UP FRONT AND PERSONAL
Ray Kelly for Vice President
BY BILL REEL

A recent Ellen Goodman column in the Boston Globe implied John Kerry not to run for president in 2008. Goodman wrote that although she voted for Kerry in 2004, she's convinced he lacks what it takes to get elected. She apologized for weighing in on the 2008 election so far in advance but felt compelled to try to dissuade Kerry from running.

Again, I didn't say whom she favored in 2008, but don't be surprised if she ends up in Sen. Hillary Clinton's corner.

Goodman's piece prompts the announcement of my preferred ticket for 2008: McCain-Kelly.

Why John McCain for president? So far nobody but the Arizona senator stands first in any of the early polls. I can't say I agree with him on everything he comes across as honest, intelligent, trustworthy and — this is very important — electable.

Why New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly for vice president?

Back in the 1980s and '90s I often got together with Msgr. John McCallough, who at the time was pastor of St. Anthony's Church in Greenpoint and also an NYFD chaplain, a position he held for 20 years. A topic of conversation at lunch or dinner with the monsignor was his opinion of various city officials and police officials he encountered in the course of his duties. A calm, deliberate, charismatic man, he seldom overdid praise or criticism. But I remember he always spoke highly of Ray Kelly, whom he'd met before Kelly rose to the top of the department. Kelly was a captain when the monsignor formed his opinion of him.

The monsignor was a retired Army chaplain who had served in Vietnam, parachuting into combat situations with the 173rd Airborne. He greatly admired leadership, and he thought Kelly excelled at it.

To me, Msgr. McCallough — who died in 2004, God rest his soul — was a great priest and a great man, so naturally I took his opinions very seriously. They’re still as good as ever as far as I'm concerned.

A couple of years ago I ran into a retired cop who, when on the job in East Harlem, was known for cracking down on drugs. He loved to lock up drug dealers. He might have been something of a cowboy. Anyway, I asked him why he'd retired early, and he frowned and said, "Ray Kelly has got everybody fighting ter- rors instead of drug dealers."

I had to laugh. Knowing this cop’s reputation, and allowing for hyperbole, I interpreted his remark to mean that the commissioner had expanded the job to include protecting New Yorkers from terrorism.

Then a year or so ago, The New Yorker ran a long article about how Kelly had transformed the department to deter terrorists. And more recently a 60 Minutes report delivered the same message.

Most voters probably think that a strong defense against terrorism should be the first priority of any administration. So I say let McCain choose Ray Kelly as his running mate and announce that if elected he’d put Vice President Kerry in charge of antiterrorism.

Isn’t that what you want?

That’s great! Voters are leery of politicians. Politics doesn’t seem to work so well lately. Generally speaking, it appears the Republicans are incompetent and the Democrats are decadent. A nonpolitical running for vice president should inspire confidence in the ticket.

But, the skeptic will ask, can Kelly campaign? Does he know how to go about shaking hands and kissing babies? Does he have any of the conventional political skills shouldn’t be a disadvantage. Let McCain do the campaigning. Vice presidential nominee Ray Kelly could stay right where he is, doing exactly what he’s doing, and if the McCain-Kelly ticket triumphs he could resign as police commissioner and, in January '09, go to Washington and get to work.

I used to think Ray Kelly would be the next mayor of New York City. He’s the obvious choice, but it says here he’s needed at the national level — as vice presi- dent of the United States.

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