
D.A. CANDIDATES JOIN IN DEBATE

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Jewish Community Cen-
ter Sponsors Panel

By BILL MONGELLUZZO

Incumbent strength in the district attorney's office, the prosecution of repeat offenders and plea bargaining were the major issues discussed in a debate by three of the four candidates for the office of district attorney Tuesday night.

The auditorium of the Jewish Community Center was packed for what was scheduled to be the first major political appearance of incumbent Jim Garrison since his acquittal on charges of bribery in pinball operations.

Garrison did not show up for the panel discussion sponsored by the Council of Jewish Women and Figaro, and his empty chair prompted one of the more heated discussions of the night.

"He (Garrison) was not here in the debates four years ago, and he won easily," candidate George Reese said. "Five months ago he had impregnable support."

Reese, as well as the other candidates Harry Connick and Ross Scaccia, said the incumbent in any office, and the district attorney's office especially, wields tremendous power.

"The incumbent is the man I want to address my questions to," Connick said. "My fight is against the DA's office, but how do you get him here?"

The general agreement that an incumbent district attorney can build up a strong constituency led to a discussion of limiting the office of the DA to two terms.

Reese and Scaccia were in favor of limiting the office to two terms. "This city has a peculiar political system," Reese said. "Through his tremendous influence the DA can build up little spheres of influence. Making a candidate run for re-election does not solve this problem."

Connick said he was opposed to limiting the candidate to two terms because he said district attorneys of many years experience in several cities have built efficient offices.

The issues of plea bargaining and sentence bargaining provided another lively debate. Although all three candidates saw merit in allowing multiple-of-

fenders to plead guilty to a lesser crime in some cases, Connick was explicit in what he called abuse of the system.

"If a man is indicted for murder, he should be prosecuted for murder. Sixty per cent of murder cases have served reduced sentences. Fifty per cent of the rape cases have been allowed to plead guilty to a lesser charge," he said.

Mrs. William Buchsbaum, president of the Council of Jewish Women, said Garrison was expected to attend the debate and did not call to explain his absence.

Although he did not send a signed statement saying he would appear, a spokesman in his office assured her repeatedly he would show up, Mrs. Buchsbaum said.