

Ronald Keith Gaddie. *Born to Run: Origins of the Political Career*. (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), pp. 221. \$26.95 ISBN 0-7425-1928-7 hc

Born to Run details nine case studies in the pursuit for elective office to the state legislature from five states, Georgia, Maine, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Wisconsin. All the candidates are young. It is part of a new series of books devoted to both the theory and practice of politics, *Campaigning American Style*, Rowman and Littlefield publishers. Dr. Gaddie provides an insider's view of campaign life, the emotional rollercoaster, where you are only as good as your last speech, ad, flyer, or knocked door. Professor Gaddie may have borrowed the title of his book from Bruce Springsteen's album, he also could have used either "Thunder Road", or "Backstreets". It is a report from the campaign trail and is the story, or stories, of the very beginning of the political career with a unique look forward, rather than the more typical backward career mapping.

Dr. Gaddie follows each race through the lens of the candidate's youth which is a rarity, yet within the context of today's political environment, diffused and fragmented political power, candidate centered races, ambition, weakened parties, term limits, and important groups and individuals. He builds upon the important work and observational research of his mentor, Richard Fenno, in *Home Style*, by observing the political process first hand. This is reality political science. I know. I was 27 years old when first elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives and served four terms.

His work includes an analysis of the important question of why young people run in the first place and related considerations such as nativity, which he states, is highest in Oklahoma. The author finds that political ambition, especially progressive political ambition, is most prevalent among the young, especially the activists, and these early starters who get into office before they reach thirty-five are the ones who go farthest in American politics. Brad Carson, Dan Boren, Kalyn Free, Brad Henry, and others this election year could provide excellent local examples for added discussion.

Gaddie believes that all of the young politicians described in his book are closer to professionals than amateurs. "They are making career choices because they want to be in government, but not on the basis of any one issue," he states. While all nine candidates and their districts vary widely – male, female, urban, rural, Democrat, Republican, single, married – commonality is found in the following observations. All candidates benefited from a core inner circle of support that provided financial connections, as well as emotional and political advice with established networks. Most had strong civic ties and mentor type relationships with well known politicians. They had a head start with the powers that be and they planned and began their campaigns as early as possible. The candidates largely managed their own campaigns and were self-motivated. All ran intense grassroots campaigns that were issue-oriented. And all knew their districts well enough to allow the uniqueness of the district help dictate the style and mode of the campaign.

Once elected, policy concerns were simply an extension of the campaign and the needs of the district as well as the ambition of the newly elected legislator. Gaddie observes how age quickly can cease to be an issue within a legislative body given individual personality, talent, dedication, and hard work as he follows freshmen in their first years of office. He concludes with a discussion on the evolution of ambition as observed in the profiled young candidates and elected officials.

For interested readers and scholars, Professor Gaddie continues to provide a tracking of the progress of those he has labeled "The Young Guns," all 27 candidates for legislative office in the state of Oklahoma under 30 this year, on his website www.soonerpolitics.com.

Born to Run could easily inspire any undergraduate or graduate student of politics, much in the same way Keith Gaddie describes his

reaction, as an undergraduate at Florida State University, to reading *Home Style* by Richard F. Fenno, Jr., “That is what I want to do.”

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