
The 2004 Elections Are They as Pivotal as the Candidates Say?

A Symposium

In July, American Experiment president Mitch Pearlstein asked a number of friends and colleagues to answer the question of whether the upcoming elections—local, state, and national—are as pivotal as those in the midst of campaigning would have us believe. Forty-four writers responded.

It Depends on Who Gets the W **Grant H. Abbott**

Is this election the equivalent of the Red Sox selling Ruth to Yankees? Not if you're a Republican, but it is if you're a Democrat and the Republicans win.

If the Republicans lose this election, they know that the Yankees can't keep Ruth for more than eight years. Besides, they loved the Clinton years. Bill and Hillary personified all that they thought was evil in the world. That enabled them to rally the forces to fight against the embodiments of evil that were tearing down the fabric of moral and Christian society. If the Democrats win the election, Republicans won't have to defend the mess

they're making of the country, and they will be able to focus their energy on combating the evil Democrats. Their thoughtful leaders will take the time articulating what they believe is an even more compelling case for why the Republicans should lead the country. And if the Democrats have failed after four years to create their own compelling vision for why they should lead the country, the Republicans will return to power in national politics. It's not enough for Democrats to be "anybody but Bush" or simply anti-Republican.

If the Republicans win this election and keep control of Congress, it will be as catastrophic as losing Ruth. If Republicans ever had any modesty

about how they came to power under George Bush, it will be gone, and they will assume the election is a divine anointing of their vision for America and the world. Republicans will be able to remake the federal judiciary and the Supreme Court. People of color will be told they have a level playing field in America, even if their end is well below that of their white counterparts. Democrats fear that their loyal opposition to Republican policies will now be considered not just opposition, but heresy, something to be stamped out. What had been political debate will become theological disputation. Democrats will not just be Republican opponents, but the enemies of God. Belief in science (especially the theory of evolution), reason, and a secular, pluralistic state that were central to the founding philosophy of this country will be cause for suspicion. America's new security mission of making the world safe for democracy and capitalism will go ahead with all its pre-emptive enthusiasm, even if it makes America less secure.

Needless to say, this prospect energizes Democrats and the not-Bush Republicans of this country. Democrats and not-Bush Republicans see the theological tinge of the new Bush Republican crusade, and it scares the hell out of them. It scares them so much that they're into some passionate political action of their own.

Now, if the Democrats win, they unfortunately may not hang on long, because when you're in power, you usually don't spend a lot of time thinking about a new vision for America. But

Democrats must develop a new vision for America that can bridge the current divide between liberals and conservatives and unite the country, if they expect to lead the country into the future.

So, I'm not sure the Democrats win even with the Babe, but I fear the worst for my country, as a Democrat, if the Republicans get the Babe in 2004.

Rev. Grant Abbott is executive director of the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches.

A Political Richter Scale for Minnesota

Pat Anderson

Political pundits and party hacks routinely bill each election as "the most pivotal election in our nation's history" and there are plenty of arguments for building a case that this election will be pivotal: the War on Terror, the polarization of the American electorate, taxation policy, potential appointments to the Supreme Court, the deficit. The list goes on.

Only with the benefit of hindsight do we know which elections are truly pivotal. But, the upcoming election could prove to be pivotal in defining a permanent political change in Minnesota.

For many years, Minnesota was known as a bastion of Midwestern liberalism. Its beginnings as a hotbed for the populist Grange movement of the nineteenth century, the progressive movement in the early twentieth century, and its multitude of nationally known liberal politicians, certainly played a role in creating that reputation.

Despite our state's liberal reputation, conservatives have consistently played prominent roles in Minnesota's leadership. Conservatives of some stripe have dominated recent gubernatorial elections. The mostly fiscally conservative Arne Carlson, the sometime conservative Jesse Ventura, and the all-around conservative Tim Pawlenty won the last four elections. The same state that elected liberals Walter Mondale, Paul Wellstone, and Mark Dayton sent Republicans David Durenberger, Rudy Boschwitz, Rod Grams and Norm Coleman to the U.S. Senate.

The true tipping point in Minnesota politics was in 1992 when Ross Perot and George H.W. Bush together outpolled Bill Clinton. Starting in 1994, Republican candidates for the state House collectively began to receive more votes than their DFL counterparts.

Viewed with some perspective, Perot, and later Jesse Ventura, appear to be transition politicians. They did not, as some have said, represent a movement to the middle, rather a movement to the right. They gave traditional, conservative Democrats a place to go without having to move completely into the Republican column. Tim Penny's failed campaign for governor is evidence that the transition is over and that the major parties (mostly the Republican Party) have adjusted to the new political reality.

You can argue that this transition was the result of demographic change; you can argue that it was a philosophical change; you can even argue that it was a Minnesota-nice style tax revolt.

You cannot, however, argue with the results.

In 1998, the Republicans took control of the Minnesota House. Not only did they take control, they did so under a redistricting plan that no impartial observer would characterize as a level playing field. In 2000, the wave continued as a third Republican congressional representative was elected and President Bush came much closer to capturing Minnesota's electoral votes than his father or Bob Dole ever did.

The transitional movement to the right culminated in 2002 when Minnesota elected a Republican governor, U.S. senator, secretary of state, state auditor, and four U.S. congressmen. In addition, with a newer, fairer redistricting plan drawn by the courts, Republicans gained a supermajority in the state house of representatives and dramatically closed the gap in the state senate.

And now in 2004, both parties admit that Minnesota, the state that has gone longer than any other state since casting electoral votes for a Republican, is in play in the presidential election.

The real question now is this: Is this transitional adjustment a permanent shift right-of-center, or are we a narrowly divided state in the midst of a temporary swing of the political pendulum?

The coming election will serve as a sort of political Richter scale. We will see if the rightward shift that started in the 1990s has been evidence of slight political tremors or of major seismic activity that has created a new and permanent political landscape.

If President Bush wins Minnesota, and if the Republicans in the state house maintain their huge majority, it would be hard to deny that Minnesota has taken a permanent step to right of center and is the home of an emerging Republican majority.

However, if the president is unable to win and the house majority evaporates, our state may indeed be a microcosm of the nation; a polarized electorate that generates close elections for the foreseeable future.

Pat Anderson is Minnesota's state auditor.

Which Measuring Stick?

Robert C. Andringa

I have mixed feelings on this question. As a former congressional staffer, aide to a governor, head of a think tank for state political leaders, and now a sometime lobbyist on behalf of Christian colleges and universities, I respond "yes!" As a citizen who has now voted for over forty years, I think, "I'm not sure."

Presidents come and go. Our government has a wonderful system of checks and balances. Presidents of one persuasion often surprise us by doing something we thought "only the other guy" could have done. Democracy has a way of finding common ground, usually a centrist conclusion, even when a presidential candidate or "rising star" in Congress promises to reform this or reform that.

Looking back, I remember other elections which seemed, as this one does, to have major ramifications for the future of society. Will Kerry get us

out of an unpleasant war sooner than Bush? Will either candidate have as much impact on the economy as Mr. Greenspan? Or is our global economy immune to any one leader? Who can appoint judges that act the way the pundits predict? What can any president do when we are at war and deficits are up to our eyeballs? This is all hard for me to tell. So maybe this year is not much different than others. I do think government works best when one party does not hold both houses of Congress and the White House.

So what questions should one use in coming to a decision on how to vote? It looks as though a rather small group of independent and swing voters will tip the balance of a sharply divided and almost evenly split electorate this year. I am saddened by this divisiveness and hope some force will return the unity we relished after 9/11.

Here are the questions that I am sorting through:

- Which president would bring appointees to Washington who are motivated by "quality service to all" rather than a "what can we do for our interest group" mentality?
- Which president would appoint Supreme Court justices and other judges who will interpret and not try to make laws?
- Since values drive choices, and both candidates talk about values, which set of values should I use as my measuring stick?
- Which candidate has the best chance of working with a politically divided Congress?

As a Christian leader interested in preserving religious liberties for people of all faiths, this is an additional factor for me in choosing among candidates. As an educator, I also want candidates who respect knowledge and look for evidence that holds off simplistic ideology. Come to think of it, this may be a pivotal election after all.

Robert C. Andringa is president of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities in Washington, D.C.

It's Pivotal for the 'U'

Frank Berman

This is an important election for the future of the University of Minnesota. The race for the White House dominates the news, but we must also focus on local legislative races. The actions of federal and state officials are imposing intense budgetary pressure on higher education, and the issue is barely mentioned. The experience of our university is a case in point.

Put plainly, the university cannot sustain any more reductions in governmental support. The result will be programmatic deletions that will permanently damage the institution, its faculty, and its current and future students.

Over the past two years the Legislature has continued to cut higher education by 15 percent each year; and the state contribution to the university budget has declined for the last ten years, from 34 percent to 26 percent. That has taken its toll in repeated annual double-digit increases in tuition and a faculty whose salary is twenty-

eighth out of thirty in its peer group. The adverse effect on student access and faculty retention is clear. That has led to the ultimate but inevitable result of an institution under budgetary siege.

The faculty is the linchpin. It educates, researches, and conducts the vast, but somewhat unappreciated, public service of the university. We have the greatest, broadest assemblage of teachers, researchers, and experts in the country—it is second to none among public research universities. This remarkable collection has been gathered in the few square miles of our campuses as a result of years of massive effort, and a huge investment; it is now at risk. That faculty cannot endure and prosper with salary freezes, then skimpy annual increases of 2.5 percent, caused by ever shrinking governmental support. Indeed, competition for all faculty—especially for the best—is fierce and cannot be fended off for very long.

The access and quality of higher education is critical. The university trains the professionals, business and civic leaders, and intellectual power that contributes to the greatness of Minnesota. What would this state be without the 11,000 graduates a year who are a continuous supply of intellect and talent for our state? Without this great research university, Minnesota would not even resemble what it now is—a state with a quality of life that virtually all others seek to emulate.

The faculty does the research for Minnesota. It accounts for more than 98 percent of the \$500 million in sponsored research funds awarded to Minnesota colleges and universities each

year. The university creates nearly \$10 billion in economic activity each year, and that doesn't take into account the multiplier effect of technology transfer and the 230 new firms that have been created in Minnesota because of university discoveries in the past six years.

The university and its faculty provide public service that is unparalleled throughout the nation, and that, too, is threatened by declining levels of governmental support.

The University of Minnesota is the single most important institution in making this state the envy of the rest of the nation. So, as this election approaches we must ask all candidates whether they will recognize these truths about higher education and the university or if they will continue to impose reductions in support due to parochial concerns of special interest groups, regional interests, or political considerations. We must insist that they recognize the truth. There is no cause or institution that deserves and warrants stronger support than higher education and the University of Minnesota.

Frank Berman, a business lawyer, is a member of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents.

Big Consequences, Tough Choices

Clint Bolick

The 2004 presidential election likely will bode important ramifications, but not for the issues that concern people most. Given the candidates' relatively similar views on many issues—and the closely divided Congress that will

paralyze with inertia any president's grand schemes—the election likely won't matter much in terms of such headline-grabbing issues as the war in Iraq, terrorism, taxes, education, and entitlements.

But it will have two inevitable consequences which, frankly, suggest opposite courses of action for freedom-minded Americans.

This election matters less for the presidency or Congress than it does for the third branch. The new president almost certainly will choose at least two, and as many as four, members of the U.S. Supreme Court (plus roughly one-quarter of lower federal court judges). Those appointments will mark the course of American jurisprudence for decades.

The current court—though it has tilted to the left in the past couple of years—is the proudest domestic legacy of the Reagan years. It has protected private property rights, freedom of speech, and school choice; and has reined in both past judicial excesses and governmental overreaching. It's far from a perfect court, but still a far cry from the painful era of Warren court activism in which the judiciary served as an appendage to left-wing advocacy groups. From that perspective, Bush's worst appointee likely would be better than Kerry's best, and depending on who creates the vacancy, a single appointment could shift the balance on the court. High stakes? It's tough to imagine any domestic issue more important, for the court's decisions directly touch the freedoms and opportunities of every American.

The other big impact the election inevitably will have is on the future of the Republican Party, and that cuts in the opposite direction. Over the past four years, the Bush administration has jettisoned basic principles that limited-government Republicans hold dear. Re-electing this administration will appear to ratify a veering course that includes massive federal deficits; unfunded federal mandates; sweeping new entitlement programs; farm and corporate subsidies; nation building; ominous constraints on individual freedoms; and a war whose justification is shaky at best yet has cost precious American lives, destabilized our allies, fueled anti-Americanism, and diverted resources away from the war against terrorism. Even those Republicans who support the war but are true to conservative principles will find this administration's overall policies troubling.

Moreover, this administration carried the proud banner of "compassionate conservatism," yet (apart from vouchers for the District of Columbia) has done nothing to reach out to minorities, immigrants, and the poor to extend the blessings of freedom and create among them a vested interest in the American system. Given the demographic changes occurring in our country, the Republican Party's cynical posture seems calculated to consign it to permanent minority party status.

In that regard, a resounding defeat for the current administration would force the Republican Party to rediscover its root principles and to present a more positive and coherent program to

the American people. Remember that it was two years of Bill Clinton that gave us the Republican revolution of 1994 and the Contract with America.

As a Republican whose party attachment has not wavered since I was a teenager but is fleeting now, I wonder what my party stands for today. It certainly is no longer the party of Lincoln, and I have profound doubts over whether it is any longer the party of Reagan. The outcome of this presidential election may well determine whether the party remains one that seems to value preserving power for its own sake—or one that earns power in order to advance freedom. If so, it may require a painful momentary loss to get us where we truly want to go.

Clint Bolick is a lawyer in Phoenix, Arizona.

The Tail is the Dog

Joshua Borenstein

After having watched the past Minnesota legislative session hijacked by a group of state officials willing to play politics with our lives and needs, I have a radical idea—let's abolish all elected officials. Every citizen votes Republican or Democrat in each branch of government. The majority party wins, and their platform is automatically ratified by their election. Think of the time and money we could save.

Perhaps my idea is not so radical? How far are we from that reality today? How many elected officials are prepared to "consider" a position outside their party's mantra? How many are prepared to go against a large party

contributor for the sake of the people they are elected to represent? How many are not mere pawns in big party politics?

Have you noticed the ever-rising number of elected officials and candidates who want to be elected for the power that comes with it? They are found in both parties and at every level—national, state, and local. These are people with no core beliefs, who contribute nothing to society. They are never-ending wellsprings of political angles and calculations, which they apply to every issue, no matter how large or small, no matter how little we care. They may have had values at one time, but the quest for or the realization of power buried their sense of right and wrong long ago.

When we hear elected officials say, “I know I should support this issue, but I won’t, because I don’t want to give the governor a victory,” it’s time for a drastic change. They were not elected to help get a member of their party elected governor, senator, or president. They were not elected to serve their party. They were elected to serve the people. No one is elected for the purpose of creating political capital. Political capital is a fringe benefit, earned by service. It cannot be the objective of the position.

The tail is not just wagging the dog. The tail is the dog. One wonders, often, if there is anything the candidate really cares about other than being elected.

Should we be shocked when the Democratic mayor of St. Paul risks the wrath of his political party and supports

President Bush because he feels Bush would be the best president? Is it worthy of newspaper headlines when Governor Pawlenty takes a stand on issues not in line with his fellow Republicans (light rail, prescriptions from Canada)? However disappointed their parties may be, we should be encouraging them for having political honesty. How sad it was that so many people praised the late Senator Wellstone by saying, “He truly believed in his cause.” Are we so destitute of people who are true to their beliefs that we actually must consider this an aberration, a rarity in politics, an unexpected good attribute? Unfortunately, by our own admission, we are.

Today’s elected officials need to serve the country and make the right decisions for the people. Every day when they step into their office they need to say to themselves and their peers, “Forget the politics. What is the best way I can serve the citizens I was elected to represent?”

How do you know if the politician is genuine? Here are some telltale signs:

- They constantly accuse their opponents of playing politics, with no evidence for that accusation. They see everything—even the most serious issues—as nothing more than “politics.” Maybe because it’s they see and do everything for politics. Sometimes one sees in others very accurate reflections of themselves.
- They come down on both sides of almost all issues, especially the big ones facing society today. (Kerry on

the war, marriage, abortion, and more).

- They hold up the entire political process to try to protect themselves from making a vote that could play poorly to the public.
- If they refuse to allow the people to vote on an issue or a candidate (marriage amendment, New Jersey governor).

It behooves all of us to pull support from all nominees who are in pursuit of power, regardless of party. We need candidates who believe in a cause other than their own election or reelection.

Rabbi Joshua Borenstein is the executive director of Torah Academy of Minneapolis.

Just Ask Franklin Pierce

Rudy Boschwitz

Every election—particularly presidential elections—is seen as pivotal for the nation, indeed, for the world. Certainly the candidates believe it to be the case. This is seconded by handlers, publicists, and speechwriters who do their best to convince the public and, particularly, the candidate's base of the pivotal nature of the campaign of the moment.

I recently watched Larry King interview George and Laura Bush. He asked them if this election was pivotal and then, as an afterthought said: "I suppose every candidate thinks his election is pivotal. Franklin Pierce probably thought his was, too." Larry ought to read his history. Pierce served from 1853-57—a very pivotal time for our country.

So how does the election of 2004 rank on the pivotal scale? And am I, a much-involved partisan (finance chairman of Minnesota for President Bush) the right person to make such an assessment. Here's a surprise: I think I am. It has to do with history, who I am, and how history has touched me and my family.

Terrorism is a terrible thing. It is complicated by the presence of weapons of mass destruction. The ruthlessness of the terrorists removes any doubt of their using such weapons if they can obtain them. Just an ounce and a half of anthrax powder closed down Senate buildings in Washington for weeks and caused several deaths. It is not hard to imagine how—despite our best efforts—extensive damage and loss of life can be inflicted on one of our cities in this open society.

But having said that, terrorism is not of the same threat level as were the Nazis in the early 1940s with their Japanese allies, or the nuclear confrontation of the Cold War. Terrorism, as bad as it is, does not compare to the threat of thousands of MIRVed nuclear warheads that could have ended civilization—even by accident!

Without underestimating the threat, terrorism must not be thought to have the upper hand against the free world. Terrorists must hide and constantly be on the move to prevent discovery. They do not have the legitimacy of a government nor the cash flow it can facilitate and provide. Arms must be purchased secretly. Communications are not easy and subject to detection. They have the

advantages of surprise and fanaticism, but they operate with many restraints. It won't be easy, but I believe we will get our arms around terrorism and defeat it as an international threat. It will take focus. It will require much determination. It may not be quick. It definitely will not be easy. It is a serious threat.

Throughout my life there have been many forms of evil and many tyrants. Most politicians and statesmen have tried to placate, appease, buy off, or negotiate with tyranny and evil. The results have been devastating. Of my family that remained in Europe during WWII, only one survived. On the other hand, some leaders—Churchill, Truman, Reagan, Thatcher and now George W. Bush—have looked tyranny in the eye and said: “You can't do that, and if you don't cease and desist, we're going to take you out.”

The world has become a better place because of the grit of such leaders. So when you have one, it is wise to retain him. Terrorism does make this election pivotal. Given another four years, I believe that the United States under the leadership of George W. Bush will get the upper hand on terrorism and will change the face of the Middle East for the better. He has the focus, determination, political courage, and staying power to make it happen.

So this is indeed a pivotal election and George W. Bush is the right man for these times.

Rudy Boschwitz represented Minnesota in the U.S. Senate from 1979 to 1991.

The Election and the Family

Allan Carlson

The great contemporary contest in family policy is between an agenda that promotes the autonomy, fecundity, and stability of the natural family and an alternate agenda favoring a “post family” order as found in the advanced welfare states of the European Union. Will the American electoral contest of 2004 rest on this fault line?

It could. The administration of George W. Bush has given real attention and expended honest political capital to advance the first agenda. Unlike Ronald Reagan, whose positive instincts on these questions were frustrated by senior staff hostility, or George H.W. Bush, who talked “family values” but never seemed to understand them, the current president has given social conservatives a full seat at his policy table and has affirmed their agenda.

There have been real gains. Regarding taxes, this administration pressed hard to raise the Child Tax Credit to \$1,000 (the central recommendation of the 1991 National Commission on Children) and to begin rolling back the “marriage penalty” in a way favoring traditional families. Mr. Bush placed key persons in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services who shifted policy to favor marriage promotion and protection and to end the neo-Malthusian aversion to child birth and family formation. Mr. Bush also crafted a team at the United Nations who completely frustrated the

social policy schemes—"gender role" engineering, children's rights, population control—that dominated that institution during the 1990s. The looming twenty-first century danger of depopulation even received attention from the Bush team.

Finally, this president took political risks to counter the "surprise" judicial innovation of the last few years: same-sex marriage. He pressed for a constitutional amendment to protect the traditional conception of marriage from judicial reinterpretation. "Traditional marriage between a man and a woman has served society and civilization well," he recently told an audience in Ohio.

Meanwhile, the Democrats and their presidential candidate John Kerry veer close to the European "post-family" agenda. Relative to family autonomy, the 2004 platform does state that "family is the center of everyday American life" and that "a strong America begins in the home." And it is true that Mr. Kerry has urged retention of the \$1,000 per child tax credit and of recent repairs to the income tax's "marriage penalty." However, the Democratic platform deliberately offers no coherent definition of "family" and it moves, in non sequitur style, from the affirmation of strong families to an advocacy for more government intervention and spending in health care, public education, and environmental protection.

Regarding fecundity, Mr. Kerry clearly embraces the population control agenda. Domestically, he serves as co-sponsor of a measure that would

double federal spending for Title X birth control clinics. Looking overseas, he vowed on World Population Day (July 11) to "reverse" the "short-sighted and unwarranted" policies of the Bush administration and to "restore full U.S. funding to the U.N. Population Fund."

Regarding the nature of the family, Mr. Kerry has stated that he opposes same-sex marriage, favoring instead "partnership and civil unions." And yet, he has never acted on this belief, voting against the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act and opposing (while actively avoiding the recent vote on) the Federal Marriage Amendment. Moreover, aspiring first lady Teresa Heinz Kerry assured "gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered" delegates to the Democratic Convention that she would be for them "a mom in the White House." It may not be entirely cynical to conclude that Mr. Kerry yearns to embrace gay marriage . . . sometime after the election.

Will Americans follow the West Europeans into a "post family" order resting on weak homes, meaningless marriages, depopulation, and universal dependence on the state? Or will they affirm a home-centered, child-rich, growth-oriented, small-government future? The 2004 election may decide.

Allan Carlson is president of the Howard Center and distinguished fellow in family policy for the Family Research Council.

An Election Made of Words?

Barry Casselman

The question, "Does the 2004 national election matter?" has many

answers, depending on whom the answer is for. Senator Kerry, for example, has said that “it is the most important election in my lifetime” as Democrats desperately struggle to regain lost power. Republicans, with Reaganism still the dominant political ideology in the country, may not see it quite that way, knowing that conservative principles are likely to direct and constrain even a new Democratic president. For the populist or otherwise radical left cultural elite in America, the election has taken on aspects of a quasi-religious experience—attempting to create a secular version of a crusade to defeat George W. Bush, their devil incarnate (although he is a deeply religious born-again Christian). To independent voters, this year is ambiguous with large unanswered questions and pressing issues not being addressed by either major party or their candidates. Finally, to the nation’s best interests, this year’s election is a mystery because, as in all elections, history does not show its hand until long after the event itself.

Part of the difficulty in understanding the true significance of 2004 before the fact is that it has become an election made primarily of words. Of course, words always make up much of a presidential campaign and national election, but this year it would appear, words have overwhelmed the issues.

Senator Kerry has contributed to this by driving his campaign to the political center, agreeing in principle with the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, the need for the United States to act pre-emptively when threatened, and abandoning the stri-

dent populist rhetoric on economic policy of the primary campaign (during which Howard Dean dominated the political discussion with a class-war rhetoric). Thus it is mostly words that separate the presidential candidates on much foreign policy.

The recession, which President Bush inherited, has also contributed to this. Clinton-style Democratic strategists seek to avoid the anti-business tax policies that sound good to populists, but simply do not work. This further muddles the distinction between Kerry and Bush—although each continues to speak a different language when speaking of economic issues.

Where there is great contrast between them is in what has become called “social issues.” These matter to many voters on both sides, and are employed by each to create passion and intensity in their campaigns and for their base voters.

The reality is, however, that so-called social issues are not decided by presidents, nor legislated by the Congress. These issues are created and decided by American society itself as it evolves its attitudes toward parenthood and family, sexuality and tolerance, education and health. Even the Supreme Court, which in recent decades has entered the controversial process of defining the legal parameters of some of these issues, historically follows the social evolution of the country.

I do think the campaign of 2004 will reflect basic attitudes of the American voters. This campaign is being waged in an extraordinary time when the nation is at war and the economy is

going through a transformation. Rarely has the United States changed its leadership in these circumstances, but it has happened—as it did in 1968 when Richard Nixon narrowly defeated Vice President Hubert Humphrey who stepped in when Lyndon Johnson chose not to run for a second term.

As I noted earlier, the magistrate of history will preside over the tribunal deciding how important the elections of 2004 will be. History does not receive its votes in any election, and as we are learning anew in this era of popular “deconstruction,” history can, and probably will, be revised again and again as a society seeks to impose meaning on the elusive truths of this remarkable phenomenon called civilization.

Barry Casselman is a national political commentator who has reported on presidential elections since 1972.

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

Norm Coleman

President Harry Truman once said that Washington is a city actually run by a thousand clerks. The size and inertia of the federal government and the fact that we are a “nation of laws and not men” means things don’t ever really change much in Washington, the old timers tell me. In my view, the reelection of George Bush will only make a difference in the things that matter most.

As a mayor, I learned that key to executive leadership is doing a few important things well. In St. Paul it was making the city “safe, clean, and

affordable.” That helped create optimism, investment, and jobs. As Steve Covey has written: the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

In this election, the race will eventually come down to establishing in the minds of the American people what the “main thing” is and who is more capable of doing it well.

I don’t think there is any question that Minnesota would do better under a second Bush term. A “heartland” president is good for us. His energy policy would help our farmers and our environment. His tax policies would help our families and our job creators. His social policies would fit with our traditional Midwestern values. But more is at stake than our selfish state interest.

The War on Terror is America’s Main Thing, the destiny of this generation as the president has correctly stated. Other things are important, but they are not paramount. Without a doubt, after 9/11 and since, the president has demonstrated that he can lead that war well. It is no time to be changing horses in the stream of history.

There is a clear difference in approach on various dimensions of leadership in this election:

Staying the Course vs. Plotting a New Direction

Alfred North Whitehead wrote that leaders must maintain order in the midst of change and change in the midst of order. But how much change and how much order is the question. The president is focused and clear on where

he wants to lead. Senator Kerry's candidacy seems to be based on the fact that he's not George Bush, but neither is Howard Dean or Joe Lieberman.

Staunch vs Sensitive

The president feels you win a war by fighting it, not by getting your heart right.

Clear vs Nuanced

There are habits of the heart and mind. Some tend to "boil it down" and others to "consider other options." Time and danger determine which is better in a situation. The president's syntax may be vague, but his message is clear. Senator Kerry has the gift of explaining all sides of his views with eloquence.

Forward-looking vs Inward-looking

It is true that the unexamined life is not worth living. But when an accident is unfolding in front of you, that might not be the time to contemplate your driving history. The president is focused on the next challenge while the senator is calling us to look within, or back, or both.

Conservatism vs Liberty

Lincoln said conservatism is preferring the old and tried to the new and untried. At this point which do we need more? The president is guided by time-honored values and the senator seems more drawn to interesting social experiments.

There may be a time when Senator Kerry's new direction-sensitive-

nuanced-inward looking-liberality may be what the country needs. But now is not that time. In turbulent, dangerous times we need a president we can depend on and the continuity of trusted hands on the wheel of state.

Norm Coleman is Minnesota's junior U.S. senator.

Fear, Loathing, and the Microwave Culture

Larry Colson

Throughout human history, individuals and nations have been called upon to make momentous decisions, although the magnitude of each is not always obvious at the time. We find ourselves at such a point today but have the benefit of knowing that this will be one of the most significant elections in the nation's history. We have arrived at the proverbial fork in the road. The paths from which we must choose could not be more clearly delineated; the choices could be no more diverse.

Down one path, we have Sen. John Kerry. Unfortunately for Senator Kerry, he is simply a placeholder—the anti-Bush. This election is less about Kerry per se and more about the desire of a vocal minority for change. The kind of change seems unimportant to this crowd, as long as it leads to someone other than President Bush occupying the White House on Jan. 20, 2005. Kerry's ascension to the role of Democratic presidential nominee is less due to his vision and leadership abilities than to the result of something that has

been slowly building in our society. I refer to this phenomenon as “America’s Microwave Culture.”

The Microwave Culture is the expectation, dare I say need, for instant results. This culture has been building over decades, but has accelerated dramatically in the recent past in response to the availability of instant everything. We have gotten so used to good things happening fast that many of us have lost our ability to set long-term visions and patiently but steadily seek them. Nowhere is this attitude more deadly to the future of America than in how we address the issue of terrorism.

It is through this tinted window that many who seek change view the Bush administration’s vision and execution of the War on Terror. We haven’t caught Bin Laden, so we’ve taken our eye off the ball. After eighteen months, we still have casualties in Iraq, so it must be a failure. The expectation of a just-add-water democracy in Iraq would most certainly have come to fruition if only there had been an adequate plan to win the peace. This whole dealing with terrorism thing should have been wrapped up long ago, so we can go back to thinking about how to spend our peace dividend.

Down the other path is President George W. Bush. President Bush approaches the problem of terrorism from a black-and-white, good vs. evil view with no middle ground. He believes in preemptively but judiciously using our military to do unto the terrorists and those who support them

before they do unto us. In stark contrast to the Microwave Culture view, he has said from the beginning that this will be a prolonged battle, one that will likely extend into future generations and be fraught with danger. The effort will not be quick or cheap, in blood, money, or even international goodwill, but it will be effective.

This is a difficult and evil concept for those who see terrorism in many shades of gray and who believe that the world is a generally peaceful place where all people and cultures can live in harmony together, providing our respective needs with honor, dignity, and respect via one vast world government. To them, we can deal with terrorism if we just try to understand the world from the viewpoint of the terrorists, and work with them to settle our differences. To borrow a phrase, they believe we need a more “sensitive” approach to terrorism.

The 2004 presidential election is not, as some might say, about the wisdom of changing horses in the middle of the stream; it’s about which of two very different approaches we wish to take in dealing with terrorism. Will we, in our quest for instant gratification, seek a new, softer and supposedly more thoughtful path, or do we have the collective national will to stand up and fight against those who wish us harm? The choice we make will echo in the thoughts and actions of friends and enemies alike for years to come.

Larry Colson is president of Level 5 Technologies, a software firm in Minnetonka.

Pivotal? Let's Ask Hamilton

Kimberly Crockett

Although the Constitution's enumeration of presidential powers is brief, Bush and Kerry present an unambiguous choice to voters on all major issues.

To illustrate that point, I will focus on a single presidential duty—nominations to the federal bench—because the farce that has replaced our appointment process reveals serious imbalances that threaten national security, domestic prosperity, and the integrity of our constitutional system of government.

The next president will have many opportunities to shape the courts and constitutional jurisprudence for generations. The Patriot Act and other war-related issues such as the treatment of enemy combatants will wind through our courts.

In Federalist No. 66, Alexander Hamilton described the president's power "to **nominate**, and, with the advice and consent of the Senate, to **appoint**. There will, of course, be no exertion of choice on the part of the Senate....they can only ratify or reject the **choice**." *

In No. 76, Hamilton goes on to describe how a nomination may be overruled, but that " (i)t is also not very probable that his nomination would often be overruled."

Tell that to President Bush!

Hamilton would be incensed by the machinations of certain Senate scoundrels. While there have been a few battles over judicial nominees since our founding, almost every nomi-

nee, no matter how well qualified, is now treated as controversial. This started under Reagan when "Borking" became a new verb, continued somewhat under Clinton and has now grown to a full crisis.

For over 200 years, a nominee needed a majority of votes to be confirmed. Now, because of Judiciary Committee mischief and unprecedented Senate filibustering, many nominees need a supermajority, if they are even allowed a vote. Senate Democrats have kidnapped a vital executive power.

Why are Americans of both parties so interested in the judicial philosophy and policy preferences of judicial nominees? Aren't judges supposed to just "follow the law"? The answer lies in an ever increasing tendency of the judiciary to wander, if not barge, into the realm of the legislature. Instead of interpreting the law, some judges are making law or "legislating from the bench."

In Federalist No. 78, Hamilton describes the proper role of judges. "The courts must declare the sense of the law; and if they should be disposed to exercise **will** instead of **judgement**, the consequence would equally be the substitution of their pleasure to that of the legislative body."*

When judges substitute their will in place of the legislature, our constitutional balance of powers is upset. Courts overreach for a variety of reasons; the law is poorly drafted, silent or just not acceptable to the majority. Our doctrine of **stare decisis**, or following precedent, compounds the problem (as does the sheer volume of law). Judges

who want to honor the rule of law are in a miserable double bind; if they follow judicially created “legislation,” they continue a wrong, but if they overturn it, they are guilty of “judicial activism.”

Because judicial legislating has become commonplace, the role of ideology has become improperly magnified, thus threatening the proper functioning and independence of the judiciary. Serving on the bench should be a great honor and all nominees should be treated with respect. I fear politics and too much bad law will drive many good candidates away.

The politicization of the bench is responsible for some of the terrible divisiveness in our country. We fear that our opponents on great issues will outmaneuver us in the courts, rather than waging a fair fight in our legislatures. If the courts become just another political branch, all hopes of civility are lost. Our constitution cannot protect us from self-destruction if we ignore its brilliant checks and balances.

A Bush victory will not solve this crisis, but a Kerry victory will make it worse because it would only embolden those who use the judicial branch to advance a liberal social agenda. Bush will continue to nominate judges who understand the limits of their power; Kerry’s nominations will reflect his left wing credentials. His choice of John Edwards, a man who made a quick fortune by combining junk science with the coercive power of the law, reveals the direction Kerry would take us. Hamilton would urge a return to first

principles to guide us back to constitutional balance and a sense of common purpose.

* Emphasis in the original.

Kimberly Crockett is executive director of the Federalist Society, Minnesota Lawyers Chapter, and a member of the Deephaven City Council.

The Fifty-Fifty is Here for a While

Dick Day

Is this election pivotal? I only wish it were that easy.

I listened to Joe Soucheray on KSTP-AM the day after John Edwards gave his “Two Americas” speech at the Democratic convention. What a wise and well-grounded audience Joe has. He and his callers were trying to make sense of Edwards’s claim that we’re a country of haves and have-nots, which the Kerry-Edwards team believes is a problem that needs the urgent attention of government.

One caller, who said he would fall into the “have-not” category, pointed out that people make choices. He and his wife have chosen to live on one income so that she could stay home with their children. Other “have-nots” are choosing to spend their money on gambling or drinking. Another caller asked why liberals assume that the “haves” make their money by deception or fraud or special advantages, not by plain old hard work or perseverance or ingenuity. Another caller said most of us are struggling to pay our bills—why should we get a share of the income of another struggling guy?

Who could disagree with such clear thinking?

Well, apparently 50 percent of Americans do.

Fifty percent apparently believe that our broken education, healthcare, and pension systems can be fixed with government programs paid for by people making over \$200,000. Fifty percent of Americans apparently believe that corporate profits are a candy dish from which we can guarantee a living wage of \$10.65 an hour. Fifty percent apparently believe Americans are safer if we store nuclear waste at 130 sites around the country rather than isolate it at one secure location at Yucca Mountain. Fifty percent apparently believe that our economy will improve if we prevent American companies from hiring workers overseas.

I wish we could have an election and settle such issues once and for all. I do believe that liberal opposition to common-sense conservative thinking is melting—but at a glacial pace. How long did it take for liberals to join us in welfare reform that requires work? How long did it take for Bill Cosby, Barak Obama, and Carl Eller to admit that wealthy white folks are not to blame for black achievement gaps? How long did it take for liberals to agree that markets are not evil things, that a capitalist system provides a pretty good quality of life for most Americans?

In some cases, it took decades, and we still have a long way to go. When will liberals understand that most Americans are capable of taking charge of their own lives with a more efficient, effective result in areas like their

healthcare and retirement? When will they admit that Americans by tradition work hard, get a good education, play by the rules, take care of their neighbors and friends, live by and teach their children the important values that, if government gets out of the way, guarantee most of us a happy, productive life? When will they give business credit for being a good steward of the environment or for supporting the orchestra or sponsoring a Walk for the Cure?

All that being said, factors beyond the control of politicians will probably drive necessary and desirable changes. The inevitable march of progress will triumph. Science will prove some things that conservatives know to be true, for example, that life begins at conception and that it's O.K. for some species to die out. Technology will improve productivity. American energy and creativity will generate more high paying jobs on our shores than we outsource around the world. Certain failures will become too obvious and dangerous to ignore, like open borders and insufficient military spending. And our natural self-interest is an unstoppable catalyst for improving our standard of living.

Is this election pivotal? No. It is important, but not pivotal. It's going to take more than one intrusive, infuriating, noisy, repetitive, frustrating presidential election to settle the deep differences between Americans on many fundamental issues. Until there is a significant majority on one side or the other, no one can claim a mandate, no one can claim to be on the right side of truth and justice, or to speak for

Americans. For the time being, politics isn't going to be pretty, and it probably isn't going to be much fun.

Dick Day of Owatonna is a Minnesota state senator.

At the Heart of the Matter: Morality

Jean Bethke Elshtain

It is never easy to assess whether a particular election is "pivotal." Because we have a tendency to exaggerate the importance of our own actions and epoch, we like to see decisive turns in this direction or that where none exists. Much of the time, life and politics chug along as usual with some differences manifest on the margins depending on whether a Democrat or Republican has been elected—but no earth-shattering pivot is made.

In this respect 2004 may be an anomaly. The most succinct way to put it is this: do you, as a citizen, believe that moral issues lie at the heart of political life, or do you believe that moral questions can and should be severed from politics? Senator Kerry espouses, often in a rather cloudy way, the separatist posture; President Bush endorses what I will call the integrationist approach. Kerry is comfortable, indeed quite matter-of-fact, stating: "I oppose x, y, or z (fill in the blank) **personally** but I endorse it **publicly** because my **private** beliefs shouldn't determine my **political** stance." Claims of this sort privatize the vital bedrock of what is right and good. What is political and public is to be determined either by party consensus or a utilitarian calcu-

lus. This process began when, remarkably, the Democratic Party marginalized religious and moral conviction and alienated a core constituency in transforming itself into the party supporting a nigh-unrestricted abortion right. People like Jesse Jackson and Al Gore did an abrupt about-face, going from strong opponents of a pro-abortion position to strong endorsers of such.

Given this prior bifurcation of moral belief and policy, it should, I suppose, come as no surprise when Senator Kerry tells us that the stem cell debate has nothing to do with morality—only with science and medicine. Only a strong prejudice against bringing religiously derived ethical principles to bear on public issues can explain Kerry's insistence that the American people "need a president who believes in science." What on earth does this mean? Is science now to be placed in a special category beyond challenge? Are moral considerations no longer to be brought to bear in order to question or to challenge what science is up to at any given point?

Uncritical belief in science—as every student of political history knows—is a very dangerous thing. In the not-too-distant past, it generated the "certainties" of eugenics and the confident belief that "science" had found a way to breed in only "good" characteristics and breed out the "bad" ones, which meant everything from cleft palate to Down syndrome. No one needs to be reminded of the horrors with which eugenics mania culminated—all in the name of the most advanced "science" of that era. If you

sever your conceptual universe into the private (moral) and public (consensual or utilitarian), you hobble any serious attempt to engage the often outlandish claims of the genetic engineering industry. Sadly, this is precisely the direction in which Kerry's position points.

A hoary distinction between science and religious belief or morality, and never the twain shall meet, is not credible. Scholars have explored at length the intimate relationship between faith and science. But on the terms and conditions laid down by Senator Kerry this election season, opponents or skeptics of the lavishly financed gen-tech industry's efforts to clear the way for unrestricted and for profit production of human embryos for the purpose of "harvesting" stem cells, are cast as irrational religious believers. Supporters of cloning, for that is the only means whereby stem cells are generated, are cast as avatars of enlightenment and voluptuaries of progress.

Whatever one's position on the stem cell debate, or the abortion debate, or the euthanasia debate, or many other debates that go to the very heart of what it means to be human and to determine in what human dignity consists, Senator Kerry's abandonment of the critical perspectives made available in and through the complex discourse of religious faith and moral philosophy, impoverishes the civic debate. It is surely too late in the day for responsible public figures to push a threadbare and discredited distinction between faith and science—by calling, ironically, for a faith in science.

As with every other human endeavor, science cannot simply be "believed"—it must be subjected to critique, evaluated by political and moral leaders, and challenged by skeptics armed with the concepts Kerry insists should be stored in a private redoubt. It is a pity that Senator Kerry has turned "science" into an object of belief beyond criticism rather than to insist, instead, that science is an activity that has great power and authority in modern culture. It follows that claims made in behalf of science must be watched very, very carefully rather than given an uncritical thumbs-up and a green light.

If the 2004 presidential election turns, at least in part, on whether citizens should exist in a state of moral dichotomy, severed into public and private parts that do not engage one another, then it may well turn out to be a pivotal election. I suspect that this issue will be muted as so many issues vie for our attention. But the debate must go on and it cannot if Senator Kerry's terms of discourse triumph.

Jean Bethke Elshtain is Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of social and political ethics in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago.

No Sea Change

James W. Emison

The 2004 presidential and congressional elections will not be pivotal in any true sense of the word. There are several reasons this is the case.

No matter who wins the presidency, the ability of the House and Senate to "resist" the president will continue

unabated. The supermajority required to overcome a Senate filibuster is the principal culprit. Only if there is a dramatic shift in the political makeup of both legislative bodies along with a concurring president will there be an opportunity for the GOP or the Democrats to impose their legislative will. This is a very unlikely case since all the current polling information indicates a tight race—traditionally close races are the ones that produce something like deadlock and that means very slow going for any sort of ideological shift.

Of course there will be some change imposed by whoever wins but it will not be a sea change and will not be pivotal. Ronald Reagan and Franklin D. Roosevelt were involved in the last sea change elections—the only two of the twentieth century. The 2004 election will not follow in that tradition.

James W. Emison is chairman and CEO Western Petroleum Company.

Hoping for a Decisive Victory **Amitai Etzioni**

The 2004 election is pivotal because it will either help bridge polarized America or deepen the divisions. I very much hope, although do not predict, that the winning side will win decisively by a hefty, and above all, clear margin. If the presidential election is going to be decided by a small group of voters, whoever loses will attack the legitimacy of the outcome. Unfortunately, this will not be difficult to do because every election has irregularities. Most of the time the side that

considers itself injured realizes that irregularities happened on both sides and correcting for these irregularities would make little difference.

Not so in 2004. Whatever one thinks happened in 2000 in Florida, few believe that another presidential election decided by the Supreme Court would be a healthy outcome for American democracy. Similarly, the smaller the margin of victory, the more Americans will feel—right or wrongly—that the other side violated the rules and will contest the outcome, deepening the already deep divide in the nation.

I cannot foretell what the frustrated millions will do. There is no danger that they will join with the military in some kind of coup, the way B movies would have it. They may march on Washington or form a tent city on the Mall like the Bonus Expeditionary Force did in 1932.

Much more likely is that many more Americans abandoned participation in public life because they considered it unresponsive, if not illegitimate or crooked. (I once asked a cab driver if he thought that politicians were crooked. He responded: “Is water wet?”)

Still fewer Americans might vote in the future, which is not a welcome development. Fringe groups at both ends of the political spectrum would gain support. All this is much more likely if the elections are not won fairly in a highly visible way.

Even if the outcome is clear-cut, whoever is next in the White House had better launch a major initiative to reduce polarization and to build unity.

Dealing with the deficit and the need to reform Social Security and Medicare by bipartisan commissions is a well-known and often well-used way to proceed.

Truly consulting leaders of the minority party helps—even when they can be readily outvoted in Congress. We need a bipartisan agreement on limiting the obstacles set in the way presidential appointments are made. We need to define grounds for impeaching a president.

We need nationwide dialogues on the values to guide us, to see if we can build a wider consensus on issues such as stem cell research, gay marriages, and the death penalty. We have had successful dialogues in the past—on civil rights and women's rights.

Above all, we must discuss the criteria that should guide our war against terrorism. We learned after Vietnam that wars carried out without very broad and deep public support undermine both our war efforts and our social well-being. The debates about the Patriot Act and preventive war have been much too polarized, with much political posturing.

After the election, nothing is more pivotal than for us to come together on what makes for just wars and the legitimate means for protecting us from the next terrorist attack at home.

Amitai Etzioni is a sociology professor at George Washington University.

Let's Not Go It Alone

Arvonne Fraser

From my Farmer-Laborite father and my own experience in politics, I've

learned that every election is important, but some are pivotal. This is one of them. On November 2, every citizen eligible to vote must decide between two distinct opposites—the go-it-alone, individualistic, and paternalistic approach or the collaborative approach. The first is simplistic and sometimes contradictory; the second is more complex and responsible.

President Bush takes the individualistic approach both domestically and internationally. He took our nation into war with Iraq without allies. He believes in privatizing Social Security. Individuals should be able to save enough to cover their retirement and the loss of family income through the disability or death of a wage earner.

Nations—by definition collaborative institutions—can take pre-emptive strikes against other nations if they have large armies and great firepower. On economic issues and social issues President Bush and the current Republican Party are also paternalistic and theocratic. Men with money and power are endowed with a divine right to govern. (*And I do mean men.*)

John Kerry takes the collaborative approach. He understands that no individual and no nation can go it totally alone, but that both nations and individuals have responsibilities. He's seen war and knows that nations need allies, that soldiers must rely on their compatriots as well as their leaders, and that war should be a last resort. He understands that economic growth is the result of entrepreneurship and a capable, educated workforce and that the worker should share in the benefits of

the compact between owners of enterprises and the workers within that enterprise. He also understands that savings for retirement and insurance against death and disability are subject to the “hazards and vicissitudes of life” as the original Social Security Act stated. In short, he understands that the essence of democracy is collaboration, that every citizen has rights as well as responsibilities. Kerry’s long experience in the Senate and as a prosecutor have all taught him that the issues a nation—or an individual—faces are complex. Winning a battle does not mean winning a war. During—or even before—a war plans for peace must be made. During an election careful thought must be given to what should be done once an election has been held. There are no easy answers in a nation as large and diverse as this.

The pivotal questions that this election will decide are whether we leave our current health care system intact or try to improve it so that everyone has affordable health care; whether we leave no child behind in school or just talk about it; whether and how we strengthen our military; and how best to fight terrorism. The strength of a nation is not measured by its military might but by the commitment and capacity of its citizens. The president, as the nation’s leader, must be willing and able to call on the citizenry to demonstrate their commitment and use their capacities both for individual and collective purposes. He must think long term, and look at possible consequences of actions.

Voters in this election must think long term as well. The Supreme Court and the presidency are at stake. There have been no deaths or resignations of Supreme Court justices for years. During the next four years appointments to the court are likely to be made. Whom do you trust to make these crucial appointments?

The final pivotal question is who and how many will vote? Will the significance and stark contrasts in this election bring out more voters? Or will a large number of citizens continue to opt out? Those who do not vote are essentially taking the Nader position: “it makes no difference.” This is folly. Elections are what make a democracy and they do make a difference.

Arvonne Fraser was U.S. representative to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women during the Clinton administration.

The Only Game in Town

Bill Frenzel

The presidential election of 2004 is pivotal! The fate of the republic hangs in the balance! At least that’s what politicians and political observers are taught to say, and think, before every election—presidential, legislative, or local.

Certainly it is true that every election is important. We want the right candidates (ours, of course) to be elected. We hope that every American believes that he/she has a big enough stake in the outcome to be a vigorous participant.

And it is also true that partisans, political philosophers, and activists of all stripes really do believe that each election is the critical be-all and end-all. They had better believe it. If they don't, their candidates and positions will not prevail.

Historically, however, our governmental system—reinforced by a kind of defiant independence in American public opinion—has been more potent than the force of the persons elected. Our system, with its checks, balances, barriers, snags and fishhooks, is not one that allows strong presidents to impose sudden changes in national policies.

Under certain conditions, including strong mandates or emergencies, strong personalities can make a difference. Nevertheless, deviation from existing policies is difficult. Changes made usually move the political direction only a few degrees off of the centerline.

The Framers of our Constitution, led by James Madison, were very clever, and rather conservative, in creating our government and its machinery. After unhappy experience with George III and an aggressive Parliament, they gave us a republic that has been proof against mood swings. Americans have liked that system. Succeeding generations have created more barriers (filibusters, two-term-presidents, etc.).

In addition to their aversion to in-your-face government, the Framers also were edgy about “transforming leadership” by “men on white horses.” When they assigned powers, they were not overly generous to the president. They gave him the powers of the Comman-

der-in-Chief, appointments, and the veto. Perhaps his best power, the bully pulpit, came later. Altogether, they don't match the Power of the Purse, which the Framers put in the hands of the legislative branch.

This wonderful system guarantees a sort of inertia, or policy drag, in our complicated political and economic society; the drag provides good insulation against drastic policy changes. Changes made probably won't be graceful, but they are unlikely to be extreme. In effect, the system hedges our political bets, and makes change less rapid, and less fearsome. A single election can't change our world very much, and certainly it is unlikely to bring it down.

However, even if change is gradual, or marginal, elections are how Americans make it, or resist it. If the election is the only pivot we have, the fact that it is a small one does not make the election less pivotal. If small, hedged bets are what the system allows, they are the ones we must make. The elections are the only game in town.

So the politicians and activists may be right, after all. The 2004 presidential election may not be crucial in the long term scheme of things, but it can still be pivotal. The stakes may not be large to historians, but most Americans can readily identify them.

There are sharp differences in economic and foreign policy, especially national and international security. For many, with retirements looming in the Supreme Court, the importance of judicial appointments is prime. The

age of the justices has given the small pivot far larger implications.

The vote is expected to be close in both presidential and legislative elections. If elected, neither presidential candidate will have a cakewalk. Republicans will probably retain the House, but Democrats have a chance to pick up the Senate. In any case, there will be filibuster-sustaining minorities in the Senate, and there will be moderate Republicans and conservative Democrats in the House, complicating policy implementation for either or both parties.

History will have to judge the ultimate importance of the 2004 election, but there is enough at stake to excite us all now. Nevertheless, it may be comforting to know that our system will prevent a wipe-out of either of the contesting factions. We all know we will be back at it in 2008, working on another pivotal election.

Bill Frenzel, former U.S. representative from Minnesota, is a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution and a member of the President's Commission to Strengthen Social Security.

At the Crossroads

David Gaither

I have no doubt this presidential election will be the most pivotal in the past of our generation and perhaps the most significant for many generations to follow.

The victor will decide many important issues—taxes, immigration, foreign policy, and national security among them. But fundamental to our new president's actions on these issues

will be what's pivotal about this election: values.

A leader makes his decisions based on his values. And the values of the American people are reflected in the man that we elect to lead us. Never in my memory has there been such a disparity in this foundational premise of two candidates' decision making. And never before do I remember such a disparity in the basis upon which the electorate is casting its votes.

President Bush is a man who bases his decisions on a value system that he openly shares with the American people. He has been clear, decisive, and consistent in his actions. He believes that the primary responsibility of government is to protect the people, and still believes in the autonomy of the United States. He believes in the freedom of the individual, and in the power of the individual to create jobs, be responsible for himself, and help his fellow man.

This president's actions reflect his beliefs. And most notable is that his actions remain consistent despite vociferous critics and disappointing polls.

My opinion is based primarily in two contextual arenas. The first pivotal factor of this election for President is simply put as the choice between principles and polls. Perhaps never more clearly have the choices between the two men been illustrated than in the foundational premise of their respective decision making.

It is without question the President is a man who bases his decisions on a value system that he openly shares with the American people. Whether or

not one approves of his values, what is painfully obvious to most all is he does have certain values and principles that if not all, most of his decisions reflect.

These principles and values transcend his ego in that he surrounds himself with advisors that are subject matter experts and listens to their perspectives. However, in the final analysis, while the President may consider the details or the tactical considerations presented, he is fundamentally grounded by those values he holds dear and renders predictable and consistent decisions guided by those principles.

One might suggest the President to be stubborn but without question, no one questions the basis for his decisions.

This is in stark contrast to his opponent, who has shamelessly changed positions on virtually all matters of importance in an attempt to broaden his support and win the election. Whether it's the death penalty for terrorists, additional monies for troops in Iraq, the relevance of military service to a president, PACs, Israel, the Patriot Act, war medals, Hanoi Jane, affirmative action, trade with China, etc., Kerry has been at best, inconsistent in his positions. A strong, rational leader will alter his viewpoint based on new information. A rudderless leader will change his mind at the whim of external desires. It's fairly easy to conclude that Kerry's commitment to winning the presidency is the driving force for his actions. And, should Kerry win, this desire to be someone rather than to stand for something is certain to affect America's national security, economy, and culture for many years to come.

Equally disturbing is the media's role in persuading the American public that the values of John Kerry, and those of the Democratic Party, are the values that should guide our country forward. Gone are the days where a liberal bias was alleged to be present in the national media. The presiding dialogue from the left is how this bias is justified.

Mainstream media have gone from reporting the news to making the news. Through omission and perspective they alter what the electorate learns about the issues. NBC aired ten times more stories about Abu Ghraib prison than the discoveries of Saddam's mass graves. The author of a book criticizing the president got two segments on "60 Minutes," while the voices of 250 swift boat veterans are ignored. Opinion pieces continue to criticize "tax cuts for the rich," but fail to mention that a record 33 percent of taxpayers pay no taxes at all. And despite the conclusion of four independent commissions to the contrary, many still accuse President Bush of lying to justify our presence in Iraq.

The news is presented to incite passion. We're told that the actions of a few at Abu Ghraib "shamed and humiliated" the entire country, that the world thinks George Bush is more evil than Saddam Hussein, that we are far less secure than we were before 9/11.

What is pivotal about this election is that its outcome will be a reflection of the American people, and the values that they hold. Are we a people who can filter through hyperbole to consider facts and issues, or are we run by the

emotion of the seven-second sound bite? Do we value conviction and consistency, or are we swayed by someone who tells us what we want to hear for the moment, despite his voting record and regardless of the lack of viability of the empty promise? Do we believe in self-responsibility, or are we simply victims of circumstances and others' behavior? Do we favor the candidate who promises the most entitlements while making apologies for our strengths? Do we value the autonomy of our country in the world, or are we better off as part of an international "team"?

America is at a crossroads, and I'm hopeful that it will take the right path.

David Gaither, a first-term state senator from Plymouth, serves as assistant minority leader in the Senate Republican Caucus.

The Preeminence of Natural Law

David Hann

In the annals of American presidential politics, there have no doubt been elections contested for higher stakes. The election of Lincoln in 1860, for instance, was certainly pivotal. It was the culmination of almost a century of increasingly divisive debate about fundamental ideas, for which there were increasingly few opportunities for compromise. There was certainly no compromise on the answer to the essential question: "Is slavery consistent with the foundational principles of our republic?"

We are in the midst of a similar national debate that arguably began in

earnest in the 1960s. It centers on whether our nation is united in our agreement with the basic premise of our republic: the preeminence of natural law. This premise is the root of the idea of inalienable rights; that just government cannot make positive law in violation of natural law. This was, in fact, the issue that underlaid the debate over slavery. Paraphrasing Lincoln, as important as is government by the consent of the governed—majority rule—no majority can vote itself into slavery.

What we have seen increasingly in the past three or four decades is the desire to make law in violation of the principles of natural law. Unrestricted abortion and advocacy of same-sex marriage are two prominent examples of this trend. It is ironic that in 1860, the Democrats, led by Stephen A. Douglas, advocated for "popular sovereignty"—let the people decide—on the issue of slavery in the federal territories. To him, slavery was "morally neutral," simply a matter to be decided by the democratic will. In today's Democrat Party, there is no longer the trust in the will of the people on such important issues. They have implemented their policy preferences through court decisions. They have learned from the Dred Scott decision that the court has the power to make law. They have failed to learn that such law making is destructive.

The most significant issue in this election is how we will respond to the threat to our nation posed by radical Islamic terrorists. This movement has been a growing menace to the West for decades and the U.S. action in Iraq is

only the latest battlefield in a war that is likely to persist for years to come. The attacks we have sustained are motivated by the belief that Western culture is decadent and evil. The United States, as the leading proponent of that culture, must therefore be destroyed. That our culture is in fact in decay has made the effort required to defend ourselves more problematic. Unless and until we realize the ideas embedded in our Constitution represent the best hope for mankind, it will be difficult for us to prevail.

This election is pivotal because it presents a clear choice to the American electorate. President Bush and the Republican Party have demonstrated a willingness to defend the cultural traditions rooted in natural law. The Democrat Party of today has largely given way to a sophisticated cynicism that does not believe those unique ideas foundational to the American experiment are worth defending. We see evidence of this in the positions taken by the Democrats on domestic policies, and by extension, in their relative unwillingness to assert our power to defeat our enemies.

In June of 1858, Lincoln said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other."

He was speaking in the context of his times about the central issue of his day, slavery. This institution raised the

question of what we held to be foundationally true about the nature of man. The political compromise to tolerate slavery in the states was necessary to form the union, and was sustained for nearly 100 years. However, Lincoln argued that this compromise did not invalidate the principles of natural law upon which our nation rests. His "house divided" language speaks to the impossibility of permanent compromise on such foundational principles.

Today, we are a house divided. With Lincoln, I do not believe we can long endure without common agreement on the meaning and importance of natural law as the premise of our union. This election will be a test of the awareness of the American electorate to the larger cultural issues that we are wrestling with and to the degree the public believes they are worth defending.

David Hann is a Minnesota state senator from Eden Prairie.

The Truly Pivotal Choice: Preemption or Response

Steven F. Hayward

All elections are pivotal in American politics, because each election either signals a change in direction from current policy, or ratifies the existing course. Are some elections more pivotal than others? Yes—when the potential change is large and decisive, like Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, or Ronald Reagan in 1980. Clinton was not dramatically different from the first President Bush. Clinton followed Bush in raising income taxes, pressing for free trade, and pushing for a New

World Order of multilateral foreign policy.

This election will prove pivotal for two large reasons. The first is if President Bush wins and Republicans maintain or expand their congressional majorities, it will be a confirmation that a durable realignment has indeed occurred, and that the results of the 2002 off-year election were not merely an anomaly of the terror war. The larger reason is the course of the terror war itself. John Kerry has surprisingly and helpfully clarified the fundamental choice on this issue, which is whether the nation embraces the Bush Doctrine of aggressive pre-emptive war against terrorism. By saying he would “respond” to any terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland, Kerry implicitly rejects the doctrine of pre-emption, and suggests that he will be less aggressive than Bush, though his terminal vagueness makes it hard to say exactly how he would go about it.

It is a surprising strategy for Kerry, and it assumes that the voters either do not see our current situation as a real war (there are some in Kerry’s orbit who argue that it is less a war than some kind of “twilight struggle”), or have already grown fatigued by the cost and exertion. To be sure, this election is being held under the murky circumstances of a war against an unconventional enemy without a fixed territory or sovereign government, but it is doubtful there are many voters aside from Michael Moore who do not believe it is a serious matter.

The salient point for Kerry is that during the Cold War, no Democrat

succeeded in winning the White House unless they were perceived as being as strong as or stronger on national defense than the Republican candidate. Truman was tougher than Dewey in 1948; JFK ran to the right of Nixon in 1960, proclaiming a “missile gap” that did not exist; Carter ran to the right of Gerald Ford on detente; and even Clinton attacked the first president Bush for being insufficiently robust with China, even though the Cold War was over. Now with something like Cold War conditions back in play, Kerry is not reassuring that he would be as effectively tough as Bush, though he will doubtless calibrate his statements more finely by election day.

Finally, a word about the tone of this year’s politics. Every election seems to get nastier, and no doubt this is true in the ordinary sense. But only our nostalgia blinds us to the fact that, even in wartime, we have often been harshly disunited. In his state of the union speech in 1944, Franklin Roosevelt noted: “If we analyze American history impartially, we cannot escape the fact that in our past we have not always forgotten individual and selfish and partisan interests in time of war—we have not always been united in purpose and direction. We cannot overlook the serious dissensions and the lack of unity in our war of the Revolution, in our War of 1812, or in our War Between the States, when the survival of the union itself was at stake.”

So far, so good, but then FDR went on to make a remarkable statement: “One of the great American industrialists of our day—a man who has

rendered yeoman service to his country in this crisis—recently emphasized the grave dangers of ‘rightist reaction’ in this nation. All clear-thinking businessmen share his concern. Indeed, if such reaction should develop—if history were to repeat itself and we were to return to the so-called ‘normalcy’ of the 1920s—then it is certain that even though we shall have conquered our enemies on the battlefields abroad, we shall have yielded to the spirit of fascism here at home.”

The point is, all the irresponsible talk you hear today about Bush being Hitler and Republicans being Nazis has a long pedigree. When this squalid history is recalled, it reminds us how much chutzpah liberals have to complain still about the Willie Horton ad.

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Probably Not, But Ask Me in Twenty Years

Frederick M. Hess

It’s hard to tell whether any election is pivotal except in retrospect. While this is an immense cop-out, it’s also the truth. This is especially true, as in this fall’s contest, when challengers focus more on critiquing the incumbent administration than on issuing concrete plans for change. Given the ambiguity of the Kerry agenda, and the Bush administration’s refusal thus far to provide much detail regarding a second-term agenda, it’s hard to know how much the outcome will really matter.

Incumbent bids for reelection, even during times of crisis, have rarely proven pivotal—even in retrospect. Ultimately, it’s tough to argue that the elections of 1916, 1940, or 1944 were pivotal. Does one really envision Wendell Wilkie keeping us out of World War II after Pearl Harbor (remember, Roosevelt, too, promised to keep us out of war)? Of course, one reason that it’s hard to argue that incumbent bids for reelection are pivotal is because every incumbent running in the general election during a time of war has won reelection—so one question is whether Americans will vote like they always have during wartime, or whether the “war on terror” will yield a different outcome.

Wartime elections are most likely to seem pivotal when the candidates hold starkly different stances on how to prosecute the conflict—as was the case in 1864. Today, there is little clear difference between how a Kerry and a Bush administration would manage the next four years in Iraq. Moreover, given the Bush administration’s decreased willingness to go it alone in confronting “rogue” states or aggressively pursue the preemption doctrine, even when it comes to Iran, North Korea, or rooting out terrorism, the difference between the two candidates may be more tonal than substantive.

On a broad range of domestic policies, it’s equally hard to argue that the election outcome will yield predictable, significant change. In 2000, it was possible for conservatives to imagine that a Bush victory would mark an

effort to complete the “Reagan agenda” by privatizing entitlements, promoting faith-based approaches to addressing social policy, flattening the tax code, cutting taxes, and ensuring that the surpluses of the Clinton years were not used to fuel a new expansion of government. In reality, the Bush administration delivered tax cuts, but coupled them with a first-term wave of new domestic spending, disregard for fiscal discipline, and a lack of serious effort to pursue entitlement reform, tax reform, or faith-based measures. While the Bush campaign murmurs “just wait for the second term,” there’s no evidence the administration is marshaling the public support required to back dramatic reforms it shied away from in the first term.

The big differences between the candidates on domestic policy are on their approach to health care and taxes—with Kerry likely to raise at least some taxes and increase spending somewhat more rapidly than Bush. Even this picture, however, is complicated by the fact that a Republican controlled House, which appears a near certainty, may be much more disciplined in holding the line on spending and program expansion when facing a Kerry White House. For instance, it’s important to recognize the very real possibility that a Gore administration would never have been able to enact the costly 2003 Medicare expansion—because it would have been stopped cold by conservative House members who caved to the Bush administration. Despite Kerry’s stream of new spending promises, it is quite possible that House

Republicans freed from the yoke of the current administration would ensure that a Kerry administration will be more fiscally responsible than a second Bush administration would be.

The biggest argument that this election is pivotal could very well turn out to be the winner’s ability to reshape the Supreme Court. Just as in 2000, there’s the ongoing possibility that the next president could conceivably appoint four justices in a term and shape the court for a generation. Of course, there’s also the possibility that the next president might appoint no justices. Meanwhile, any appointments would have to be shepherded through a closely divided Senate—so there are no sure bets even on that front.

At the time, not even the 1980 contest between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter appeared the seminal event it is now remembered to be. Because so much of any election turns on domestic and international events beyond the president’s control, it’s the rare election that reveals its significance until it’s in the rearview mirror. So, it’s hard for me to see this election as pivotal; but ask me again in twenty years.

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Reweaving Our Cultural Fabric

Rick Heydinger

I am *not* an emotional person, particularly about politics. So I was perplexed when I found myself in tears as I read an op-ed piece by Garrison Keillor

that called into question the values of Republicans. It was not because I agree with his politics, although generally I do. It was not because it was eloquently written, for I found his arguments shrill.

Upon reflection I realized I was grieving the loss of who we are as a nation. The fabric that binds us together has seemingly disappeared. This fabric, as defined by organizational theorists, is our culture. It is represented in our myths, our rituals, and our heroes. It is the bedrock on which our society rests. Perhaps more than any other single factor, culture influences the choices we make as a society.

Throughout most of the twentieth century we had a commonweal that held us together. It included a commitment to caring for all our youth, raising the average wage, improving health care for all, and giving older adults a stronger foundation for retirement. And, in each decade we had a national vision: in the 1940s winning the war, in the '50s offering an opportunity to earn a college degree, and in the '60s expanding civil rights and winning the space race.

All groups were pulling for everyone to move ahead—regardless of political affiliation—Democrat, Republican, Farmer Labor, or Communist. We had passionate and partisan arguments about how to get things done. Yet the differences were about the means. Today the differences are about the ends.

For example:

- Does the fabric that binds our nation guarantee that I have the most freedom to do what I want to do? Or, do we come together as a

nation to improve life for all and leave a legacy of strength for future generations?

- Should the USA's relationship with other countries be based on preserving our identity regardless of the impact on others? Or should our nation's role focus on improving the quality of life across the planet?

We are not coming to terms with these questions. Over the past thirty years, our divisions within the country have become wider and deeper.

Our national debate focuses on issues that are not paramount to our future: gay marriages, abortion, and prayer in the schools. Obviously, many would vehemently disagree with this. Yet from my perspective, support for all youth, access to health care for all, ensuring that people who work fulltime have a livable wage is much more fundamental to the future of our society than whether the two men next door are married or whether my son has to repeat a prayer in school.

Debates about issues are cast in shrill, winner-take-all terms that do not promote a coming together. Our media personalities, those who set the tone of our discourse, shout at each other and interrupt each other as if civility and respect had no bearing on our culture.

We must again find a strong commonweal—one that works for all the population. We have confused our right to hold strong and differing personal beliefs with an overriding commitment to the commonweal. These are not mutually exclusive.

Although it is too much to ask that one election deal with cultural issues as deep-seated as these, we must reverse our current trend. Divided societies often come together when threatened by an external challenge. September 11 presented us with this threat. This attack carried with it an ironic potential that it would drive us together as a society. In our response, we could have set the course demonstrating our leadership in the world. We could have begun to reweave our common cultural fabric as well as establish a more mature leadership role in a new world order. Yet we squandered the potential to progress from this horrible tragedy.

So to me, this election carries with it great urgency. I want people to choose candidates that best offer opportunities for reweaving our cultural fabric. This fabric must carry with it a commitment to a better life for all. Given our growing divisions, I am afraid that time is running out.

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It's About Demography

Barbara Johnson

As someone who lives in the rarified air of the political arena, I hesitate to make any prediction about the outcome of this year's presidential election. As to whether this is a pivotal election, I would have to say it isn't.

My own opinion about presidential politics in general has to do with demographics. The baby boomers are the largest single voting bloc and they

(including me) are becoming more conservative as they get older. This is a normal phenomenon. Democrats who have been elected president in the past thirty years have been far more conservative than unsuccessful candidates. This trend continues and was reflected in the choice of John Kerry over Howard Dean as the Democratic nominee. Democrats on a national level have learned a lesson about being more centrist. Republicans have attempted to reach out to the African American and Hispanic communities, typical Democratic base voters.

Consequently, the basic public positions of the major parties and their platforms will be fairly similar. The slings and arrows will come from the edges and regardless of the result, no one's minds will change about the hot-button cultural issues. As the election process unfolds, however, one trend is already presenting itself again. The fringe fanatic tactics on both sides will continue to turn off the average citizen and contribute to the disenchantment with politics in general. To demonize either candidate demeans the entire political process and causes people to tune out even the substantive messages that need to be heard in this election.

It appears from the election four years ago and through current polling that the nation is fairly evenly divided between the two major parties. If the election goes to President Bush, I think people will have spoken about their need for a sense of security in very uncertain times. They agree with the direction the president has demonstrated in his first term. If Senator Kerry

wins, a majority of people will have had a troublesome experience with current policies. They may have lost a job, have concerns about environmental policies, or see us weighed down in an unwinnable war. When it comes down to raw numbers, a very small percentage of voters will make their decision on the matters of abortion or gay marriage. Most will vote their pocket-book.

In any case, either candidate will continue to steer our country in a middle-of-the-road direction, preserving our nation's position in the world. They may have different approaches but each has the country's best interest at heart. Whoever wins, however, will continue to be assaulted by the fringe and the majority of citizens will continue to be tired of these tactics.

Barbara Johnson is a member of the Minneapolis City Council and chairs the Ways & Means Committee.

The Only Thing More Pivotal: Reuniting Us

Dean E. Johnson

Every country's presidential election should be considered pivotal by its citizens. However, the 2004 U.S. presidential election appears to be among the most pivotal in modern history. Once the outcome is determined, the race's place in history may not be fully understood for decades. Regardless, the people of America will either reaffirm the existing direction or opt for new leadership—and thus new public policy.

The 2000 presidential election was as close as any in our nation's history.

Controversy and Supreme Court rulings engulfed the conclusion. Although Al Gore won the popular vote, President Bush captured just enough electoral votes to shepherd him into the White House. Over the past four years, he has guided the country through some of its most difficult times. The upcoming election is a referendum on both his policies and our citizens' desires for the future.

Despite the fact that the United States is the lone superpower left in the world, our global leadership is often harshly criticized by other countries. Our policies on trade, human rights, terrorism, war, and other fundamental issues stand as an outward expression of our values, goals, and priorities as a people.

First and foremost, this election is about our safety as a nation. Trade policies and foreign relations have an exponential effect on our everyday lives. The events of 9/11 shocked us into a new reality. The result is that our national security has taken on a new level of importance in the minds of both our leaders and our neighbors. This awareness of terrorism, combined with rapid changes in technology, has forced us to rethink the way we farm, educate our children, provide health care, and, ultimately, view the world. How we as a nation approach these opportunities will guide us for generations to come.

This election is also about a clean environment, energy policy, balancing the national budget, and reducing the national debt. It is about high education standards, the rising cost of health

care, and effective transportation systems. These core debates of government are at the very essence of who we are as a country, a people, and a culture. Consequently, this election is critically important to every person in America. The direction we chose will have a lasting impression on several generations.

Make no mistake: we are at a turning point on all of these issues, and on many of them, our country is extremely polarized. Perhaps the only thing more pivotal than the upcoming election is what our national leadership will do in the next four years to bring our people together.

Sen. Dean E. Johnson is majority leader of the Minnesota Senate.

It's Not Like There's Much Difference

Heather Mac Donald

Let's see: President Bush is spending like a drunken sailor; his Transportation Department has been suing airlines for discriminating against Muslim passengers after 9/11; his attorney general continues to sic judges on police departments in the name of combating "racial profiling"; and the latest justification for the war on Iraq—saving the Iraqis from a brutal dictator—comes right out of the Holbrooke-Albright foreign policy playbook that candidate Bush had vowed to close.

I haven't heard of a single federal racial quota program that has been rolled back. Nor have I heard any public defense of color-blind hiring.

A president John Kerry may try to squirm his way out of Bush's war in Iraq, but if another opportunity for liberal interventionism through bombing arises, he will undoubtedly seize it.

Neither Bush nor Kerry believes that people who have entered the country illegally should be deported or denied social services, free schooling, free hospital care, or driver's licenses; they only differ on how many benefits to bestow on the lawbreakers—such as citizenship now or later.

To be sure, a president Kerry would not waste too much breath arguing for marriage as a union between a man and a woman. But despite President Bush's cautious rhetoric in that direction, we are losing the culture wars either way. In twenty-five years, gays will be marrying.

Tax rates will undoubtedly differ under each candidate, but not more than the usual Democratic-Republican fluctuation.

So, no, I don't believe this is a pivotal election.

Heather Mac Donald is a fellow at the Manhattan Institute and the author of Are Cops Racist?

I Don't Know. And You Don't Know Either!

Roger Magnuson

I came across a bold bumper sticker on the backside of an aging Honda. "Militant Agnostic: I Don't Know. And You Don't Know Either."

The message detonated some random firings of my Starbucks-enhanced

synapses. Was not this an oxymoron? Or at least one of those “singular anomalies” that Gilbert and Sullivan assures us would surely “not be missed.”

And why, as a linguistic nicety, did the author use the Greek derivative, a (alpha privative) and gnosis, rather than the Latin parallel, with its “i” privative? “Militant ignoramus” could communicate with even more punch and scientific precision the driver’s position on things. And how does this relate to the scholastic concept of “invincible ignorance” and Chester Finn’s critiques of public education, and...

I finally settled on the chief significance of the bumper sticker. It sums up my thoughts on whether the 2004 presidential election will prove to be critical to the fortunes of the republic. And it provides a shot across the bow to my fellow columnists on the subject. I don’t know. And you don’t know either!

Who would have known that while Jimmy Carter was on hands and knees reviewing blueprints of submarine lavatories in the dead of night he was performing the useful service of preparing America for the Reagan Revolution?

How could one have known to thank Bill Clinton in advance for changing the control of the House of Representatives, an institution with a more intractable and entrenched majority than the Supreme Soviet?

And, on the dark side, who could have known that a few lost seats in the 1986 senatorial election would cost the Supreme Court Robert Bork, and the

nation a reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the return of the abortion issue to state legislatures?

Three potentially critical results of this year’s election seem at least probable, given the national priorities.

The first priority, of course, is to select a president who will be best at defending our liberty and assuring our security in a time of war. The threat of assaults by the fanatics and the terrorists is not going to go away. The pacification of Iraq will not happen overnight either.

While both candidates seem largely to be singing out of the same hymnal for public consumption, terrorists, while not known for their “sensitivity” generally, seem more sensitive to the moral resolve of their adversaries than most people acknowledge. After Grenada and the bombing of Libya, word reached both Moscow and Tripoli that Reagan was not a man to be taken lightly. The uncontrollable Qadhafi suddenly learned manners and self-control. Iran had earlier made its own reading of Jimmy Carter. It appeared under Reagan to sublimate, at least temporarily, its lust for provocation. The terrorists are more interested in the presidential resolve and stubbornness, than in the presidential syntax.

Weather vanes, on the other hand, seem to invite strong winds. Kerry, the over-the-top anti-war activist of yesterday, the yes-and-no-man of yesterday, the international syndicator of national defense today, the national leader of the once and future anti-war party, the seer of sensitivity, cries out to be tested.

As Khrushchev tested another Massachusetts-senator-turned-president, can we not expect the terrorists to test this new president early and often? And on American soil?

The second priority is domestic. It is reining in the judicial oligarchs who disguise as constitutional mandates the implementation of their personal political preferences. State criminal laws against sodomy may or may not be good public policy. But how does Justice Kennedy look at a Constitution drafted and ratified at a time when every colony, and then every state, made sodomy criminal, and conclude that that very same Constitution creates an absolute right to engage in sodomy today? Why does he choose to overrule precedent not two decades old that holds precisely the contrary? On what principled basis should the opinions of a few lawyers in black robes supplant, without textual authority in the Constitution, the laws of forty state legislatures? That is a critical issue that goes to the heart of the balance of powers.

There is, after all, no public policy issue, whether same-sex marriage or euthanasia or even the flat tax that cannot be “constitutionalized” by five people in black robes who think they are wise enough to revamp a nation’s mores and overrule the political bodies closest to the people. The judicial selection committee in a Kerry presidency would, of course, buy litmus paper by the gross. Kerry’s judicial nominees would be vetted by the normal special-interest censors to ensure fidelity to the party line. With life

tenure, further assertion of judicial primacy in public policy would be assured. The trial lawyers, abortion and gay rights lobbies, and other Kerry constituents would ensure that the federal courts would continue to engage in social adventurism virtually impossible to correct.

The third priority is perhaps as controversial these days as it was self-evident to our Framers. It is the centrality of the moral. The Greeks understood that the pedagogue has as his goal the inculcation of virtue by intellectual means. The Founders understood that virtue, and the morality at its foundation, were necessary to sustain a nation’s liberties.

There is little question that there is a cultural war being fought on multiple levels in America. It is evident in issues relating to church and state, faith-based initiatives, same-sex marriage, entertainment and public decency, and a host of other fronts. The goal of these assaults is to demoralize America. The hatred for the president, which seems so disproportionate to his congenial disposition and moderate domestic politics, is best understood as a passionate objection to his moralisms. He perhaps reminds his opponents of the repressive father they had growing up in the ethos—if not the decade—of the ’60s. This could be the most important effect of a Kerry win. The most committed of his supporters, symbolized by the Hollywood stars who help bankroll his campaign, are the most active proponents of demoralization. If our Framers had it right, that is a serious, long-term peril for the republic.

I suspect the Honda driver would think all these results of a Kerry administration a little bit of heaven on earth, the only kind he appears at the moment to be interested in. But for the country, the results would be dismal. I feel quite sure, and militant, about it.

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A Hope for Calm Voices of Compromise and Moderation

C. Peter Magrath

The question as to whether the 2004 presidential election is pivotal is interesting, though I am unsure how to define “pivotal.” And so I respond with a comment on the importance or special significance of this clearly hot and closely contested election. Moreover, these comments are more in the way of musings, since I am a very fallen (long ago) political scientist, but continue to be fascinated by politics and politicians qualifying me as a political junkie.

All elections—a privilege and a right unknown in too many parts of the world and taken too much for granted in the United States—are important and very American. Presidential election for one of the most powerful political offices in the world is inherently significant. Is the 2004 election uniquely special, or as some observers might call it, likely to be a “defining election” in the sense that a major shift in the political landscape may occur? The latter happens rarely. It happened in the Hoover-Roosevelt 1932 election, which led to a landslide win for FDR and huge margins for the Democrats in the House

and Senate. Arguably it occurred most recently in the 1994 congressional House elections orchestrated by Newt Gingrich, which signaled—despite the two Clinton presidential wins—a clear tilt toward the political right in American state and federal elections, a trend that seems to me rather clear since the 1980 presidential election triumph of Ronald Regan.

But no matter how passionate the emotions, fueled by the obscene expenditure of money on both sides in the Bush versus Kerry contest, this election does not strike me as being uniquely pivotal. Of course it is important, and it matters to all Americans—and not just the most intense Bush and Kerry partisans. A second George W. Bush administration will represent a policy and style on international matters considerably different than a Kerry administration, and such issues as how the United States approaches energy, environmental, and healthcare challenges will differ depending on the outcome. Nevertheless it seems to me that, despite the emotions surroundings so-called “culture wars” matters—gay marriages, abortion rights or wrongs, or respect for the flag—the majority of Americans are still politically moderate. They differ on the means, toward major policy objectives, yet share very common concerns in desiring a secure and terror-free international order, a stable economy where all who want jobs can have them at decent pay, a system of affordable healthcare, a reasonable guarantee of security in their later years, and good quality and accessible education for all Americans.

In observing and listening to the political screamers and schemers, the relentless attack ads that demean the attacker as well as the attacked, and the erosion of political centrists who can broker the compromises so essential to democratic government in our federal and state legislatures, I sometimes wonder, "Where have all the moderates gone?" Without a shred of evidence or data to bolster this assertion, it is my belief that the overwhelming majority of Americans are political centrists or moderates. Of course, there are many real and understandable divisions on such matters as the sanctity of life with regard to abortion or the questions that play out in the disputes surrounding gay marriages or partnership rights. These matters are important, but ultimately they are peripheral to the challenges before the United States and the world. The horrors in the Darfur region of Sudan, to take but just one of countless possible international examples, or the fact that over 44 million Americans have no health insurance, strike me as far more significant.

This election, as with all elections, will make a difference, not just to passionate Democrats or Republicans, in shaping the policies and directions of the United States. But whether it's another Bush administration or a Kerry administration, the nation will remain politically closely divided. At least for a while the moderate politicians will continue to be marginalized, and we will continue to have a closely divided Congress. The 2004 election will be

important, but not pivotal. And after the excesses, the heat, and the passion, perhaps in this fundamentally middle-class society—in which all aspire to be or define themselves as part of that great middle—calm voices of compromise and moderation will again emerge and prevail. Perhaps this is a forlorn hope, but it is my hope.

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Attacks from Within and Without Make it Pivotal

Mitzi (Mary J.) Malevich

Because 9/11 changed everything—we are at war—the election must be characterized as pivotal because we now have a new definition for defense of one's country, exemplified by George Bush's preemption doctrine.

Before the end of the Soviet regime, the world and most Americans were accustomed to seeing two entities as equally powerful. Now there is only one superpower left, namely the United States. This reality leaves many of us with ambivalent feelings about this superpower status. Some are happy to be in this position and offer no apologies because this status has allowed us to be very generous in treating our neighbors as ourselves. Others seem to worry about the fact that other people hate us and keep asking what we can do about that. (The answer is nothing, as it goes with the territory.)

Islam and the West have been at war for several centuries but mostly

back and forth across Europe and the Holy Land. Remember the Crusades? But the United States has been a sovereign nation only 228 years since July 4, 1776, (at a time when Islam was fighting over Spain).

Our history is short but definitive with regard to transportation and methods of warfare. In ***Nothing Like It in the World***, his book on the construction of the transcontinental railroad, Stephen Ambrose wrote:

“Lewis and Clark had led the way to the Pacific. They did so by foot, pole, paddle, sail, or on horseback, whatever worked and whatever they had available. No progress had been made in transportation since ancient Greece or Rome, and none when they got back to civilization in 1806. Steam power was first applied to boats the following year, and two decades later to the development of the steam-driven locomotive.”

Imagine! In the time from Caesar to George Washington, man’s ability to move had not changed. The technological innovation that followed and that continues today in the Western world has not been experienced by much of the Islamic world.

Islamic terrorists have used airplanes to bomb the World Trade Centers, but they aren’t even capable of building the planes they used. And slowly we have become aware of the fact they have been using airplanes since Ronald Reagan was president. Is this a new war with Islam or just a continuation of what took place in the earlier centuries?

President Bush responded the same way FDR did. He bombed back, first in Afghanistan, now in Iraq. Preemption is now our first line of defense.

When the bombing started, Sen. Joe Lieberman was the only prominent Democrat to sound as though preemption was a proper response. John Kerry still hasn’t given a definitive answer on whether preemption is a proper response to future attacks.

We can be sure of what Bush’s response will be, but can we believe what Mr. Kerry finally decides to tell us he will do? Mayor Randy Kelly of St. Paul, in endorsing Mr. Bush, said it well “... in turbulent times, what the American people need more than anything is continuity of government, even with some imperfect policies.”

At the same time we are facing the external threat from al-Qaida, we have been under internal attack over the “Western traditional values” that have historically defined us as a society. In the 1970s Kris Kristofferson wrote a song called “Why Me,” which starts like this: “Why me, Lord, what have I ever done to deserve even one of the pleasures I’ve known?” Like Kristofferson, I have often had the same thoughts. Why was I born in the United States? Why did my grandparents choose to come here? Questions only God can answer. Belief in God was fundamental in the founding of this country. Ronald Reagan believed we have a destiny to fulfill. Tony Blair said the same thing when he spoke to Congress recently.

What traditional values? Namely marriage and the definition of the family. Marriage between a man and a woman is a fundamental to every society, country, culture, nation, and religion and has been since humankind began. It determines ownership, responsibility, inheritance, and legal boundaries. Mr. Bush has made himself clear on this subject when he said he would pursue an amendment to the Constitution to protect us against attacks on marriage. Kerry has been non-committal although members of his family have said they favor marriage between same-sex people.

With our country under attack from without and from within, this presidential election is pivotal.

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Pivotaly Skeptical, but...

Marvin Olasky

We should be skeptical about “pivotal election” talk. Almost every presidential election has seemed pivotal to the contending forces, but look at two of the hardest-fought and closest: Was the American trajectory radically affected when Grover Cleveland lost to Benjamin Harrison in 1888? Was the 1892 rematch between the two then equally pivotal?

The same could be said regarding just about any election prior to 1980. Although their followers were often intoxicated both politically and literally, was Van Buren’s loss to Tippecanoe (and Tyler too) in 1840 pivotal? How about Coolidge vs. Davis in 1924? Karl Rove

brings to journalists’ attention McKinley vs. Bryan in 1896 and 1900, but had Bryan won we still would not have had what the one election that truly was pivotal—the Civil War-precipitating clash of 1860—brought upon us.

How about modern times? When Richard Nixon beat Hubert Humphrey in the pivotal election of 1968 many conservatives breathed sighs of relief, but Nixon in office helped to cement big government tendencies. When Nixon in the pivotal election of 1972 beat George McGovern sighs of relief were even deeper, but a Watergate cloud initially as small as a man’s hand caused such a deluge that the ferociously liberal congressional class of 1974 was in position to cut Vietnam and Cambodia adrift the following year.

Question, though: did the nature of American politics change in 1980? Earlier in the Cold War, the willingness to stand up to the Soviet Union was bipartisan, but the Democratic lurch to the left created an appeasement party that Ronald Reagan providentially was able to dominate. Had our military and rhetorical pressure not been firm at the time when Soviet leaders (although not American professors) were coming to realize that their system was fatally flawed, hardliners may have been able to hold on, and the Berlin Wall might still stand.

The 1980 election thus was pivotal, and every election since then has pitted a sometimes-wavering but generally firm GOP against a watery Democratic Party. As the 9/11 commission observed, Bill Clinton’s unwillingness to take Al-Qaida seriously after it

had declared war on us led to the event that brought the commission into existence. Perhaps the elections of 1992 and 1996 were not pivotal because we still had breathing room, but think about the election of 2000: if Al Gore had received a few more hundred Floridian votes, he would have been able to hem and haw over terrorism the following year.

And that brings us to the presidential election this fall, which I reluctantly conclude is pivotal because two decidedly different views of America's role in the world confront us. I have no doubt that a President Kerry could talk a good game, but does he understand that there is evil in the world that we must stand up against? Or does he think that those who hate America, Christianity, and Judaism can be massaged into politeness?

Even if John Kerry suddenly displays vision rather than equivocation, the pressures on the Democratic side toward accommodation and appeasement are so great that it would take a stubborn Andrew Jackson or Harry Truman to resist them—and with Kerry, the buck also seems to stop in Paris, Berlin, and Beacon Hill, or at least Turtle Bay. A review copy of *The Book of Rule* that arrived unbidden in the mail last month begins its discussion of “how we are governed” with an opening spread on the United Nations, and that's what John Kerry is likely to make first in war, although not in the hearts of his countrymen.

And what comes first in peace? Domestic issues would not make an election pivotal if we had basic agree-

ment on what makes a just or good society, or even how we should decide such questions, but now we do not. Supreme Court justices continue to arrogate to themselves more power, and we can either curse their dark robes or push for the appointment of candles rather than smudge pots. With several Supreme Court judges perhaps waiting until after the election to retire, whoever is in the White House may have the opportunity to have his judicial way for the next thirty years.

Oh, I hate to describe our next vote as pivotal, particularly because if Republicans win, the battle for the soul of the GOP will intensify once again, and victory for compassionate conservatives will once again be elusive. But if the Democrats win, international and judicial disaster is within our grasp.

Marvin Olasky is editor-in-chief of World and a professor at the University of Texas.

Incurious George

Vance Opperman

Curiosity is the sign of many things, including good leadership. George Bush is simply not curious enough to be president of the United States, in spite of the curious way in which he achieved that office. He was of course the candidate who explained that until he had become governor of Texas, he had never traveled outside the United States (Texas borders Mexico). Underemployed sons of ambassadors frequently travel with their families. George Bush Sr., in addition to being the former chief of the CIA (an organization committed to curiosity), was also, of

course, our ambassador to China. Do you suppose dinnertime conversation in the Bush household would've included dialogue like, "gee Mom, where's Dad?" Mama Bush: "In China, he's the ambassador you know." Incurious George: "Oh, what's for dinner?"

Soon after this George Bush became president, he informed us that we should drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to solve the energy crisis then occurring in California. Apparently our president was incurious regarding the generation of electric power in this country—hardly any of it is produced by burning petroleum products.

For many of us, it is the economy, stupid—but for this presidency, it's more a "what, me worry?" indifference. Treasury secretary Paul O'Neil was asked to do a complete review of our structural deficit in preparation for the 2002–2003 budget and tax proposals. His extensive report, which documented a structural deficit in excess of \$44 trillion and recommended an across-the-board immediate tax increase or benefit decrease of 33 percent, received an incurious response. O'Neil was fired. Rather than show immediate interest in how this disastrous deficit could be remedied, the only curiosity shown by the White House was directed to whether or not O'Neil had taken any classified documents with him. That inquiry was quietly dropped (at the end of the news cycle) when it was shown O'Neil had the documents cleared by counsel prior to his removal. Apparently the president has shown no curiosity in discussing with his former

Treasury secretary any of the tax and fiscal implications of the O'Neil report.

A little more curiosity about weapons of mass destruction, yellow cake uranium, the role of the Iraqi secular government of Saddam Hussein in opposing Osama bin Laden, the impossibility of urban warfare in Baghdad, the frequent military reports of prisoner abuse, the true allegiance of Chalabi, nuclear technology sales by Dr. Khan, a need for peacekeeper ground troops, the lack of democratic traditions in Iraq—any American citizen will have his favorite list of items he wishes our president had been curious about. The president appears to be remarkably incurious about who in his administration outed an active CIA agent.

Curiosity regarding the warnings and contents of the August 6, 2001, presidential daily briefing would certainly have been appreciated in hindsight. The president's position on stem cell research, the only outcome of his nearly one-month vacation immediately before 9/11, is a remarkable example of the dangers of incuriosity.

Rather than listen to scientific expertise, the president opposed the extension of stem cell research on the basis of faith. However, relying upon a faulty understanding of this faith, he would allow some stem cell research to continue on pre-existing and soon-to-be outmoded stem cell lines. And this illustrates the real danger. There are those who believe knowledge, or at least knowledge that must be acted upon, is best received as a matter of faith. A faith-based epistemology negates inconvenient curiosity about

the real world and real consequences. Perhaps this explains the curiosity void that best defines the Oval Office. Few people can show so little curiosity after more than 500 days of vacation. In a previous Minnesota election, I always felt that John Marty was running for the wrong office; rather than governor, he should have been elected chief Lutheran minister. And by the same token, Bush is too incurious a George to be a president. As with Bonzo, it should be his bedtime.

Vance Opperman is president and CEO of Key Investments Inc., which provides venture capital for biomedical start-ups.

Ground Zero: The Court and Same-Sex Marriage

Gary Palmer

Many political observers believe that the 2004 election is the most critical election since 1980, not just in terms of whom the American voters elect as president, but also in terms of whom they send to Congress. While the central issues before the American public are U.S. policy in dealing with terrorism and U.S. economic and tax policy, those are not the issues that will likely determine the outcome of this election. Rather, the determinant issues of the election may very well be those that invigorate the two groups whose core beliefs on social issues are at the opposite ends of the spectrum—secular liberals and religious conservatives.

For these two, there are two issues at stake in this fall's election that are ground zero for both in terms of their social agenda—the makeup of the U.S.

Supreme Court and the legalization of homosexual marriage.

Both the secular liberals and the religious conservatives know what is at stake in this election regarding the federal courts. Over the next four years there will be three, possibly four, Supreme Court vacancies to fill. In addition, there could be over 150 vacancies to fill on the federal circuit and district courts. Through his appointments, the next president will likely have the unequaled opportunity to influence the direction of the entire federal judiciary and the Supreme Court for the next thirty years.

Consequently, because the federal courts have become the last hope of secular liberals to enforce their social agenda, the reelection of President Bush along with the addition of Republicans to the U.S. Senate would be a devastating blow.

It would be no less so for religious conservatives if John Kerry were to win and the Democrats regained control of the Senate. Giving Kerry three or four appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court would mean the loss of what many believe is the last chance to rein in activist federal judges.

Many religious conservatives are already fearful that the federal judiciary has gone too far in its pronouncements on the separation of church and state and have crossed a line that threatens religious freedom. A recent survey indicated that the vast majority of evangelical Protestant pastors are concerned about the erosion of religious freedom. The survey found that even among pastors of liberal mainline

churches 58 percent think that the separation of church and state has gone too far.

Among conservative pastors there is a growing fear that a liberal dominated court will impose restrictions on their ability to preach against moral issues such as homosexual marriage. These fears have been heightened by reports from around the nation of church services being monitored by a group called the "Mainstream Coalition," which has threatened to file complaints with the IRS against pastors and churches that have been outspoken in opposition to homosexual marriage.

Aside from their concerns about the loss of religious freedom, from a purely political standpoint a Kerry victory would mean that the influence of religious conservatives would be severely diminished. Not only would they have failed to rally their base, they would have failed in an election where the social issue consequences could not be more evident and the differences between the presidential candidates could not be more obvious. For religious conservatives, this election should be the one that would most energize evangelicals and Catholics to register and vote.

With the polls showing the race in a virtual dead heat, at this point the presidential race and several key House and Senate races may well be determined by the ability or inability of the secular liberals and religious conservatives to turn out their people. Because the outcome of this election could well determine whose values will be the

dominant influence on public policy for the next generation, for secular liberals and religious conservatives, the stakes could not be higher.

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Critical Need for 'Normal' Election

Lisa Lebedoff Peilen

A number of years ago, a commercial for a women's hair coloring product ended with a famous question: "Does she or doesn't she?" The presidential election of 2000 also spawned a famous question: "Was he or wasn't he?" The fact is that millions of Americans do not believe that George W. Bush was legitimately elected president of the United States.

That is one of the reasons that the presidential election of 2004 is so crucial. Certainly President Bush wants to be elected in the traditional manner, that is, without court involvement, so that he will not have to be identified for eternity with an asterisk after his name, a la Roger Maris in baseball.

But personal concerns aside, it is critically important for our country to have a "normal," uneventful election. Whether they agreed with it, Americans accepted the Supreme Court's final ruling on the presidential election. There were many strong feelings about that decision, but no rioting on the streets. Our institutions and our country survived and moved forward.

While that acceptance demonstrates the strength of our democratic

tradition, I am reminded of that old saying, the asset is the liability and the liability is the asset. Our institutions survive only because of public confidence in them. Americans tolerated the last election but they won't tolerate many more like it. If they believe the voting process is seriously flawed, and that elections will be decided by a politicized court system, they will no longer support the process. It is imperative that the election of 2004 be decided by the Electoral College and not the courts.

The other important issue for this election is whether Americans will be willing to change leadership in the midst of a war. Traditionally, we have been most reluctant to do so, but all indications so far are that the election is too close to call. I believe that the administration's own strategy may backfire to this extent: I believe the administration made a calculated decision to increase support for the war by sheltering most of us from it. The real burden of this war is being borne by a very few. This is very different from the Vietnam era, when the draft brought the war to the doorstep of many Americans. Certainly opposition to the Vietnam War was what prompted President Johnson to not seek another term. But the flip side to this is that most Americans today feel no involvement or connection with the war in Iraq. Consequently, they may be more willing to change direction precisely because they have no investment in it.

Lisa Lebedoff Peilen, St. Louis Park, was a Republican-endorsed candidate for the

Minnesota House in 2002 and is former director of tourism for the state of Minnesota.

Probably Should, Probably Won't

Tim Penny

Will this election matter? The short answer is that it should, but probably won't.

As we approach the November election, voters know that much is at stake. They sense that this is as consequential an election as any in their lifetimes. National security concerns and economic issues are of near equal importance to the electorate. Voters instinctively sense that this is a time of challenge and opportunity for America—and they want to get it right. But the two major parties, their candidates, and their surrogates are not helping us. Some examples:

- America is struggling with the messy aftermath of the Iraq war, where to date over 1,000 soldiers have perished. Between Iraq and Afghanistan (not to mention the Balkans), over 160,000 American troops are in harms way, many of them (40 percent in Iraq alone) are activated members of the guard and reserve forces. While we need a debate about the conduct of the current "war against terror," we are instead preoccupied by what each presidential candidate did (or didn't do) almost forty years ago during the Vietnam War.
- America is faced with a continuing threat from terrorists, not knowing

when or where the next target might be. Homeland security is an expensive and difficult undertaking in a nation such as ours with relatively open borders and broad coastlines. While we deserve a discussion about the proper balance between freedom and security, we are too often bogged down in a partisan blame game about who leaked what and when.

- America is gradually recovering from a cyclical recession, which was exacerbated by 9/11 and shaken by a series of corporate scandals. At the same time, a globalized economy has made traditional fiscal and monetary measures less effective in stimulating economic growth and job creation. While we struggle to understand conflicting signals on the economy, we are further confused by candidates who assert that things are better (or worse) than we know them to be.
- America is increasingly reliant on foreign investors to finance our federal budget deficit—which stands at \$450 billion with no sign of abating. New entitlement benefits, most notably the Medicare drug program, and a soon-to-retire baby boom population, threaten to saddle the nation with either unsustainable debt or future large tax increases. While we wonder about the cause and effect of the budget deficit, we hear only generalities—and no specifics—about how either presidential candidate will rein in the red ink.

- America is more addicted to foreign oil than ever before. Forty years after the first oil crisis, our nation still has no comprehensive energy policy. Recent oil price increases have again reminded us of the threat this poses to both our economy and our national security. While we pay the price at the pump for our reliance on foreign oil, we are skeptical of today's campaign promises because we know both parties share blame for our oil dependence.

In short, these weighty issues deserve a more thoughtful and insightful discussion than voters are being offered by the candidates, their parties, and the special-interest groups.

This year, by most accounts, thirty-three states (representing fully two-thirds of the electoral votes) are already securely “red” or “blue.” Accordingly, the vast majority of the voting electorate will be essentially ignored by the candidates. In some ways, they are the lucky ones. Those of us in the so-called “battleground” states will get lots of attention—little of it edifying. Already, we in Minnesota (along with other battleground state residents) have been bombarded by attack ads that began as early as March.

The two major parties (and their associated interest groups) seem more interested in “big lies” than in big ideas. The essential message this sends is that each side is willing to do whatever it takes to win—even when it means stretching, bending, or ignoring the truth. Candidates and their surrogates market these untruths because

the tactic works. The respected Annenberg School of Communication found in a survey earlier this year that most voters “absorb and believe what they see, no matter how dubious the relation to the truth.”

This attack-style approach to campaigning leaves voters with less information and more misinformation. In the end, instead of a positive mandate with which to govern, the ultimate victor will have a negative mandate. In short, “not the other guy.” Sadly, bringing Americans together and moving the nation forward will be more difficult in the aftermath of an election that does more to make us angry than to make us proud.

Tim Penny, co-director of the Humphrey Institute Policy Forum at the University of Minnesota, represented Minnesota's First Congressional District from 1982 through 1994.

In Danger of Becoming a Nation Ruled by Judges

Tom Prichard

This year's presidential election will be significant for a number of reasons. It will decide who will lead this nation in the war against terrorism and the approach taken to address the pressing domestic problems like social security and health care reform. Just as important, it will decide who fills the anticipated vacancies on the U.S. Supreme Court and federal appellate courts. The impact of those judicial selections will be felt far beyond the term of the current president and will have a far-reaching impact for generations.

In many respects presidents are hemmed in by realities beyond their control. In foreign policy, the terrorist threat will be the central issue for years. Whoever is president will have to address that. Of course, competency and personnel will be very important in successfully dealing with this threat. Domestically, the federal budget deficit will serve as a restraint on efforts to raise taxes and increase government spending. The next president will be limited by those restraints. Certainly there is a pressing need to reform healthcare and the Social Security systems. The approaches we take—empowering individuals or expanding the role of government—are certainly important. But if things move in the wrong direction, it's going to happen for four years, not necessarily twenty.

Not so on the judicial front. The next president will make decisions having a far-reaching impact on issues that are fundamental to the moral and social well-being of our nation. A brief look at the past sixty years of judicial history shows the disastrous impact judicial activism has had on our nation. The Supreme Court's “abortion on demand” mandate has not only taken millions of innocent human lives but also cheapened our view of life. (It's impacted our economy when we consider there are tens of millions of fewer workers in our workforce.) It's also heightened social and political conflict by denying people the ability to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Additionally, a strict separationist view of religion and our public life among judges nationwide has not only

excluded prayer from public schools, but has also had a very chilling effect on teaching faith-based moral values to our nation's young people. (One of the most ridiculous statements offered by the Supreme Court to justify its strict separationist views was the following rationale given in a case forbidding the mere posting of Ten Commandment posters in public school classrooms: "If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all, it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments...it is not a permissible state objective under the establishment clause.") And we wonder why the moral climate in our nation has deteriorated.

The most recent example of judicial tyranny was the Supreme Court's "discovery" last year of a constitutionally protected right to sodomy. The significance of that decision was not the ridding of a rarely enforced anti-sodomy law in Texas, but the rationale for the decision. (I wonder what Washington, Madison, and Adams would think of the idea that the Constitution they approved contained a constitutional right to sodomy.) As Justice Antonin Scalia said in his dissent, the rationale for the decision lays the foundation for establishing a constitutional right to same-sex marriage.

The greatest, long-term threat to liberty in our nation is not terrorism, but the moral breakdown we see occurring inside our nation; a breakdown aided and abetted by an out of control and unaccountable judiciary. We are

quickly becoming a nation ruled by judges instead of properly elected lawmakers. Unless judges understand their limited role is to interpret the law not engage in social engineering, then we can expect not only further loss of liberty, but also continued social conflict and moral breakdown.

The election of 2004 will be significant for a number of reasons but especially for the judges the next president appoints to our federal courts.

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It's the Courts, Stupid

Dwight Rabuse

This presidential election is pivotal—for reasons almost unmentioned by the candidates themselves. Those reasons are at least threefold, and go by the names of Rehnquist, O'Connor, and Stevens—the Supreme Court justices most likely to be replaced by the next occupant of the White House. These justices—all Republican appointees—who will turn eighty, eighty-five, and seventy-five before the end of next year—occupy different points of the spectrum on a high court their younger colleague, Antonin Scalia, describes as having "taken sides in the cultural war." Not far behind in age, four other justices, Anthony Kennedy, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer and Scalia himself, will be more than seventy years old by the time the next presidential term ends. Rehnquist has been a dependable conservative vote. Stevens, a Ford appointee, has moved steadily

leftward. O'Connor occupies the middle, frequently the decisive swing vote on a court split on controversial issues of race, government power, and the state's power to regulate sexual behaviors.

While many executive decisions are reversible as administrations change, court appointments are not. They continue to determine, for good or ill, a president's legacy long after a term of office ends. And the influence of the federal courts on that legacy has never been more powerful. The traditional power of the states to regulate and determine issues surrounding crime, family life, and sexual conduct has migrated to the federal judiciary. An electorate sharply divided on social and cultural issues from abortion to capital punishment to homosexual rights has increasingly found that the power to shape the law surrounding such issues has been wrested away from the legislatures and Congress to the courts.

Activists on all sides understand that who wears the black robes is more important than who prevails in the state assemblies or referenda. And President Bush, unlike many of his Republican predecessors, is a chief executive who understands the importance of the judicial appointment power very well. Dwight Eisenhower lived to recall his appointments of Earl Warren and William Brennan as his two biggest mistakes. Richard Nixon appointed Harry Blackmun, who authored the majority opinion in *Roe v. Wade* and became a predictable vote against the death penalty. Reaganites still mourn their failure to win confirmation for Robert Bork and the critical

vote by his "replacement," Kennedy, not to overturn *Roe*. Justice O'Connor's "middle course" votes between the factions on affirmative action and other social issues have frustrated the Reagan and Bush Justice Departments. Against this backdrop the current administration is mindful that judicial appointments matter. The Democrats in Congress know that too, as evidenced by the unprecedented stonewalling of Bush picks to the district and appellate courts. And the current confirmation fights are only dustups compared to the looming war over the next Supreme Court vacancy, which may make the Bork confirmation fight look like a tea party.

Nobody talks much anymore about the "big issues" of the 2000 campaign, the social security "lock box" or Medicare coverage for prescription drugs. The economy continues to improve and shrink as an issue. And even the war in Iraq fades as a basis for voters to choose between the candidates. We are in Iraq for years to come, on this the candidates agree, and there are few differences between Kerry and Bush on what to do there next.

The presidential candidates may talk about them only in code, but abortion, school choice, gay marriage, states rights, and the other so-called social issues are at the heart of the political and cultural divide between red states and blue states. Presidents will have little direct control over the outcome of these and other issues, but the judges they appoint will.

Voters do understand, or soon will, that a Kerry Supreme Court justice and

a George Bush justice are very different creatures. Kerry judges will not hesitate to make new law—law conservatives will not like. Bush judges will not translate their social and moral judgments into law, but they will likely respect and recognize the right of the people, acting through their elected representatives, to decide these matters. The next president will likely have the chance to appoint several justices, and hundreds of other judges, in his own image and likeness. That alone makes the election of 2004 pivotal. It will shape the course of American law, and thereby the culture, for decades to come.

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Pivotal? Probably Not

Lawrence W. Reed

If passion and rhetoric made presidential elections "pivotal," the 2004 battle would qualify. We're surely in for one of the nastiest and most partisan campaigns in U.S. history. Politics, however, is the one corner of life where smoke doesn't mean there's fire. Big and ever-growing government brings forth deep passion and fiery rhetoric for reasons other than real differences in philosophy or policy. Whoever is in charge for the next four years will have a lot of power over \$10 trillion or more of other people's money.

In every presidential election in my lifetime, somebody—usually the preponderance of pundits—has claimed the contest is "pivotal," "critical," or in

one way or another the most important political event in living memory. Sadly, we're usually faced with the prospect of leaving a soiled diaper on a baby and just changing the safety pin.

I wish it weren't so. I love a spirited political rivalry based on substance. As one who believes that the size and role of government dwarfs other issues, I long for a presidential election in which you know in your heart that government will get bigger under one candidate and smaller under the other.

This is what really makes a presidential election "pivotal"—viable options, starkly different; clear-cut philosophical and policy distinctions between the major candidates, plainly evident to all; good reasons to believe that electing this candidate instead of that one will make an unusually big difference in the course the country takes in coming years.

Based on what we know now, it appears that this year's election does not measure up to the significance of the elections of 1800 (Adams vs. Jefferson), 1828 (Adams vs. Jackson), 1860 (Lincoln vs. Douglas, Breckinridge and Bell), 1912 (Taft vs. Wilson and Roosevelt), 1932 (Hoover vs. Roosevelt), or even 1980 (Carter vs. Reagan). **Those** were pivotal elections. Americans voted, and big changes followed.

The differences between Bush and Kerry range from moderate to substantial on many "social" issues, such as abortion and gay marriage. Kerry's court appointments would likely be more liberal than Bush's. Under Kerry, American foreign policy would be

more accommodationist and consensus-seeking, a problematic shift that carries its own set of risks. But public opinion and the likelihood of a Republican Congress would work to restrain the extremist tendencies of a Kerry administration.

Under either Bush or Kerry, the federal establishment will grow. The present administration has delivered stunningly huge increases in domestic spending. Bush seems likely to go down in history as the first president in a century to veto nothing in his first term.

Republican Congresses seem interested in spending restraint only when a Democrat sits in the White House. So even though Kerry promises more new federal spending than Bush, the track record suggests we will actually get more if Bush is re-elected.

If Bush delivers some form of Social Security privatization—an unfulfilled promise from the 2000 campaign, and something Kerry would never countenance—we might someday look back and assess the 2004 contest as more important than it now seems. Allowing citizens to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in personal bank accounts, stocks, or bonds would make good policy sense and strengthen personal responsibility.

But if history is any guide, a reelected president will have only the two years before the mid-term elections to make big changes. Unfortunately, in the last four years, Bush did little to prepare the country for a major overhaul of Social Security.

A pivotal election? I hope post-November events make it so. In the meantime, I'm not encouraged.

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Switching to a Progressive Horse Midstream

Bruce Sanborn

John Kerry gambled in Boston and put Bill Clinton up to bat. And Clinton delivered. With the convention delegates, Clinton used lines like:

"We Democrats will bring to the American people this year a positive campaign, arguing not who is a good or a bad person, but what is the best way to build a safe and prosperous world our children deserve."

Let's get beyond who is good or bad. Let's talk positive: about the way to build. Build what? A safe, wealthy world. Why? Because the children deserve it.

Arguing not whether an idea is good or bad, we could brainstorm how the Democrats might make the whole world prosperous. As leader they picked Kerry, whose marriages have made him infamously wealthy. Moreover, Democrats have progressive ideas; for instance, about marital flexibility, regulating wealth, and big multilateral government. Why not build on the Kerry model, and yes—still have government go after people's private property and income with progressive taxes and regulations—but also get governments

building wealth through marriage. Multilaterally issue a mandate world-wide: in the twenty-first century, rich people must marry poor people, middle class people must marry middle class people, and if any prosperity shortfalls remain, some people must practice polygamy and polyandry. Two Americas? Accept no limits, get progressive: marry the two.

Concerning keeping the planet safe, including a free America, my research shows Mark Steyn is onto something:

“The notion that you can take a four-year intermission from the war is appealing, but a fantasy. Both Iran and North Korea are likely to come to the boil during the next presidential term, and nothing in either John Kerry’s record or temperament suggests he’s up to settling either of those crises in America’s favor. So our hopes of avoiding Armageddon may rest on how effectively Kerry bores his candidacy into the ground.”

Clinton was pretending about getting beyond good and bad. Politics, after all, ought to, and always does, talk about who is good and bad, say, to lead the country and uphold the law of the land. Here’s a workable definition: speech and actions are good that befit human beings in a democracy. We might consider good and bad uses of truth by Kerry and Bush.

At the Democrat convention, Kerry implied Bush misled America into war. Earlier that month using some awful grammar in a *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* interview, Kerry followed Michael Moore’s line of attack and accused Bush and the Republicans of outright lying to America:

“These guys have broken, I think, all those [Midwest] values, and, especially, how you send young Americans to war. Midwest values believe you tell the truth to the American people, and they didn’t tell the truth.”

Kerry, however, knows that regarding Iraq and weapons of mass destruction Bush acted in line with the reports of British, Russian, and U.S. intelligence and the opinions of the Clinton administration as to the weapons Saddam likely possessed. Bush acted on the best information available to an American statesman. Kerry calls Bush a liar for not possessing superhuman knowledge, a standard only a god or visionary could meet. That’s unjust and bad, especially given that Kerry has held himself to a subhuman standard.

For three decades, in order to influence U.S. defense and foreign policy and possibly to promote himself, Kerry has told citizens, reporters, and fellow senators of his being sent illegally into Cambodia on Christmas Eve 1968, being shot at by Khmer Rouge combatants and drunken South Vietnamese allies, and hearing President Nixon say on the radio U.S. soldiers were not in Cambodia.

It turns out Nixon wasn’t president in ’68 and Kerry wasn’t in Cambodia then. Caught, Kerry’s campaign now says it was not Christmas Eve, not 1968, and Kerry was “near” not in Cambodia. No mention of being shot at by Khmer Rouge and drunken allies.

The question before us is: is this election pivotal? I expect so and borrow a cautionary metaphor Abe Lincoln used when running for reelection

in the Civil War. It's not wise to switch horses in the middle of a stream, especially in time of war, and especially if the new horse is not too good and will likely insist on progressive swimming, with horse and rider imitating dolphin, flipping and, I'm afraid, flopping.

Bruce Sanborn is chairman of the Claremont Institute in California and Washington D.C.

They Can't All Be 'The Most Important'

Chuck Slocum

A presidential election is always a watershed in America's history. The November 2 election will, indeed, be a pivotal one.

More money than ever before will be spent on campaigns and TV advertising. Fewer than half of Americans eligible to vote will do so. When it is all over, our two major political parties will each claim and define a victory. All the other parties and their losing candidates will lament the politics of America, calling for changes in the way we elect our leaders. Post-election opinion polls will show that many Americans were unhappy with the campaign.

For decades and perhaps longer, presidential elections have taken on a common theme—that the election of this president is the most important decision voters will ever make. I have voted in the last nine presidential elections and it is unlikely that each one was the most important decision that we voters would ever make. The 1968 election was a watershed, to be sure. The 2000 election was so close that it

will go down as an extremely important one, too. The elections of 1972 and 1996, in retrospect, were relatively inconsequential. The 2004 election will rank somewhere in between those benchmark presidential contests, in my view.

So, how should America go about practicing its 228-year-old form of democracy in the conduct of presidential elections?

- We should recognize that much that America does is good. Through both our private and free-market driven institutions—working in partnership with our own various local, state and federal governments—we have created a country that provides opportunity and delivers favorable results for the vast majority of us. We have food, housing, schooling, health care, job opportunities, and life choices that are the envy of the rest of the world. Still, we have an “underclass” representing one in five Americans who do not share in the abundance.

The 2004 campaign has done little to address how our nation's future can best expand its abundance to those within our own county who have unmet needs.

- America's largesse has been spread throughout the world. We have long “outsourced” our wealth through shared goods, services, technologies, and people. Our generosity as expressed through both public and private international philanthropy has helped millions who are sick, malnourished and dispirited in

crises. Still, within the worldwide community, we are distrusted and even despised by many of those nations we have served.

The 2004 campaign has done little to address how America can define and sustain its rightful place as a respected world citizen.

- America's role as the sole international superpower nation for more than a decade has been celebrated widely as a harbinger of many good things for the rest of the world. Without a fascist or communist menace from which to defend itself, America has not yet defined and often appears uncomfortable with this unique opportunity to shape the world. Superpower nations of previous times have been challenged and undone by their own actions and perceptions of the rest of the world.

The 2004 campaign has done little to find consensus regarding how America must exercise its own superpower status on the world stage.

- While the managers parlayed the personal attack and "wedge" issues vigorously, a reasoned debate on America's military spending, foreign aid strategies, economic development, environmental priorities, and lifelong education of its citizens was not articulated in the 2004 campaign.

All that said, we live in the greatest nation in the history of mankind and it is a wondrous time to be alive.

Chuck Slocum is president of Williston Group, a management consulting organization.

Believe It or Not: Status Quo **David Strom**

Every election, it seems, is pivotal.

At least it seems that way while the campaigns are in full swing. The economy depends on the election. Foreign policy too. And don't forget the Supreme Court.

Let's face it: elections matter. But not every election matters as much as we like to think.

The last election to really matter, in a sense that world history was changed by it, was the 1980 election. Electing Ronald Reagan mattered. The sclerotic American economy was revitalized; unions lost their stranglehold (see previous); the Soviet Union was dealt a death blow; democracy and freedom were reborn across the world. The 1980 election mattered.

In the sense that the 1980 election was pivotal—that there was a chance for a real change in directions that mattered—the election of 2004 is unlikely to qualify. For better or worse this election is likely to be a choice between two largely status quo candidates.

The simple fact is that we are still living in the world that Ronald Reagan created: America as the world's the sole superpower, regulated free markets dominating the U.S. economic system, and relatively low taxes and relatively limited government the dominant fiscal policy.

The candidates differ on many issues. But not in any manner that would change the fundamental ethos of the American system in the way that

FDR and Reagan did. Electing FDR mattered. Electing Reagan mattered. They changed the world.

It seems unlikely that either Bush or Kerry has it in him to change the world in that manner—or that the American people would want it as such. Despite the huge emotional energy behind the red state/blue state differences over cultural issues, it seems unlikely that anything in this election cycle will change the basic policy consensus behind Reaganism.

Could Kerry truly govern significantly to the left of Clinton? It seems unlikely, given the face put forward by the Democrats in Boston. Obviously, the Democrat Party seems to think that in order to get elected, they must be (middle-class) tax cutting, pro-military, anti-terrorist patriots. It may be that they had to grit their teeth to project that image, but the basic truth is that they understand that the American consensus today is Reaganism, whatever they might like to call it.

The one prize that conceivably might really matter, the Supreme Court, is of course at stake. The last thing we need is another activist liberal on the court. Another Antonin Scalia or Clarence Thomas would be nice. But honestly, the record of Republicans when putting judges on the bench has been pretty miserable. And until Republicans get sixty votes in the Senate, that record is likely to remain pretty grim. Conversely, as long as the Democrats don't have sixty votes, it is unlikely that we will see another Ruth Bader Ginsburg put on the court.

So relax. As important as this election now seems (as Hugh Hewitt likes to say, "your life literally depends on it"), in reality this is likely to be a status quo election whoever wins.

David Strom is president of the Taxpayers League of Minnesota.

No—Not Until June

Lou Wangberg

Will the election of 2004 be pivotal? Yes—and no.

As exciting as the red/blue of the election night map may be, no major changes will occur on Election Day in November. Nor will there be a wrenching change on inauguration day. If George Bush is returned for another term there will be changes but none promise to be dramatic. Should John Kerry prevail it will take months for his team to be installed and his proposals to be put forth and enacted. "Pivotal" implies a rapid almost immediate change.

To be truly pivotal there must be fundamental and lasting changes, a legacy that survives the quick passage of a four-year presidential term of office. The truly sweeping transformation that makes the answer "yes" comes from events that could start in the summer of 2005.

In June of 2005 the last of 150 or so annual judicial rulings of the Supreme Court of the United States will have been handed down. Following the court's adjournment for the summer, at least one justice is likely to retire. By tradition and observance of political reality,

justices seldom retire in an election year filled with the certain controversy that a nomination and resulting confirmation hearings would stimulate. Only a death or serious illness would generate the need for an early nomination.

The current court has been the same since Justice Stephen Breyer took his seat in 1994. This is the longest unchanged court in the 135 years since its membership was increased to nine. George W. Bush, like Jimmy Carter, is one of the few presidents who has not had an opportunity to name a justice.

This is an aging Supreme Court. By the summer of 2005 only one member, Clarence Thomas, will be under the age of sixty-five. David Souter, Anthony Kennedy, Antonin Scalia, and Breyer will be in their late sixties. Ruth Bader Ginsburg will be seventy-two. In spite of their age, these six justices are not expected to retire. Health issues, such as the colon cancer that Ginsburg has successfully overcome, could change that. Court watchers, however, do not predict these six leaving.

By next summer, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who is rumored to have considered retirement in the past, will be seventy-five. Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who will be eighty, has also reportedly considered retirement. Justice John Paul Stevens will be eighty-five. The retirement of any or all of these justices in either 2005 or 2006 would not be a surprise.

In all of the 215 years since the first justice was named there have only been sixteen chief justices and just over 100 associate justices. The average tenure on the Supreme Court is

just over fifteen years, nearly four times that of a presidential term.

The Rehnquist Court dates to 1986. From the last addition to the court in 1994 there have been numerous 5-4 votes. The replacement of two or three of the justices will significantly change the philosophical direction. Conservative justices appointed by Bush would tilt the court toward rulings that could be highly controversial. Previous major rulings such as *Roe v. Wade* might be subject to reconsideration. In like manner, more liberal justices nominated by John Kerry promise to swing the court in the opposite direction.

Of the approximately 150 rulings each year only a handful result in major societal changes. However, when they do occur, as in *Brown v. Board of Education* or *Roe v. Wade*, the whole of America is redirected. One can easily imagine the screaming headlines proclaiming "Abortion Illegal Again," or "Homosexual Marriage Made Legal." It could well go one way or the other.

This kind of potentially sweeping change would not come in one roaring storm. It would not happen in one judicial year. But with average court tenure four times that of presidents there will surely be pivotal changes one way or the other over time.

There is no doubt that the most important single issue to be resolved in the election of 2004 is the future composition of the Supreme Court. Fighting terrorism, the war in Iraq, a cabinet-level intelligence department, and budget debates, are compelling and on the surface more controversial. None, however, has the greater potential for

altering our American system more than the persons who serve on the Supreme Court. The only certainty is uncertainty. Only the ultimate direction of the change is in question. As Americans vote they would do well to think long term.

Lou Wangberg, an educator and management consultant, was Minnesota's lieutenant governor from 1979 to 1983.

Security of America is at Stake

Bob Williams

While all elections play a crucial role in determining the level of freedom we pass to future generations, the 2004 presidential race is an especially pivotal election.

The choices have never been clearer in several important domestic issues:

- Bush wants to cut taxes and reform the tax code. Kerry's policies would lead to higher taxes.
- Bush supports protecting innocent human life. Despite admitting that life begins at conception, Kerry opposes any and all restrictions on abortion.
- Bush supports Thomas Jefferson's idea that individuals, not government are the wisest repositories of public trust. Kerry appears to believe that government can make better decisions than individuals.
- Bush strongly favors judges who support the rule of law. Kerry would appoint activist judges.

However, what truly makes this election pivotal is the issue of homeland security.

In June, a recording made by Jordanian-born terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi threatened to fight Americans "until Islamic rule is back on Earth." Far from wanting to rid the Muslim world of "infidels," Islamist (Muslim fascist) extremists want to establish their radical ideology in every nation. In that, they are no different from imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, or the Communist Soviet Union.

We are at war with an enemy that seeks to destroy our way of life, and therefore we need a commander-in-chief who recognizes that and is determined not to allow it to happen.

Since 9/11, President Bush has been a relentless leader, building an international coalition to defeat terrorists. Sometimes it is easy to forget how much the world has changed, but it is worth remembering.

Pakistan was a major foreign policy failure of the Clinton administration. During the 1990s, Pakistan was permitted to develop a nuclear arsenal and spread nuclear and missile technology; it made the strategic decision to align itself with the communist Chinese and North Koreans; and it was the primary actor responsible for establishing the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

After 9/11 it would have been just as likely for the United States to invade Pakistan as Afghanistan. Both nations were given a choice, but only Pakistan chose wisely. Due in large part to the leadership of President Bush, Pakistan has gone from a nuclear-armed, potential enemy of America to one of our most valuable allies in the war on Islamists. The A. Q. Khan

network—responsible for running a nuclear technology black market—was unraveled and dismantled, and Pakistan has taken the unprecedented step of hunting down Al-Qaida members wherever they reside, even in the traditionally off-limit tribal areas.

Similar changes have taken place in Saudi Arabia, where Islamist extremists are finally being dealt with and their funds are drying up. In Libya, one of America's biggest enemies has renounced weapons of mass destruction and turned them over to international inspectors.

These successes could not have been achieved without the bold actions of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thanks to the leadership of President Bush, America is more secure, the people of Iraq are now free of Saddam's brutal Baathist dictatorship, Afghanistan is free of Taliban rule, over 50 million people have a chance at freedom and prosperity, and the world is becoming a better place for it.

By contrast, John Kerry believes we should treat international terrorism as a criminal problem. Rather than taking decisive action in Afghanistan and Iraq, Kerry would have favored limiting America's response to match the approval of other nations like France, Germany, and Russia. (This is not a new position for Kerry. As far back as 1970, he said: "the United Nations should have control over most of our foreign military operations. I'd like to see our troops dispersed through the world only at the direction of the United Nations.")

When asked if a president Kerry would have gone to war in Iraq, he

actually responded: "You bet I might have!" Kerry would not have taken swift decisive action in Afghanistan and Iraq. Undoubtedly, Saddam would still be in power and Al-Qaida leadership would still be free to plot against America, instead of running for their lives from cave to cave.

Kerry repeatedly voted to reduce funding for vital weapon systems. He has also voted to reduce funding to the FBI and the intelligence budget, even after the East African embassy attacks and Bin Laden's declaration of war against the United States. After first voting to give the president the authority to send troops to war, Kerry even voted against giving those troops the equipment they needed in the field.

John F. Kennedy once said: "The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all." Never has this been more true than today, making it crucial that voters pay careful attention to who they entrust with the position of commander-in-chief. This is an election that will be looked back on as one of the most pivotal in American history.

Bob Williams is president of the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, a policy research organization in Olympia, Washington.

Semantic Considerations and the Election

Cheri Pierson Yecke

For millennia, humans have created words that name concepts, actions, people, places and things, as well as their distinguishing characteristics. In a given culture, consistency of meaning

ensures that we all understand each other when we use specific words. But in an amazingly short timeframe, common meanings in American English have become muddled—a fact that has profound implications for the values upon which this country was founded.

When words with changing definitions are adjectives there is little impact on society. If a nice car is now “bad” and “gay” now means homosexual, fundamental concepts of our culture have not been altered. Only the descriptors have changed.

But when words that describe *concepts* begin to change, we enter into an uncharted Orwellian realm, as the concepts that a society holds as fundamental are the building blocks of its character and should not be subject to indiscriminant modifications.

This is why the election of 2004 is one of the most important elections in history—America is at a crossroads. Issues facing our country in 2004 cut to the heart of the values that make up our national identity. In some ways, the culture wars between liberals and conservatives have become a war of words, as can be demonstrated with three semantic examples: school, tolerance, and marriage.

School

Most parents and community members commonly believe that schools are places where children are taught academic content and skills. However, others have different ideas. In one educational journal, the public was informed of a new reality: “School’ no

longer means what you thought.” In the eyes of some, education needs to move away from academics and toward social issues. One educator proclaims: “We live in an age troubled by social problems that force us to reconsider what we do in schools.” Note the liberal activist thought process: “...force us to reconsider...” In other words, circumstances demand that there can be no other choice.

Do Americans agree that they must accept “a different sense of what the real purpose of schooling is?” No. Parents and community members clearly define “school” as an organization focused on academics, and most are unaware that forces are trying to alter that definition.

Tolerance

When we were growing up, we tolerated our younger siblings. They were annoying, but we put up with them anyway. We practiced religious tolerance with friends who might have been Catholic, Protestant or Jewish, and found that we could still be friends even if we held different beliefs. We didn’t try to change them and they didn’t try to change us.

But what *has* changed is the meaning of the word “tolerance.” It no longer means to endure something you don’t like, or respecting others’ beliefs while holding firm to your own. “Tolerance” has come to mean *accepting* that which you may not like or believe in. It used to be that if a person was intolerant then they were unaccepting of others. In the new lexicon they are bigoted, narrow-minded, and prejudiced.

Many people believe that homosexuality is wrong, but under the new definition of “tolerance” in places such as Canada and Sweden, to state your opposition to homosexuality is to commit a hate crime. Clearly, the redefinition of “tolerance” places freedom of speech in a precarious position.

Marriage

The common understanding for millennia was that “marriage” meant the establishment of a family unit with the union of one man and one woman. This is why many people view the phrase “gay marriage” as an oxymoron, like “jumbo shrimp” or “genuine imitation.” For centuries, the concept of marriage has inherently presupposed that the two individuals being united were male and female.

But in spite of the meaning it has held for centuries, dictionaries are racing the courts to change the term’s definition. In January 2004, the Merriam-Webster online dictionary changed the first listed definition of marriage to include: “the state of being united to a person of the same sex in a relationship like that of a traditional marriage (same-sex marriage).”

A representative from Merriam-Webster explains the change this way: “We’re genuinely sorry when an entry in one of our dictionaries is found to be offensive or upsetting, but we can’t allow such considerations to deflect us from our primary job as lexicographers.” As with the definition of “school,” change agents have washed their hands of responsibility and pro-

claim that changing the definition of a commonly held concept is out of their control—circumstances demand it.

The Orwellian stealth tactic of working to change existing words so they have new and profoundly different meanings deceives the public and stifles open, honest debate.

What does it mean to our nation when the conventional meanings of important concepts have been hijacked? It means that our culture and identity are being eroded with changes not endorsed by the majority. It means that we are losing the culture war.

We stand at the crossroads and this election will determine which path our country will take. It has been said that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. Unfortunately, we have been asleep at the switch and the ship of state has veered off-course. It is time for us to reclaim the fundamental concepts that have been hijacked through semantic gymnastics and judicial activism. The first step on this road will be to ensure Republican victories in the 2004 elections.

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Plus ça change

Stephen B. Young

Unless a substantial number of American voters experience a secular epiphany between now and election day and decide at the last minute to vote en

masse for either the Red or the Blue cultural zone, this year's presidential election will not be pivotal in any way.

Once again, the nation will be split down the middle with nothing resolved and the losers mad, more intolerant and mean spirited than before, and gearing up for revenge.

One more sad step in the slow death of a once great republic. We have a politics of tit for tat, the pettiness of which can not be overplayed.

Our republic was born out of faith in humanity's capacity for self-government. That faith, in turn, presumed that we as earthly creatures possess a moral sense and can develop habits of good character to activate that sense of propriety and restraint and concern for community.

The story is that upon completion of the constitutional convention, Ben Franklin was approached by a proper Philadelphia matron as he walked out of what we now call Independence Hall. "Mr. Franklin," he was asked, "what kind of a government have you given us?" "A republic, Madam," Franklin replied. "If you can keep it."

All the appeals of candidates to their base on the left or the right are all for naught in the last analysis. For example, Bush and Kerry each must motivate his base, but appeals to the base conflict with the ideological and rhetorical softness that baits and hooks the crucial victory votes from the moderates and independents.

Actually, however, the moderates and independents are more numerous than we are led to believe. Politically, America has become three nations,

not two. There is a strident multi-cultural left, a self-righteous right, and now a big center of annoyed and alienated citizens.

The left, which asserts the agenda of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity, is anti-communal and so narcissistic that it can't see its selfishness for the love of finding one's special and true "identity." About 25 percent of the public—mostly in the "blue" states—is culturally solidly on the left.

The right has moved beyond traditional American core values to adopt an elitist fusion of Social Darwinism and "cheap grace" Calvinism. The right takes comfort in a vision of the anointed, those who supposedly are winners in God's eyes—either for their wealth or their ritualized codes of personal conduct. Some 25 percent of the voters—mostly white middle-class Protestants living in the "red" states—are to be found in this cultural dynamic.

A cultural war between this left and this right has been going on since the mid-1960s with the entry of the baby-boomers into politics. The war was indeed started by the left with promotion of the counter-culture, opposition to the war in Vietnam, feminism, etc. The right then formed up to put a stop to the cultural gains of the left. Ideology took over both political parties in action/reaction response cycles.

So, there are few "conservative" Democrats anymore with the party going over to the left, just as there are hardly any remaining "moderate" Republicans in a party of the right. Most of these non-ideological centrists have

dropped out of party politics altogether. There has been a creeping ideological re-alignment driven by the factional activists in each national party. And we wonder where all the great leaders have gone.

But some 40 to 60 percent of all Americans at this point do not want to fight this culture war any more. They want their country back. Forty years of conflict between Old Testament rectitude and the demands of a self-imposed victimization have been too many years of divisiveness over religious orientations; the issues of the culture war have grown tiresome for those whose votes carry the day.

Those in the center call themselves independent; mostly they drop out from politics and off the radar screens of calculating political consiglieri like Karl Rove and Terry McAuliffe. But, if forced to choose between the left and the right, on Election Day some will go to the polls and reluctantly lean to one side or the other. But the forced choice is resented and leaves a bad taste in the conscience.

These voters in the center still hold to the old American virtues, to what

was once called liberalism—free markets, personal opportunity, responsible government, a strong national defense but with personal liberty and separation of church and state—just like the Constitution provides.

The preamble to that Constitution sets forth the very honorable goals of that once proud American liberalism.

After the Perot vote in 1992, the system really became stuck in dysfunction: a party of the left fighting with a party of the right for crumbs in the center in order to win power and shove an agenda down the throats of those who lost by a teensy-tiny hair of a fraction of a percent. The 2004 presidential race is playing out this dynamic. The record is stuck; the tune is discordant.

This is a politics of creeping belittlement of our national strength and purpose. How can this nation be as a city upon a hill to the world?

From whence cometh our help?

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