

Interview with David Bauer

Convener, The Maple Tree Group

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Regarding RIRA's election to nominate community representatives to the RIOC Board of Directors

Interviewed by Dick Lutz, Managing Editor, *The Main Street WIRE*

Q:

You've been at this a long time. Done?

Bauer:

Well, you're never done. There's always something else coming along that you hadn't counted upon. This election has been a fascinating process, and it's the result of, at the moment, what – ten years of active effort to have it happen. Why should it happen? It should happen because we're a democratic nation and, in a democracy, the right of the citizen to vote is a paramount duty and, over this period of time, we've benefitted from State participation in this Island, but we've lost the ability to have an active say in what happened on the Island. This election is a step toward making that active say a possibility. We don't know if it will happen. It will depend on the Governor. It will depend on the State Senate.

Q:

When you say, "It might happen," what's the optimum.

Bauer:

I would like to see six people – actually seven people eventually as the position opens up – be people who are residents of the Island serving on the RIOC Board after they have been elected by their fellow citizens.

Q:

This is an indirect process, so this isn't the final goal, necessarily.

Bauer:

No. It's a direct election but it depends on the people who have the ability to make the appointment to recognize the importance of that direct election – that is, the Governor, and the State Senate, under State law. The logical outcome of this, if it is successful, would be that the law would be changed, putting people directly on the Board without the intervening of the appointment by the Governor and the State Senate.

Q:

Do you think that's genuinely possible?

Bauer:

Anything is possible given the right circumstances given the right circumstances and the support of the citizens of this Island and the excellent newspaper we have.

Q:

You hired a lobbyist. Why?

Bauer:

The lobbyist idea came late on. It was suggested by an Island resident that it would be helpful to have someone in Albany who knew the paths to success be of assistance. Whether that will happen or not, I don't know. We are a private organization – we're not a government organization that has pushed for this – and it's typical for private organizations to have a lobbyist that presents their viewpoint.

Q:

Suppose nothing comes of this. What does the Maple Tree Group propose to do under those circumstances.

Bauer:

If nothing means that the six people who have been elected as nominees by the Island, if none of those six were to achieve a position on the RIOC Board, we would have to reconnoiter, reexamine what happened, why it happened that way, was there something we did that was not properly done, or is it an issue that deserves a funeral? And much of that will depend upon the events of the next month or two, as we see what happens to these folks who have been elected.

Q:

What do you see as the steps for these nominees now that they've been nominated by the community.

Bauer:

Those names have been forwarded to the Governor. The Governor will want to determine what kind of people they are, what their backgrounds are. The worst thing would be for the Governor to find himself in a position where one of these people has an unsavory past. If it were a straight election, that would be less of a problem. People who have been rascals have been elected to public office and have served in a commendable way. But since the Governor and the Senate are involved in the process, they in effect are putting their reputations on the line, and it would be possible that somebody would fall short of whatever standards the general public would hold valid at any given time, and, if that happened, the Governor and the Senate would be held responsible because of the appointment process.

Q:

Given that it's taken ten years to get this far... Did you ever think it would take this long?

Bauer:

I never had any specific time length in mind. When we put the idea together in the beginning, the head of DHCR appeared to be sympathetic with the idea, and, in fact, gave us constructive help and ideas on what we should and shouldn't do. It seemed at that time that it would be possible. Our representative in the State Assembly seemed to be very amenable to the idea. Our State Senate seemed amenable to the idea. All the way through there was some feeling that we might

have success. Nobody in a responsible position turned us aside. As a matter of fact, we met with Governor Pataki and, after an hour's worth of conversation back and forth, he appeared to be sympathetic to the idea. Without putting any blame on Governor Pataki or anyone else in the then State administration, their idea of what might be done resulted in a less complete conclusion than we thought we might have. So is this going to take more time, a shorter time? It's impossible to know. But is the idea right? If the idea is right, it seems that you should continue.