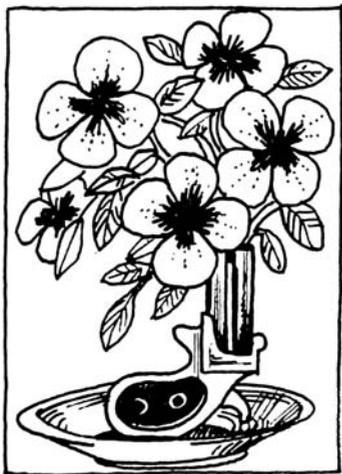


States of the Union

GLORIA GET YOUR GUN

BY RICHARD J. MARGOLIS



“**D**ELEGATES get blue badges,” explained the smiling reception lady as she handed Diane her name-card. “And delegates’ spouses,” she said to me, “get white badges.”

At the Civic Center in Greenwich, Connecticut, a Saturday afternoon cocktail party was going from strength to strength. Our hostess, Gloria Rice Clark, was ready to announce her candidacy for high

sheriff of Fairfield County, thereby adding a notch to America’s taut feminist bow. Diane had received an invitation because she is one of 255 “sheriff’s delegates” who will choose a Democratic candidate at the July convention.

We had never met Gloria (why are women candidates always called by their first names?), but we knew something about her. She is a 34-year-old lawyer who two years ago became the first woman constable in Greenwich’s history. Greenwich does not seem any the worse for it.

We pinned on our names and were heading for the big room with the bar when our state Democratic committeeman, a gregarious chap, put a hand on my shoulder. “I want you to meet Bill Murphy,” he said. “Bill’s a delegate from Darien.” As Bill Murphy pumped my arm I got a blurry closeup of a pink shirt, steel-rimmed glasses and a gray crew haircut. “I’m Bill Murphy,” he told me. “I’m a delegate from Darien.”

“I’ve heard about you,” I assured him.

At the bar Diane grabbed a gin-

and- tonic and vanished into a swirl of pants-suits and tattersalls. I, noticing that the drinks seemed ungenerous and therefore un-Democratic, lingered to explore the situation. “How would you rate the boozing here?” I asked a teenage bartender. “Heavy, moderate, or light?”

“None of the above,” was his reply. “The correct choice is *very* heavy. We were told to go easy on the drinks, but we’re getting a lot of complaints.” I asked if he thought Democrats drank more than Republicans. “Just the opposite,” he said. “It’s the Republicans these days who are trying to forget their worries.”

I was forgetting my own worries one sip at a time. It was pleasant to drift toward a large floor-to-ceiling window and look out on sunny Greenwich, where the lilacs and dogwood bloomed and the greensward (zoned for four acres) rolled on forever. Around a corner of the civic center I could see half a tennis court splendidly occupied by a lithe-some brunette in white. I watched as she double-faulted.

“I don’t fault patronage,” some-

one at my back was saying. "On the contrary, if the sheriff is handing out jobs I want to be at the front of the line." I turned to see an elderly man with a tall drink in his hand talking to a stout lady in a blue dress. The lady, her badge proclaimed, was Gloria Rice Clark. I liked her instantly.

"Look," she said to the patronage-seeker, "the sheriff can appoint 50 deputies. They're supposed to keep order in the courtroom, guard and transport prisoners, serve writs . . . things like that. But the way it works now they're not *trained* for their jobs; they're hired because of the money they contribute to the sheriff's campaign every four years. They're just friends of the sheriff."

The gentleman's face brightened. "I'm your friend," he said.

(It is true that the present sheriff, one John P. Previdi, a Republican, has spent immoderate sums to get elected. When he ran in 1970—for a third term—he didn't bother to make a single public appearance outside his hometown. Residents of the other 22 towns in Fairfield County had to settle for seeing his face on huge billboards set along every main road. The deputies paid for the billboards, and Previdi won in a breeze.)

I introduced myself to Gloria and asked if there was any basis to the rumor that she was the fastest gun in the East. She took the question very decently. She said she knew how to use a gun but she didn't think that was the main point of her candidacy; the main point was to remove the taint of patronage from the judicial system. "If I'm elected, I'll hire deputies on merit, and I won't accept campaign contributions from them."

While she was talking I felt a hand on my arm. It was a man wearing a pink shirt. "I'm Bill Murphy," he said. "I'm a delegate from Darien."

I shook his hand and wandered off. At the bar I ran into Tom Milmore, lawyer, commuter, and long-

time chairman of the Democratic party in Weston, the town next door to mine. I told Tom what I had just heard about sheriff's patronage.

"Patronage!" Tom sneered. "Everyone talks about it, but nobody around here ever sees any of it. Only once can I remember being offered patronage, and the offer came from Washington. That goes back a few years, to when LBJ was organizing the Great Society. I was sitting in my office in New York when my secretary said I had a call from the White House. I couldn't imagine what the White House wanted with *me*."

"Well, this Presidential aide was calling to tell me they intended to appoint some guy from Weston—I think his name was Benjamin Harris—to the National Library Commission, whatever that is. They were *clearing* the appointment with me. I said sure, go ahead and appoint him; I had never even met the man, but I knew he was a Democrat. Then this aide said the news should come from me. So that night I went over to the man's house, told him about his appointment, and got him to contribute \$150 to the party. Patronage!"

JACK CAHILL joined us. Jack is a fire commissioner in Wilton, a lieutenant colonel (retired) in the U.S. Army and my car insurance broker. I asked Jack if he was enjoying himself. "You probably don't know it," he said, "but it was in this town exactly 33 years ago that I raised a whole battery. Later we all shipped out to the South Pacific."

I said I hadn't known that.

"I also saw action in Europe," he went on. "I fought with Patton. He had such a fierce reputation, we were a little scared of him, but he was a good man to work for. He was bold. We all need boldness to get by in life. That's one thing Patton taught me."

I pointed to Gloria, who was standing on a speaker's podium

across the room. "She'll be a bold sheriff," I said. He didn't answer because someone was at the microphone introducing Gloria as "the next high sheriff of Fairfield County." There wasn't much applause; everyone had a drink in his hand.

Gloria made a short, graceful speech, reminding us that she was a loyal Democrat, a worker for Robert Kennedy in 1968 and for Edmund Muskie in 1972. She said, "The taxpayers and voters are fed up with games they always lose and with political pinball machines that promise homeruns but end up 'Tilt.'" And she concluded with a JFK-like peroration: "I ask you to share the seriousness of my effort. I ask your support. And I ask you to consider not what the office of high sheriff has been in the past but what I hope to make it—the focus of judicial progress in Fairfield County."

After Gloria's speech, as people began edging homeward, a small boy mounted the podium and leaned toward the dead mike. He was wearing a New York Yankees cap and a jacket with the names of other baseball teams sewn onto it. I watched as he mimed an oration without once uttering a sound. His performance featured finger-wagging ("Mark my words . . ."), outstretched arms ("Give me your tired . . ."), and a succession of sour grimaces ("We live in troubled times . . ."). When he stopped I eased over and asked him what he was running for. It was the wrong question; he straightened his cap and fled.

The Greenwich sun was setting now behind an empty tennis court and Diane was throwing me time-to-go-home glances. At the door we shook hands with an old friend in a pink shirt. "You're Bill Murphy," I said. "You're a delegate from Darien."

He seemed pleased. "How'd you know?" he asked.

"We politicians," I answered, "never forget a face."