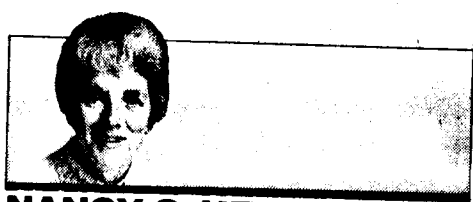


Garrett 10/1/91



NANCY Q. KEEFE

COMMENTARY

Hospitals chief choice: A set up or a let down?

She remembers it well, the proclamation from County Executive Andrew P. O'Rourke naming May 18, 1991, Carol Garner Farkas appreciation day in Westchester.



Mack L. Carter Jr.

That night at the Harlequin Ball, benefitting the Westchester County Medical Center, O'Rourke praised Farkas, the chairman of the hospital board, for "her outstanding devotion to the Medical Center . . . which has earned for you the well-deserved admiration, affection and appreciation of all who have been fortunate enough to know and work with you throughout the years" and for "your important and lasting contributions."

It all lasted exactly four months. On Sept. 18, O'Rourke told Farkas he wanted her to resign.

How fleeting is fame. How ephemeral is affection.

What happened?

Farkas, along with all her colleagues on the hospital board, disagreed with O'Rourke.

If you're not with him, you're against him, apparently. It happened with David Bogdanoff, chairman of the Housing Implementation Commission until he disputed the county executive, then with the hospital board members. They have dissented over O'Rourke's choice for commissioner of hospitals, so he wants them out. And he says he'll see they never serve the county again in any role.

Vindictiveness, thy name is Andy.

"He got about as many resignations as President Bush would get if he asked Congress to resign," Farkas said last week.

Ex "HH"

Bungled selection process

O'Rourke can replace her as chairman, but she says she's staying on the board and will be at every meeting, as will the others. Beyond that they are seeking to put some muscle in their dissent. Nine of the members filed a lawsuit last week to block the appointment of Mack L. Carter Jr. as commissioner. They say he lacks experience.

What a mess. And it's O'Rourke's doing. He let the search committee's suggestions languish so long that the favorite candidate got another job. Then he trashed the selection process that he had set up.

As Samuel Kasoff, head of neurosurgery at the medical center and a member of the selection committee, explained it to a group of editors and reporters at these newspapers yesterday, O'Rourke had a right to turn down proposed candidates. He should then have gone back to the committee, or named a new committee or shelved the selection committee altogether.

"But you don't go to one of the rejected candidates and pick him," Kasoff said.

O'Rourke did, though. He put forth Carter the way George Bush put forth Clarence Thomas for Supreme Court — as if to say: I dare you to vote against him.

By his own lamentable choice of a word, O'Rourke has provided the evidence for such a conclusion. He said opponents of Carter's appointment were "prejudiced." Though O'Rourke insisted he was using it in its broadest sense, that's a loaded word. But he won't admit that. Instead, he accused other people of bringing race into it.

Set up to fail

Like the Clarence Thomas we have read about and seen on TV, Carter is warm and likable, with a lot of moxie and an instinct for aiming for the heart. During another meeting with editors and reporters yesterday, he said that he had been on the job at the medical center one week and that it was a tough first week, because he knew people didn't want him there.

But, he added: "I grew up all my life proving myself on the job, in school. I'm still doing it."

He probably doesn't have a chance to prove himself here. When O'Rourke botched the appointment process, he probably messed up the man's life. Even if the Board of Legislators were to approve Carter, after letting him swing in the wind for the next two months, Carter would need a superhuman effort to overcome the antipathy of powerful doctors at the medical center.

Not likely. O'Rourke has set him up to fail.

Carter doesn't think so, though. Toward the end of our meeting, he was asked if he thought the county executive had set him up or let him down. He replied: "He has not let me down. If there's anyone in my corner, it's him. If there's anybody I believe in and trust, it's Andy O'Rourke."

Mack Carter, call Carol Farkas for a reality check.

Nancy Q. Keefe's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

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