

By BRIAN ACKLEY
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So is it true, is George Pataki really that poorly thought of as governor of the Empire State?

At least he's more highly thought of than New Jersey Governor Jim McGreevey, who decided to detonate his personal and professional career a couple of weeks ago.

Well, not exactly. A poll taken two days *after* McGreevey held one of the strangest press conferences in recent political times, a Garden State poll indicated his favorability rating stood at 45 percent. In early August, Quinnipiac College polled New Yorkers to see how many of us felt Pataki's recent performance was favorable. He registered one percentage point less than McGreevey. The same poll showed Chuck Schumer and even Elliott Spitzer defeating the governor, should he decide to run for a fourth term in 2006. Rudy Giuliani waxed the floor against all of them.

Are voters actually ready to clean house on the heels of Albany's latest and most disgraceful performance? Is it true, as the *Journal News* of Westchester wrote last week that "voters are getting restless. They know state government is in shambles, and they're looking for reform?"

Well, not exactly. It would be easy to draw that conclusion, since voters gave only a 26 percent approval rating to the state legislature's performance in the same poll. Upstate, support for the legislative effort was a paltry 19 percent. Yet, when asked about the job of their own local state senator or assemblyman, more than one in two voters felt they were happy with "their guy".

"This strikes me as an indictment of the Albany system," said Maurice Carroll, director of the university's Polling Institute. "Those who get elected (locally), usually have some record of civic achievement. People think highly of them."

So highly, in fact, that fully a third of those seeking to keep their Albany jobs in November – all 212 assembly and senate seats will be voted on – that fully a third of the races have no major party opposition.

So giddy are officeholders over the prospect of an uncontested waltz back into a six-figure paycheck, they have stopped bothering to even pretend they care.

"It's certainly a plus," assemblyman Ronald Canestrari told radio station WINS. He also just happens to serve as chairman of the Democratic campaign committee in the Assembly. In Canestrari's world at least, not having any race, much less a competitive one, is further beneficial to the system because "there is added flexibility and instead of spending resources in one district, those resources are freed up."

Surprised to learn that the Albany County lawmaker is one who's unopposed? Neither were we.

Voters missed their chance in 1997, when those who supported a state constitutional convention – where actual, everyday voters might have promulgated meaningful structural change in Albany – were drowned out by catcalls and castigation. For example, one such possible outcome of a convention could have been the creation of a non-partisan group, who would be responsible for redistricting every 10 years, not the legislature itself. More than 70 percent thought that such a commission would be a good idea. Sadly, the next time New Yorkers get a chance to vote on convening such an event will be in 2017.

The poll even asked whether or not moving the state capital to New York City would benefit the virtually inert legislative process, the thinking being "the hot lights of the media would brighten the backrooms of state government," Carroll said. "In New York City, someone burps and there's a couple of TV cameras around." By the way, 53 percent of the more than 1,100 registered voters asked thought it might work.

Is that the best solution? Well, not exactly. In the end, there's only one poll that can work 100 percent of the time, if we let it. In our world, we call it the voting booth.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)