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The Impact of Terror

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REFLECTIONS ON TERROR AND LIBERTY



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All three Western New York congressmen came to UB to discuss the intersection of civil liberties and the war on terror

The impact of terror

We are Americans, and we cannot allow terrorists to stop us from being Americans,” said Thomas M. Reynolds, R-Clarence, during a rare appearance of Western New York’s entire congressional delegation – the three men who represent the area in the House of Representatives. The occasion was an informative and challenging “On the Issues” program on March 3 in UB’s Center for Tomorrow.

Sponsored by UB Law School, the American Jewish Committee and the League of Women Voters, the forum dealt with a wide range of issues involving civil liberties and church-state questions. In a national climate of heightened alert over the possibility of further terrorism, and amid pressure in some circles to abridge constitutionally mandated freedoms for the sake of national security, the topic was one that hit close to home. More than 200 were in attendance.

UB Law Associate Dean Ilene R. Fleischmann was program chair and also served as moderator for the program, which featured each congressman in turn responding to four major questions. The members of Congress – John J. LaFalce, D-Town of Tonawanda; Jack F. Quinn, R-Hamburg; and Thomas M. Reynolds, R-Clarence – have widely differing backgrounds and political constituencies, but the night was free of partisan political rancor. “It does not make any difference that I am a Democrat and they are Republicans,” LaFalce said. “We really have a very, very good working relationship. We try to find areas of agreement.”

The intersection of civil liberties and the war on terror formed the basis of one compelling round of discussion. “The challenge is to watch and make sure we have not given away too much of our freedom,” said Reynolds. “One of the



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– John J. LaFalce



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– Jack F. Quinn



“The challenge is to watch and make sure we have not given away too much of our freedom.”

– Thomas M. Reynolds

“After 9/11, the concepts of freedom and order must be recalibrated.”



things I was concerned about was giving the Justice Department that blank check. So I supported the sunset provision for some of these laws that allow for expanded law enforcement powers. I am not sure we have achieved a solution that should be permanent in America.”

LaFalce said he had some misgivings about the police-friendly USA Patriot Act, though he voted for it. He was able to have included in that act a money-laundering bill he had been working on for years. “After 9/11,” LaFalce said, “the concepts of freedom and order must be recalibrated. You give greater deference to the concept of order. But I think we have swung the pendulum too far in the direction of order.” However, he is conflicted, the congressman said: “So often I want to stand up and say, ‘51 percent of LaFalce votes one way on this bill, and the other 49 percent votes the other way.’”

“Our second role besides making laws is our role of oversight,” Quinn said, “our role of making sure there is not a knee-jerk reaction even to something as terrible as Sept. 11. It will be just as important that we review what is presented to us as making and drafting legislation.”

On immigration policy, all three congressmen were in

agreement that immigration should be encouraged, but with a greater emphasis on screening out potential terrorists.

“I think we can become a greater country if we permit more immigration in the United States rather than putting the Statue of Liberty aside,” LaFalce said. “But I do not think we have to be stupid about our immigration policy, either. We have to be much more discriminating in our issuance of visas. That is where I think we should concentrate our efforts.”

“We cannot have it both ways,” Quinn said. “In order to be smart about immigration, it costs money for the people and the technology involved. Some very tough decisions will have to be made.”

Reynolds said, “I think we can have a generous immigration policy but with stronger controls. It is OK to say, ‘Yes, we welcome you here, but we need to know something about you.’ I think that is fair.”