the primary ills of Fulton's election machinery. Officials of both political parties have voiced the opinion that the elections should be under one person and not spread over several departments.

Hay's office is charged with registering voters and preparing absentee ballots. The ordinary is in charge of the actual election.

The past election revealed little coordination between the two offices. Hay is appointed by the County Commission and thus is not answerable to Gunby who is elected. Gunby did not oppose the bill.

With passage of the bill, the running of elections would be in the hands of the board and supervisor and amounts to nothing more than a shift of powers. Hay will still remain in a quasi-autonomous position.

The Senate also passed a resolution which sets up a study committee for the purpose of investigating the possibility of merging the Fulton County and Atlanta schools systems.



Rep. Hamilton