

# Heroes Wanted

There was a time when Americans looked upon their elected officials as heroes, when ethics violations and scandals were the exception rather than the rule, and when hiding behind the power of office was a virtually unknown practice. But where are our modern heroic statesmen? Don't be surprised if it takes you a minute to name one. When we evaluate the character of public officials today, we simply shrug and say to each other, "Well, what do you expect? He is a politician." If the electorate's expectations of an officeholder are low, is it surprising when his performance reflects that?

In the late 1800s, Americans twice elected Grover Cleveland as President of the United States. Cleveland was

not elected because he was anybody's "sweetheart," or because he made promises to powerful interest groups. In today's vernacular he might be described as "charismatically challenged," which is another way of saying that President Cleveland told it like it was. He was known for being brutally honest, and people always knew where they stood with him. Voters of that time found Cleveland's integrity refreshing and endearing. They respected him and found him easy to follow. He was their hero.

Fast forward to 1992, when the people of Michigan enacted statewide term limits. This initiative has led to an unprecedented development in 1998: At least 58 percent of Michigan's House of Representatives seats will turn over.



James E. Kostrova,  
Vice President for Development

Compare that to historical incumbent reelection rates of greater than 80 or even 90 percent. This presents a tremendous opportunity for change. Accordingly, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy is establishing a Statesmanship Training Program. This program will prepare for office candidates who understand basic economic principles and who are able to communicate them effectively and apply them to public policy issues. Today's

Mackinac Center statesmanship trainees will become tomorrow's Grover Cleverlands.

It is not too much to expect leaders to provide leadership; neither is it inconceivable that public officials should be heroes. Or, as Cleveland himself said, "[T]hose who worthily seek public employment have the right to insist that merit and competency shall be recognized instead of the surrender of honest political belief."

Your Mackinac Center support will help a new generation of political leaders put sound economics and cultural advancement into practice. **!**