

VOX POP Newsletter

of Political Organizations and Parties

An official section of the American Political Science Association
Produced by the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, The University of Akron

*ISSUE THEME: PARTY ELITES

THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE: POLITICS WITH INCREASINGLY MEANINGFUL POWER

Lawrence D. Longley, Lawrence University
Member of the DNC from Wisconsin

Eighteen months ago, I was elected by the Wisconsin Democratic State Convention to represent Wisconsin as a member of the Democratic National Committee. Now, after a year and a half, I have been asked—as a political activist and as a political scientist—to reflect on my observations and experiences on the DNC.

Clearly the Democratic National Committee—a large body of more than 350 members—is ill-suited to function effectively as the supreme governing body of the national Democratic Party. It is just too large and unwieldy a gathering. When DNC meetings are held, the hall is filled with 350 or so official members, dozens and dozens of party officials and staff, a hundred or more journalists, and various honored guests (and some less honored political hangers-on). The scene, in fact, looks more like a mini national convention or an annual state party convention than a convening of a working party governing organization.

In addition, the DNC is largely made up of state political activists—party chairs, vice-chairs, and elected members, together with assorted governors, congressman, mayors, county officials, and the like—who were selected almost entirely due to their personal stature within their state rather than due to any particular largeness of viewpoint concerning national party issues. Inherent in the DNC, then, is a built-in localism—or even parochialism—of viewpoint.

To some degree, these two limitations of the DNC have been addressed. While the DNC continues to be a huge entity, a number of standing committees and specialized groups of the National Committee now operate as meaningful and manageable policy-making bodies. The DNC Executive Committee, the State Chairs Association,

the powerful standing committees on Rules and Bylaws, Resolutions, and Credentials, numerous less official caucuses (Labor, Hispanic, Women, Blacks), together with highly informal political “networks,” provide the locale for policy evaluation and effective decision making so difficult for the DNC as a whole.

The state focus of most DNC members has also been addressed by several means, including presentations to National Committee members of detailed assessments of national issues and political trends. In addition, some 45 “additional members,” selected by the DNC and its leaders, have been added in recent years to the National Com-

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*FROM HEADQUARTERS

Dear Colleagues

The Nominating Committee would welcome your suggestions for possible nominees for POP offices to be elected at the POP Business/Awards meeting at the APSA meeting in Washington, D.C. The offices to be filled include the Chair, Program Chair, four council members (all for two-year terms), and a Secretary-Treasurer, who will only serve a one-year term. The Nominating Committee members are Charles Barrileaux, Florida State University, John S. Jackson III, Southern Illinois University, and Robert Hamel (Chair), Texas A&M University.

The Awards Committee would also welcome your suggestions for the annual POP awards. These include the Leon Epstein Award for a book that has made a distinguished contribution to the field; the Samuel Eldersfeld Award for a lifetime of distinguished service to the field; and the Jack Walker Award for an article of unusual importance and significance to the field. The members of the Awards Committee are Richard Boyd, Wesleyan College, Joyce Gelb, City University of New York, and William Keefe (Chair), University of Pittsburgh.

Sincerely,

Margaret Conway
Chair

WANTED!!!

Notices, announcements, reports, and short articles for *Vox Pop*. Send material to: John Green, The University of Akron Akron, OH 44325-1904.

Dear Colleagues:

This year the POP portion of the APSA program contains four unusual offerings. Although all the details are not yet complete, I thought some advanced notice would be desirable.

First, a workshop entitled "Machine Politics, Sound Bites and Nostalgia: Substantive Issues and Methodological Problems in the Study of Party Organizations," will be held on Wednesday, August 28, 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. and coordinated by Michael Margolis, University of Pittsburgh. As with APSA pre-convention workshops, participation will involve a small fee and pre-registration. Additional details will be forthcoming soon.

Second, POP will sponsor two workshops on methodological issues in the parties and interest groups. One will focus on the use of participant observation methods, to be chaired by David Bositis, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, and one on the use of interview techniques, to be chaired by Ruth Jones, Arizona State University. Both of these workshops will be held on Friday morning, August 30, during the regular APSA program.

Finally, there will be a hands-on workshop at the Federal Elections Commission on Saturday morning, August 31, which will focus on accessing campaign finance data through personal computers. There will be a limit on the number of participants in this session and pre-registration will be required. Additional details will be forthcoming soon.

Questions may be directed to me (602-965-6551) or Michael Brintnall (202-483-2512).

Sincerely,

Ruth Jones
Program Chair

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED:

The Editors of the *Midsouth Political Science Journal*, new general political science journal, invite manuscripts from all areas of political science. We are especially interested in manuscripts that have to do with political parties, campaigns, elections, and groups in politics. Send four copies to: Gary D. Wekkin and Donald E. Whistler, ed., *Midsouth Political Science Journal* Department of Political Science, University of Central Arkansas, Conway, AR 72032. Subscriptions may be had from the same address for \$10 per annum.

For more information on the MPSJ, its coverage, and its editorial board, see *PS: Political Science and Politics* 23 (September 1990): 516-517.

THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE *(continued from page 1)*

mittee. These “at-large” DNC members include a number of prominent national Democrats, and supplement well the predominant vigorous articulation of state viewpoints.

What does the Democratic National Committee—as the governing body of a national political party—do? Among its duties are to elect national party officers, to write and approve detailed plans for each national party convention, to govern the national party during the four years between the national party conventions, to support Democratic candidates at all levels, and to express party concerns on national issues of the day. The DNC has been recently deeply engaged in each of these activities.

Early in 1989, the DNC decided on the leader of the national Democratic Party by electing Ron Brown as DNC Chair—the first African-American ever to head a major national political party. At its September 1989 meeting, another election of party leadership occurred, and after a heated campaign involving countless letters, telegrams, and imploring phone calls from candidates and their celebrity supporters, Kathy Vick of Louisiana was elected as Party Secretary.

At its most recent meeting, late in 1990, the Democratic National Committee completed work in a second area: setting the process in place for the upcoming 1992 National Convention. By a unanimous vote (a notable level of consensus for Democrats), the DNC adopted the *Call for the 1992 Convention* and the detailed specifications contained therein concerning the method of delegate apportionment among and selection within the various states, and the rules and procedures that will govern this process. It was a remarkable achievement to be able to wrap up—early and in unanimity—what has been in the past so often a highly contentious and polarized process, and to do it well before presidential candidates had the opportunity to seek to manipulate the rules in pursuit of some perceived political advantage.

The DNC has also, in the past 18 months, acted as the governing body of the national Democratic Party. By action of the National Committee, the terms of national party officers was changed to run *not* from national convention to national convention (which gave excessive opportunity for presidential nominees to replace party-building national party leaders with personal loyalists). The term of office of national party officers now extends from national election to national election. Party leaders will seek election or re-election in the future in light of what had gone on in the course of the *entire* presidential campaign, not just its nomination phase.

The DNC has also modified the Democratic Party Charter (the national party constitution) to provide that actions of national conventions that affect the governance of the party will be subject to ratification by the DNC itself prior to going into effect—a useful check on actions

adopted in chaotic convention sessions, sometimes in the political heat of the moment. Finally, the National Committee voted late in 1989 to make permanent the presence of a significant group of uncommitted “super delegates” at national conventions—more than 450 individuals selected because of their party position rather than their candidate support—thus providing a degree of “peer-review” of presidential candidates.

This latter innovation was particularly easy for the DNC to accept, for most of the newly enfranchised super delegates are the National Committee members themselves!

A growing focus of DNC activities over the past year and a half has appropriately enough had to do with the involvement of the National Committee with campaigns—congressional, gubernatorial, and even state legislative—in the various states. The primary vehicle of this involvement has been statewide “coordinated campaigns”—independent campaign structures within state Democratic parties that are created and financed in large part by individual Democratic Party nominees and supported by other Democratic power centers, including Democratic elected officials not on the ballot and constituency groups such as organized labor. The coordinated campaign in each state performs key organizational tasks such as voter registration, voter identification, absentee ballot, and get-out-the-vote drives, and—in some cases—such additional tasks as polling, scheduling, targeting, press relations, and purchasing paid media. In the 1990 campaign alone, the DNC recognized and supported more than 36 statewide coordinated campaign programs.

Another important activity of the National Committee has been fund-raising—appropriate enough since money has been termed the “mother’s milk of politics.” In calendar year 1989, for example, the DNC by itself raised \$6.8 million, together with \$2.7 million of additional “unregulated funds,” for a total of \$9.5 million. This figure compares favorably—but just barely—with comparable “off-year” DNC fund-raising totals of \$9.2 million in 1987, and \$8.4 million in 1985. Where it compares unfavorably, however, is in contrast with the enormous sums raised by the *Republican* National Committee. Federal Election Commission data show that the DNC 1989 figure of \$9.5 million was eclipsed by the RNC 1989 fund-raising total of \$30.6 million—a Republican advantage of almost 4:1! Adding in 1989 money raised by the two “Hill” campaign committees—the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee—one finds that the three national Democratic party organizations raised a grand 1989 total of over \$19 million. This is an impressive achievement—until one looks again at the comparable total of money raised in 1989 by the RNC and the two Republican Hill committees: \$80 mil-

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THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE *(continued from page 3)*

lion! The DNC and the allied Democratic Hill campaign committees have made noteworthy progress in their fund-raising activities but, at least as of the 1989 data, they still lag far behind their Republican counterparts.

Finally, the DNC has provided ample opportunity during the past months for the expression of concerns on major national issues, often after vigorous debate. Bella Abzug, a long-time DNC member and Paul Wellstone, until recently also a DNC member, could always be counted on to express viewpoints, as could also many more centralist members of the National Committee. At times (but unfortunately not always) the DNC can indeed be an exciting articulator of issues and controversies.

Some years ago, two prominent political scientists described the national party committees desparagingly as "politics without power." The Democratic National Com-

mittee is inherently and appropriately involved in politics—for politics is, most of all, the art of the possible. But to politics has now increasingly been added some measure of meaningful power. The Democratic National Committee is the national governing head of the national Democratic Party, and in the 1990s it is finally beginning to live up to that responsibility and opportunity.

Lawrence D. Longley has been a member of the Democratic National Committee since June 1989. A long-time grass roots Democratic activist in Wisconsin, he served five terms as a county political party chairman and has been elected to the State Party Administrative (Executive) Committee since 1971. In his non-party life, he teaches political science at Lawrence University, and is the author of books on Congress, the presidency, and elections.

ADVANCED NOTICE POP WORKSHOPS 1991 APSA ANNUAL MEETING

Machine Politics, Sound Bites and Nostalgia: Substantive Issues and Methodological Problems in the Study of Party Organizations

Michael Margolis, Workshop Organizer

Wednesday, August 28

1:30-5:30 p.m.

Studying Party Conventions Using Participant Observation Methods

David Bositis, Chair

Friday morning, August 30 (during the regular APSA program)

Studying Organizational Leaders Using Interview Techniques

Ruth S. Jones, Chair

Friday morning, August 30 (during the regular APSA program)

Accessing Federal Election Commission Data on Personal Computers

Federal Election Commission Staff

Saturday morning, August 31

Further details will be forthcoming soon. Contact Ruth Jones (602-965-6551) or Michael Brintnall (202-483-2512) with questions.

THE 1988 PARTY ELITE STUDY

Denise L. Baer, Associate Professor of Political Science and
Associate Director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio

David A. Bositis, Senior Research Associate
The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Washington, D.C.

John S. Jackson III, Dean, College of Liberal Arts, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois

Introduction.

The Party Elite Study originated at Southern Illinois University in 1972-74, and it remains a long-term research commitment of the principal investigators. The study has developed into a major longitudinal data base through which changes in the party organizations have been observed and documented over two decades and across four (and soon to be five) presidential elections. Through this extensive data base we can describe changes in party elites at the local, state, and national levels and analyze some of the sources of those changes. The Party Elite data are available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

The 1988 version of the Party Elite Study represents a substantial departure from earlier versions dating from 1974. In particular, we have sought to move more vigorously away from the 'voting, issues and opinion' paradigms of the past two decades whose logic and underlying purpose was to elevate the 'party-in-the-electorate' to a predominant position and to herald the 'decline of party.' This emphasis on opinions and voters denied much significance to the various national, state and local party organizations and the coalitions associated with them at both the mass and elite levels of politics. The 1988 Party Elite Study was designed to assess many of the more enduring and consequential features of parties and organizations—recruitment, representation and associations, nepotism and the nationalization of politics.

When the Party Elite study began in the 1972-74 era, 'party reform' was a compelling topic among the Democrats and to a lesser extent among Republicans. The initial study was of the Sanford Commission, the party leaders who wrote the Democratic Party Charter. The members of the Sanford Commission were an 'insider group' who were compared to the delegates to the 1974 Democratic Mid-Term Conference which met in Kansas City to adopt the charter. The original impetus for this study was to examine the changes taking place during that very volatile time for the Democrats. The initial study was followed by a 1976 survey of delegates to the 1976 Democratic National Convention and a study of the 1978 Democratic Mid-Term Conference.

The Party Elite study expanded significantly in 1980 when Republican elites were included for the first time, and, in addition, county chairs, national committee

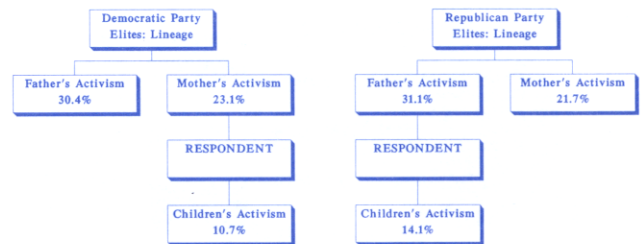
members and state chairs were surveyed along with delegates. In 1980, Barbara Leavitt Brown, now a lecturer at SIU-C, joined the study. The Party Elite study was conducted in 1984 by John Jackson together with Denise L. Baer and David A. Bositis, the same team responsible for the 1988 study. Planning for the 1992 version of the study began in the fall of 1990.

Themes of the 1988 Study.

A number of interesting departures have characterized the 1988 study. We have begun to investigate the subject of nepotism, not as a progressive nor as investigative journalists, but as observers interested in 'family' as an agency of recruitment. If "plumbers' sons mature with a wrench in their hands," then it should come as no surprise that party elites have similar family tracings. Figure I shows that both Republican and Democratic elites have a substantial party and political lineage, illustrating much the same pattern as "plumbers' sons."

FIGURE I

Public, Party and Social Group Officeholding

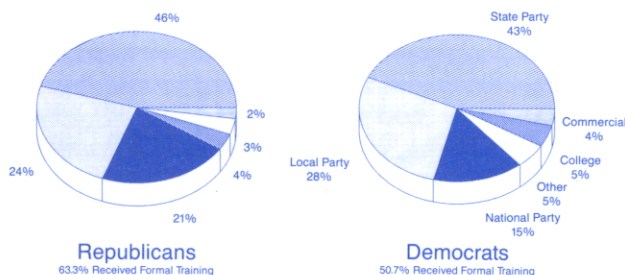


A second aspect of the 1988 study which we found quite interesting, belies many of the remarks of the 'decline of party' writers who view party organizations like the human appendix—"it did something once but we're not sure what and furthermore, it doesn't do it anymore." Many commentators have written endlessly on campaign specialists and their training as well as their capacity to manipulate voters and win elections. We have found that many of the various party elites have received campaign

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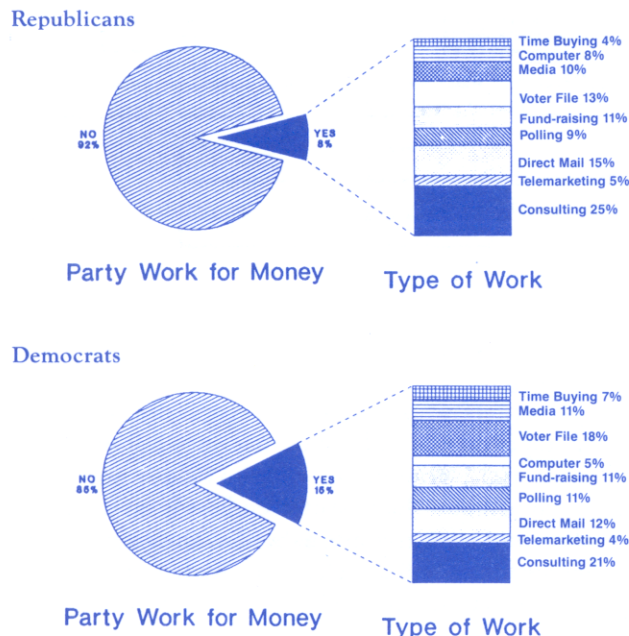
training—but the vast majority of that training has come from the national, state and local party organizations (see Figure II).

FIGURE II
FORMAL CAMPAIGN TRAINING: SOURCE



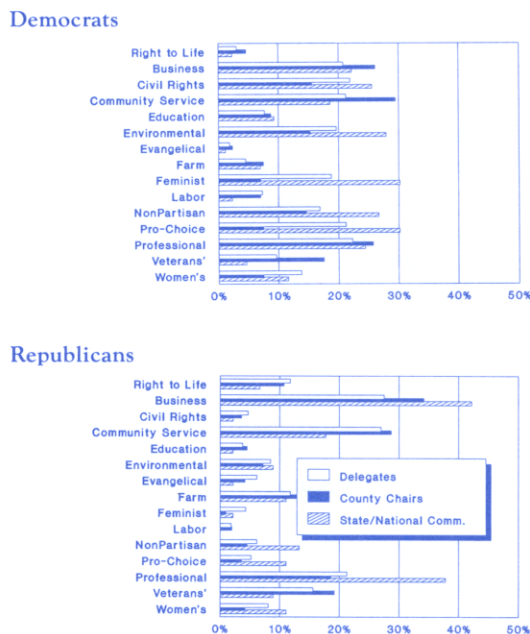
One interesting aspect of this is the role of party ‘professionals,’ party elites who have made money working for the two parties in various campaign capacities. We have found that more Democrats than Republicans work for money (see Figure III, 15 percent to 8 percent)—a finding not surprising given that the GOP tends to employ professional pollsters, media experts and other PR types—and the regular party elites participate without pay. The type of work performed by various GOP and Democratic professionals is roughly similar—general consulting, direct mail, fund-raising, media, polling, and so forth.

FIGURE III
Campaign Professionals



We have found substantial group associations among our various party elite cadres. The distribution and frequency of these interest group associations was much as we expected (see Figure IV). The Democratic party elites are more likely than their Republican counterparts to be group-associated. The character of the group associations correspond to the party coalitions as we expected—the party elites are drawn from the groups that each party represents. Few Republicans are drawn from the ranks of Civil Rights, Education, Feminist (National Organization of Women, National Women’s Political Caucus) and Labor groups, and few Democrats from Right-to-Life groups. We were surprised at how few evangelical group members there were in either party. There are a few other surprises as well. The Democrats had proportionately fewer labor organization members than we expected and more business and professional people. The Republicans were decidedly and tastefully ‘old guard’—business, community service, and professional groups dominated the responses. Both parties had similar representation among Community Service, Veterans, and traditional Women’s groups (e.g., Business and Professional Women, League of Women Voters).

FIGURE IV
Group Memberships



The various party cadres displayed patterns on issue questions consistent with our theoretical expectations. Traditional or ‘moderate’ Republicans are considerably more visible in the Republican cadres than during the Reagan years. It has already been noted above that traditional interest representation in the GOP is very apparent. The nationalization thesis is supported by the evidence

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THE 1988 PARTY ELITE STUDY (continued from page 6)

showing substantial homogeneity across cadres within each party and heterogeneity across party regardless of cadre (see Figures V and VI). This is not a phenomenon first apparent in 1988; however, the degree of similarity on major issues across party cadres was considerable. On “defense and detente,” the GOP speaks with one voice regardless of level of party, and they are only slightly less so on domestic issues. As a group, the Democratic county chairs,

the party cadre that has been most unlike their peers from other organizational levels (being more conservative than the members of the DNC and nominating delegates) have moved more substantially ‘leftward’ at a faster rate than the other cadres, and by 1988 they were much like the others. Some of this change reflects recruitment and personnel change, but it also represents changing attitudes among established party elites.

FIGURE V
Foreign Policy Attitudes, 1980-88

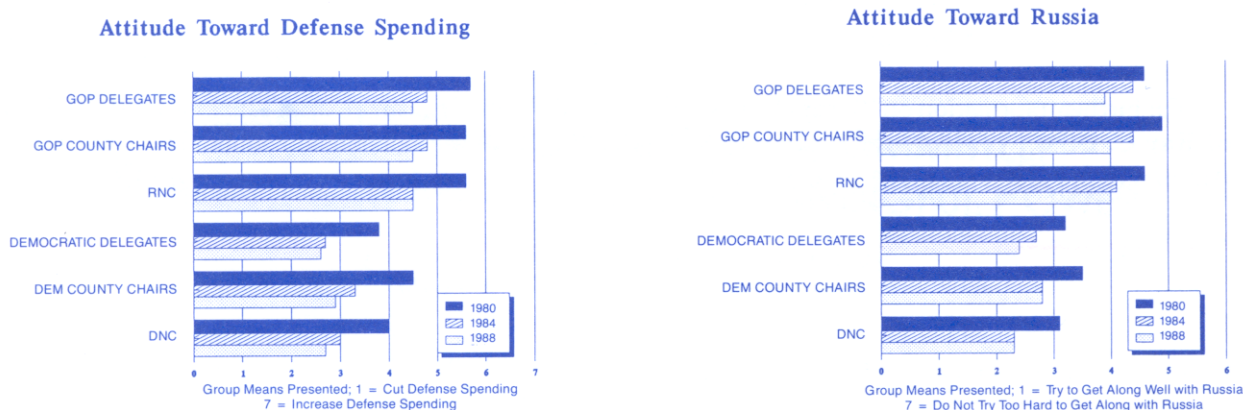
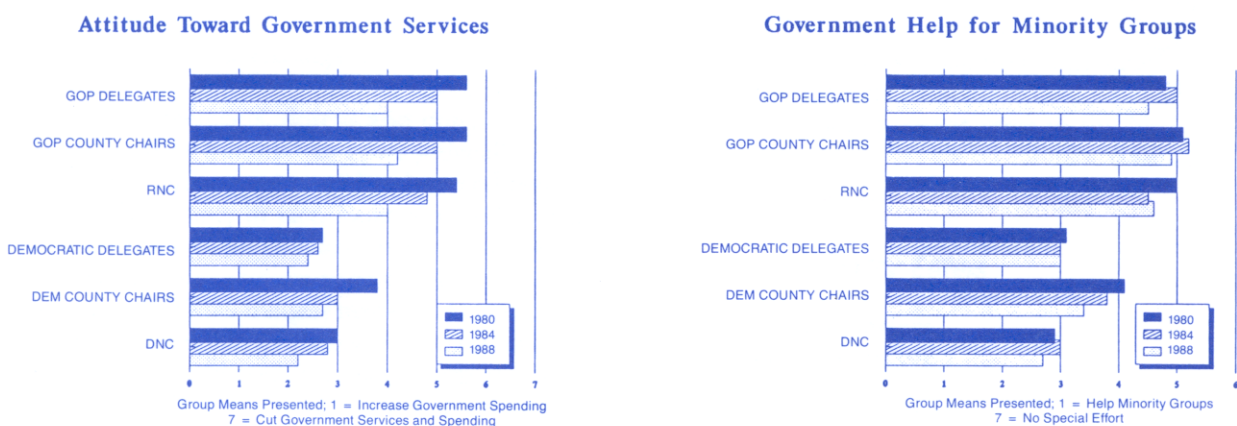


FIGURE VI
Domestic Policy Attitudes, 1980-88



Group and over-time comparisons from this study can be found in John S. Jackson III, Barbara Leavitt Brown and David Bositis, 1982. “Herbert McCloskey and Friends Revisited: 1980 Democratic and Republican Elites Compared to the Mass Public.” *AMERICAN POLITICS QUARTERLY*: 10:158-180. Denise L. Baer and David A. Bositis, 1988, *ELITE CADRES AND PARTY COALITIONS: REPRESENTING THE PUBLIC IN PARTY POLITICS*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press). Denise L. Baer and David A. Bositis, (1992, forthcoming), *POLITICAL PARTIES, INTEREST GROUPS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN POLITICS IN THE POST-REFORM ERA*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall).

Conference on
GRASS ROOTS POLITICS AND PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

The Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at The University of Akron will sponsor a conference in Akron, Ohio, on **“Grass Roots Politics and Party Organizations: The Leadership Model of Ray C. Bliss” on September 12-13, 1991.** David Broder of *The Washington Post* will be the keynote speaker.

The following topics will be covered:

- Republican and Democrat leadership styles
- Party building activities
- Party policy alternatives
- Roundtable on parties and political scientists
- Roundtable on Ray Bliss as a party leader

For further information on **“Grass Roots Politics and Party Organizations: The Leadership Model of Ray C. Bliss,”** contact: Holly Harris-Bane, Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, The University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325-1904, (216) 972-5182.

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