

Testimony of G. Robert Thompson , 32 Woodside Ave. Oil City, PA
August 30, 1995

I speak in opposition to House Bill 1320 which deprives the citizens of the Commonwealth a voice and more importantly their vote in the selection of appellate court judges in Pennsylvania.

Special interests have been trying for years under the guise of "Merit Selection" to control the system of justice in our state. You, their representatives, cannot in good conscience deliver the prerogatives of the good citizens of this Commonwealth into the hands of those interests.

The present system is flawed primarily because the media and the major political parties do not sufficiently educate the voters on the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates, this problem is addressed more effectively in ~~HR~~ 265.

House Bill

The founder of our state, William Penn, warned the colonists in 1687 "not to give away anything of liberty or property that at present they do enjoy". He was a wise man. The right to vote is an issue we must fight to protect. Surrendering our vote on a selection of those who judge us is a major retreat.

The preponderance of judges from Allegheny and Philadelphia counties in our appellate courts deprives the courts of a diversity of views. HB 1320 addresses this problem with a bureaucratic monstrosity that would impress even Merton Quirk. Obviously designed by attorneys and paid staff to insure future employment, it would replace our primary and general elections. The most recent election clearly indicates our citizens want less government, not more.

Unfunded mandates, restrictive laws, intrusions on our liberties and attacks on ~~the~~^{our} constitution need to be reviewed by a system of courts that reflects the diverse areas of our state. This can best be accomplished by candidates presenting themselves for election to the citizens on a regional basis for election as provided in HB265.

Quality assurance is a legitimate concern of members of the bar. This also can be best accomplished by candidates presenting themselves to the voters on a regional basis where the citizens have a better opportunity to assess their record and reputation. Election is better than the rough and tumble partisan politics of the confirmation process in the Pennsylvania Senate.

History teaches us that liberties lost are rarely regained except by force of arms. Surely we all believe that ballots are better than bullets. As our representatives, I respectfully ask that you would not betray our trust by taking our ballots away.