

**“Is Our Government Working for You?”
Forum at Florida Atlantic University
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By Tom Evans**

“Welcome to this forum today, and thank you for caring about what’s happening in the world and in our country. We face some critical challenges, and I’ve always respected those who search for knowledge and truth and who believe that this search is a lifelong journey.

Today, we will be addressing a number of critical issues — some of them are quite controversial. I hope we will be guided by the words of Thomas Jefferson. He said, “Here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, so long as reason is free to combat it!” That’s the spirit we need to foster not just here today, but throughout the country and indeed the world. We must encourage people everywhere to listen and to respect others.

We are privileged and honored today to have with us three outstanding Americans.

The Honorable Ann Brown, a former chairman of the Consumer Products Safety Commission, nominated by President Bill Clinton. Chairman Brown has been an outstanding advocate for consumers in America, and especially for the safety of our children.

Never timid about speaking out, she served in the Leadership of the Consumer Federation of America and is the recipient of many top national honors. Chairman Brown spent most of her undergraduate years at Smith College, and graduated from George Washington University.

Mr. Julian Gingold has advised many presidents, especially on trade, but also on our economy and politics. Julian has an encyclopedic knowledge of political history. That knowledge, combined with his judgement, has made him a sought-after advisor for many Republicans running for the presidency, for Congress, for governor and other races. Occasionally, he will even give advice to Democrats. He has served on a number of presidential commissions.

Julian Gingold graduated from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a senior vice president of UBS — Union Bank of Switzerland.

Michael Dukakis is the longest-serving Governor in the history of Massachusetts — 12 years, but not consecutive, starting in 1974-1978, again from 1982-1986 and 1986-1990. He has an outstanding record, and among his many accomplishments he attracted a number of high-tech companies to Massachusetts. He was the Democratic standard bearer for president in 1988. Before the negative advertising began against him, he was just under 20 points ahead of George Herbert Walker Bush, who became president.

Governor Dukakis shares his knowledge and experience with all ages. He is a professor at UCLA, Northeastern University and NYU. Michael Dukakis is a graduate of Swarthmore College and the Harvard Law School, and as many of you know, taught right here at FAU for four years.

It's an honor to have you and all these very fine Americans here with us today.

Now, let me lead off this forum, where we will be discussing whether or not our government is working for you. That depends to a certain degree on who "you" is!

Our Constitution set up three separate but equal branches of government. The founding fathers were especially concerned about giving too much power to the executive branch of government. Over the last 200-plus years, our constitutional democracy has been the foundation for a country that has given our citizens great freedom and opportunity.

We have been respected by free nations around the globe, not just for our military might or the strength of our economy, but for our values. That respect has been eroded but certainly not irreversibly.

The freedom we have always enjoyed has tested succeeding generations of Americans again and again. We have most always met that test in preserving the principles set forth in our Constitution but — in the final analysis — it depends on an enlightened electorate and the people they select to lead.

Let me share with you a message from one of those leaders in a lame-duck session of the U.S. House of Representatives in December of 1977. Hubert Humphrey rose to speak after being introduced by Mo Udall. The chamber was packed, and he was thin, suffering from cancer with less than six weeks to live. He walked up to the podium just

above the House floor. Smiling and in a very clear voice he said, “You know, my friends, I’ve spent close to a lifetime trying to get to this podium and I’ve finally made it!”

It was a poignant moment and everyone in the chamber rose to their feet. There was genuine affection in the loud and sustained ovation. Vice President Humphrey’s message was to make our Democracy work.

He had a message for Democrats and Republicans. To the Republicans, he reminded us that under our system, the majority prevails. However, his real message was to the Democrats who held overwhelming majorities in both Houses of Congress. To them he said, “If you trample on the rights of the minority, if you don’t treat them with respect and permit their participation, you are not only harming this body, you are damaging our country greatly!”

But ladies and gentlemen, the Republican leadership in the House and the leadership at the White House today have not heeded the words of Hubert Humphrey. And, as far as the White House is concerned, they have not communicated very well with Democrats or Republicans.

Look at where our country is at this point in our history.

We’re in the middle of a civil war [in Iraq] that has cost many American lives, close to 3,000 and almost 25,000 wounded, 50% of them grievously; they have been very brave. And sometimes we forget that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died — many of them women and children. They’re God’s children, too.

Somewhere between \$300-\$500 billion has been spent on the war and, as a result, we’ve created a much more dangerous world. The Iraq Study Group has called the situation grave and deteriorating.

The real enemy was in Afghanistan, yet the Taliban, who harbored Osama Bin Laden, are coming back under Mullah Omar. We don’t have enough troops there, and our reconstruction efforts have been badly hindered.

In Iraq, little if any planning was designed for after the invasion. By any objective standard, it has not gone well, and it has siphoned our energies. Remember “mission accomplished” in the spring of 2003? That was a long time ago. And yet, until recently,

Democrats have been timid in their criticism of the White House until Jack Murtha seriously questioned the conduct of the war.

Republicans have walked in lock-step behind the president and the media — until no weapons of mass destruction were found.

Our system of checks and balances was not working well because there was little accountability. There has been no effective oversight in Iraq or Afghanistan, but in many other areas as well. Let me give you just one of many egregious examples of how Congress, controlled by the Republicans, ran roughshod over Democrats.

Under the so-called Hastert Rule (named after Speaker of the House Denny Hastert, who was put in power by Tom DeLay), the only bills that could come to the floor were those that had the support of a majority of the Republican caucus. That's not majority rule — that's a travesty. It did great harm to some rock-solid principles of our democracy. This action trampled the rights of Democrats and Republicans alike and it was strongly supported by the White House. How misguided and very short-sighted. These people lacked an appreciation and understanding of history.

The American people are getting it. And they sent a message this last November 7th that was loud and clear.

They wanted to end partisanship.

They wanted to end incompetence.

They wanted to end the culture of corruption in Washington.

Most of all, they wanted the Iraq war to end, if not immediately, soon. Our presence in Iraq, as the president's own national intelligence estimate has told him, is making things much more dangerous.

The American people want us to address embryonic stem cell research. Stop politicizing science!

The vast majority of Americans want us to do something about budget deficits. The American people have had enough of earmarks — thousands of pet projects that circumvent the regular budgeting process costing billions of dollars to taxpayers — like those bridges from nowhere to nowhere. They're done with sweetheart no-bid contracts awarded to special friends like Halliburton.

These crucial issues present a huge responsibility for the United States as the leading nation in the world today. And we should join in the Kyoto Accords and lead the world in the fight against global warming by weaning ourselves and others away from the addiction to fossil fuels. We must recognize that renewable sources of energy combined with conservation is key not only for us today but, most importantly, for future generations of Americans.

On these crucial issues, our democracy can and must work effectively, for our children and grandchildren, and on and on and on. We cannot destroy their future or betray their trust. For each of us, that is a goal we must meet.”