

**Introduction of Representative Barney Frank
by U.S. Circuit Judge Frank M. Coffin
Maine State Bar Association
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You won't believe the time I have spent in trying to come up with a suitable introduction for our speaker. I have dug into my files and come up with phrases like "man of the people", a "man for the times", or one for the future, or the great but overused "man for all seasons". The trouble was that if I seriously tried any of these customary gambits, I feared that both the speaker and I would disgrace ourselves laughing. Finally, I'm sorry to report, I gave it up as impossible.

Instead, I shall content myself with reading a passage from an unauthorized version of Plato's Republic. This is a bit classier than the last time I spoke to you, when I pirated from Boccaccio's Decameron. The following is a little known extract found in the charred remains of the great Alexandrian Library after the fanatical bishop Theophilus burned it to excise all pagan literature. This is a snatch of dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon.

Socrates has, you will recall, discerned that a state should reflect the compartmentalized talents of its citizens: those endowed with the golden quality of command shall be the guardians; those with the silver virtues of will and courage shall be the warriors or auxiliaries; and those with the humbler qualities of brass and iron shall be the tradesmen. Then he says in the fifth book: "Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy . . . then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day."

Reflecting on this later, Glaucon comments: Socrates, such a state would possess temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice. Surely this is the perfect Republic.

Socrates: As you talk, Glaucon, do you sense something missing?

Glaucon: Socrates, how could there be? You've taken hundreds of pages to reach this point.

Socrates: There is never an end to tampering with the proper organization of society. No, Glaucon, what you describe is a very dull State. And once dullness infects a Commonwealth, citizens and guardians alike lose interest, and once interest goes, wisdom follows. What I have neglected to provide for is the spark of interest, of humor, of the outrageous, that is to say, the guaranty of humility, the key to wisdom.

Glaucon: How do you propose, then, that this spark, as you call it, be supplied?

Socrates: Let us begin by choosing a most unlikely prospect for a guardian, so that he shall always be aware of the irony. Let him at the start be pleasingly plump and comfortable, even sloppy, to look at. This will appeal to the brass and iron tradesmen class. Then let him demonstrate the warrior's silver virtue of will power by achieving a more slender if not elegant figure. Finally, let him have a passion for justice, common sense, a sense of the ridiculous, and the ability to speak quickly, succinctly, and memorably.

Glaucon: What kind of training would you prescribe for such a person?

Socrates: I would first have him plunge into the waters of governance by appealing for the support of a small cross section of the larger State. Let him represent a suburb of Athens near Piraeus on the Aegean, what we might call a Back Bay, where cluster the poor and rich, laborer and intellectual, African, Asian, and Greek, but all with their wits sharpened by all the bustle. Let him then try to serve their interests and those of the body politic in our local legislature on that hill that shines like either a Beacon or a dead mackerel, where the squalid and the admirable mix

in equal parts.

Glaucon: I can see that this would supply what some of our vulgar friends would call "street smarts", but how would he gain acceptance by the most elite of the guardians?

Socrates: Ah, Glaucon, you have made a good point. To answer it I would have him attend the most famous legal academy of the Sophists where he can match wits, imperfect syllogisms, and minute distinctions with the self styled brightest and best . . . and I would have him attain honors. And he would do this with his left hand while carrying on his legislative duties.

Glaucon: Would he now be ready for more responsibility?

Socrates: Not quite. I would subject him to the fire and brimstone of a campaign for higher office against an articulate member of the opposite sex, to sample the fury of a woman scorned . . . a test sure to temper his steel, if it does not steal his temper.

Glaucon: After all this, does he live with laurels and contentment, and the approbation of all?

Socrates: No. He has one more test -- to survive, be composed and useful when the values he prizes are imperfectly pursued and the values he opposes are deified by those more powerful than he.

Glaucon: Such a one as you describe is surely impossible to realize.

Socrates: Not completely. But there's room for only one in generations. You know what the Senate is trying to do to me. Well, like me, he's too good to last.

The Honorable Barney Frank.