

LETTERS TO THE WESTCHESTER EDITOR

'A Mockery Of Elections?'

The question posed in "Agreement on Judicial Candidates" [Oct. 14], about the three-year deal made last year (and relevant to the coming election) between the major parties for judicial cross-endorsements, is an important one: "Is it a step toward a nonpartisan judiciary, or a mockery of elections?"

County newspapers have cheered the agreement as saving the parties and candidates time and money, and the Democratic and Republican chairs have defended the move as in the service of "good government" and — in a more negative vein — by pointing out that "most voters don't care" how judges are selected.

But I agree with the "mockery" assessment. Until the day of merit selection comes, I am in favor of partisan judicial politics. I would add two points to the ones made by the critics of the judicial pact cited.

¶There is nothing "nonpartisan" about a pre-election agreement between the two major parties: it is bipartisan. And it freezes out competition, the bedrock of democracy. Bipartisanship for the common good is admirable among elected officials, but before elections it negates the whole idea of a party system.

¶The role of a party is to come up with the best candidates it can for election. And in these days of rampant voter apathy and vicious denigration of "politicians," it behooves the latter not to excuse their actions with a "nobody cares" plea. That is the problem, not the solution.

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Judicial Screening: Bar's Response

The Oct. 14 article "Agreement on Judicial Candidates," on cross-endorsements of such candidates, made no reference to bar association response. The Westchester Women's Bar Association, which annually screens judicial candidates after their nominations, formed a special task force on judicial-nomination procedures following its 1989 screenings.

Last February, the special task force proposed a plan to the county's major political party leaders that a pre-nomination screening procedure of proposed judicial candidates by our bar association be implemented.

In our plan, which included proposed coordination with the Westchester County Bar Association, we

stated that the screening of candidates prior to their nominations would assure the electorate of a choice among qualified candidates, whether the candidates run with or without opposition.

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