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INTRODUCTION

Last November the country experienced the end of two years of presidential campaigning and held an election that revealed many contradictions in our political process and participation. Some of those contradictions are undoubtedly capable of lighting the way for our future, but their light comes to us filtered through and clouded by uncertainties and conflicts that our government has refused to face because they pose difficult political choices. In this issue we will explore without party preference some of the pluses and minuses of the election and the campaigns leading up to it.

The election just held was an important one for America. That's our America; yes, your and my America. It is also the America of Emerson, Twain, Wharton, Whitman and Sinclair Lewis. A mixed bag, you might say, and you would be right. But, spread as they were over time, place and circumstance, they shared an abiding concern about America's place in the world and the character of its people.

This concern equates to defining by voice and action who we are and what we are and, by extension, our journey from colony to sole superpower. We think that the answer to who and what we are in twenty-first century America sharply divides our people and constitutes a major political fault line with the potential to compromise both our process and form of government.



SOME PLUSES AND MINUSES

The most outstanding, and beneficial, result of 11/2/04 was the reversal of the recent trend of decreasing voter turn-out. You may recall in our prior issue we pointed out that in 2000 only about 51% of those eligible actually voted. This past year approximately 9 million new voters came to the polls bringing the national total to about 115.3 million¹. Turn-out/eligibility percentages and incumbent reelection rates will not be available until April.

At this point there is no way to assess whether this spike is a temporary anomaly caused by two very determined and divisive campaigns or whether the new voters will remain in the game and broaden the base for future elections.

The country would be best served by the latter circumstance, for voter apathy in a democracy is no mere malaise. Over time, it can prove fatal, as it

creates an atmosphere of indifference that is turned to their advantage by democracy's enemies.

As we view the numbers from November, we are still faced with a painful paradox. Following an election that produced nearly nine million new voters and a plurality of 3.5 million votes we remain emotionally divided with the same government in place.

In a press conference the day following his election the President said, "I earned political capital in this campaign and now I'm going to spend it my way." This suggests that unification will be hard to come by, no matter how often it is invoked by members of both parties in the wake of the election. Our guess is that it may last for three or four months after the State of the Union speech and then fall victim to the difficult legislative struggles that lie ahead.

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Offsetting the numerical gains in voter turn-out was the kind of campaign waged by both candidates and their reliance on spin, distortion and personal attacks which left some very serious national issues largely untouched.

Look first at the stump speech styles and the candidates' body language. Bush aggressively thrust his head and torso forward to make his point while Kerry employed a sweeping arm gesture with a turn of the wrist movement at the end. Both were endlessly repetitive in these gestures and in what they said. Nor did their speech rhythms provide either relief or variety. Looking at stump speeches in a general context, they do not translate into enlightened foreign policy and any attempt to do so usually increases the risk and the penalties for failure in diplomatic directions.

Kerry was cited as having strong debating skills, but his manner, until the last few days, seemed stilted, flat and out of date. Kerry's campaign bore other burdens in addition to the marketing of his personality. We believe it revealed an unusual ineptness, considering the stakes, to directly confront some of the more vigorously pursued Republican claims as to Bush's role as commander-in-chief and Kerry's "flip flopping". Throughout the campaign there was clear and ample opportunity to turn these charges back upon their sources and to deflect them from achieving the prominence they did.

Facts were available to support strong statements, but the opportunity went unseized.

Sometimes a boring campaign cannot be helped, but this was not one of those times, as the range of important issues in play was unusually wide. But boring is one thing, and bad management is another, and for it there can be no excuse.

The Democrats are facing a major overhaul of their message and membership if they are to continue as viable contenders. Looking back at '04 it might help them to remember that, even in a practice session at the local gym, not many people bet on the punching bag.

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Hidden away in most of the voluminous reporting of the electoral results was passage of a local proposition that might have broad implications for the nation. We refer to Proposition 200² in Arizona which stated that applicants registering to vote or seeking some public benefits must provide proof of citizenship. It also requires that government employees report suspected illegal immigrants, with jail or fine penalties for failure to do so. Arizona bears the brunt of the illegal immigration invasion across our southern border and property owners and communities there finally sought political relief from the double whammy of being overrun by illegals and then having to pay taxes for their subsistence.

You may recall that a few years ago Proposition 187 was passed in California in an attempt to control the effects of rampant illegal immigration there. In spite of its broad public

support by millions of Californians, Prop 187 was declared unconstitutional by a single federal judge.

It will be interesting to see what fate will befall Arizona's Prop. 200, as it is certain to be opposed and appealed by local pro-immigration forces. Polls across the nation consistently indicate that approximately 70% of those polled favor reducing both legal and illegal immigration, but the immigration issue in America has become one in which all too often the "minority" rules.

Could Prop. 200 be the first step out of the dungeon of indifference to which immigration reform has been consigned by its political jailers who, although the people clamor for its release, steadfastly turn a deaf ear?

But Prop 200 was not the only victory for backers of immigration reform. In several races in the Senate and House the winners had taken a strong stand in favor of immigration reduction, and every member of the Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus who sought reelection won.

Stay tuned. Immigration is no punching bag. Pressures are building that have the power to overwhelm the political and special interests. Persistence is necessary given both Republicans' and Democrats' history of avoiding the enforcement of existent immigration law.

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“...as we knowingly distance ourselves from our ethical and cultural origins”

In our view the most important and interesting outcome of the election was not to be found in the candidates' claims and counterclaims, nor even in the votes' tally, but in the realm of reason rather than results. It has to do with the state of our culture and the increasing pressure on America to define who and what we are as we knowingly distance ourselves from our ethical and cultural origins.

Immediately following the election voters were subjected to a frenzy of questioning designed to probe the motives behind their choices. The two issues that seemed to resonate most intensely were the war in Iraq and same-sex marriages.

As issues they are not as threatening as others which have the capability to wreak long term damage upon our society. Although it has increased awareness of its political presence, the same-sex segment of our population is generally estimated at around 10%. And the war in Iraq, over which we are deeply divided, could be terminated in a moment by the President.

Consider other issues which lack the emotional factor but are far more complex to resolve and have the capability to change many of the social and common assumptions that influence how we live. The Social Security and Medicare programs are key examples that require prompt and far-reaching correction. Immigration reform is another. Add our record high budget and trade deficits and the need for a simpler and fairer tax code. Global warming, species loss, air

and water pollution and the disappearance of tropical forests and the polar ice caps also pose problems that need to be resolved. What these issues have in common is the potential to overwhelm parts of the structure upon which our society has come to depend for its support. They are critical, as they determine both our individual and collective physical and financial health.

A daunting list, we can all agree. And yet, grave as these issues are, they did not rise to priority status with most voters. It could be that the campaigns did not place as much emphasis on them as they did on same-sex marriage and Iraq, but we offer another explanation.

These two leading issues are concerned with sex and violence (war often being seen as legitimized violence). Over the past half-century these aspects of human behavior have been increasingly recognized and celebrated in our culture. So encompassing has this process been that no art form or media message has been excluded. The responsibility for this cultural taint also has to be borne by the academic world and the corporate/commercial producers and sellers of popular entertainment.

“...it is playback time. We are practicing what has been preached ...”

As our culture has been conditioned to see and accept sex and violence everywhere, it is not surprising that massive numbers of

voters readily identified themselves with the two issues that offered them. Quite simply, it is playback time. We are practicing what has been preached and our cultural conditioning is complete. Rather unexpectedly, but understandably, through politics we may have reached a point of near Pavlovian perfection.

What comes out of a squeezed sponge is only what was put in, and in many areas of our national life we are beginning to see the results of decades of attack upon our cultural conscience. Remember that in our present culture a typical child will watch 28 hours of TV a week and, before entering high school, will witness 8000 murders, 75% of which go unpunished with no expression of remorse by the killer.³

The voter identification we have cited does not rise to the level of a conscious response to our cultural transformation, although it appears to be an emerging and interesting reflector. As such it bears watching, but for the time being we can expect to see the impact of our cultural embrace of sex and violence mostly played out in our courts (especially juvenile), schools and marketplaces.

In a world given to excess it is never too early to ask, “When is enough?” In twenty-first century America such questioning voices are far too few, and those that answer “never” are far too many. This is a ratio that must be reversed.

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LOOKING AHEAD —
CHALLENGES AND
CHANGES

We have thought that since it first came to power the Bush administration, either in finding its way or seeking truth, has been driven more by ideology than inquiry, whether in matters of domestic politics or diplomacy abroad. Facts seem too often to lack an objective basis of their own and are not determined by process, but have been dressed in the clothes of a desired result.

This type of thinking almost inevitably precludes credibility with those who do not share it, and suggests that a popular unification of the nation's thoughts, feelings and goals will be difficult. We are called to remember that in the '00 campaign Pres. Bush presented himself as a unifier and problem solver. And yet his policies have produced continuing division and what is generally conceded to be a far greater problem than anticipated in Iraq. He may see himself as having been a unifier and sincerely believe that he has achieved his goals, but there are almost 56 million American voters and over ten thousand military casualties that testify to a different reality.

Again, while the President may have been, and may continue to be, convinced of the sureness of his policies (i.e., he could not recall making any mistakes in his first term), we believe he has been both led and misled by his advisors, especially the group known as "neocons" at the highest levels of our state and defense departments.

"...exhilarating for leaders, but painful for those with no choice but to follow."

The niceties of nuance are not known to neocons, and their policies indicate to us that their immense power at home can be applied and will be accepted elsewhere throughout the world. This is hubris of a sort and to a degree that has historically failed. It is a path that, once taken, continues to deceive and demand. It can be exhilarating for leaders but painful for those with no choice but to follow.

In November the GOP won the presidency and increased its majorities in both houses of Congress. Add to this the almost assured probability of two or more Supreme Court appointments in the next four years and the new alignment seems unassailable. The greatest danger for the Republican leadership and for the President in his second term will be the temptation to overread the results of his reelection. And precisely because of our humble and idealistic origins hubris will always be a threat to America's continuing debate as to who and what we are.

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But there are many other dangers. One of them is religious faith and it was given a prominent place in the Bush campaign from its beginning. The President sought and received support at the polls from large numbers of voters from the "Christian Right" many of whom had not registered before. These conservative Christians, sometimes referred to as evangelicals, were seen to have determined the outcome of the election in a significant number of districts and states.

What's of vital importance is that in an election where the line of distinction is drawn pretty much straight down the middle a relatively small number of voters in a few races can tip the balance. Many observers see the "Religious Right" as having played this role in November with the result that it will have to be recognized as a source of both religious fervor and political force. Demands will be made and they will be paid.

And herein lies a grave danger. Former Secretary of Education William Bennett has stated that of the almost 60 million votes cast for Bush, about 20 million came from evangelical Christians.⁺ While this one-third share of the total may not appear impressive, those same 20 million votes, or even a portion of them, spread among key districts and states could have made a significant difference in the electoral college tally and provided the necessary margin of victory. Looking either backward or forward, the importance of Christian conservatives to Bush's presidency must be recognized.

When we talk about Christian conservatives, or evangelicals, we are talking about a group within a group, for they hold strict, fundamentalist views not held or proclaimed by many other American Christians. They adhere to a very literal reading of the Bible which places them and their beliefs in opposition to the developed science of the last thousand years in such fields as physics, math, astronomy, archaeology, geology, and paleontology which have increasingly informed our

knowledge of the emergence and subsequent history of human and other species.

“This is a singular view that will insist on having its way”

Literal interpretation of scripture does not allow a philosophic exchange marked by compromise or movement in a new, common direction. The Bible, being God’s word and law and revealing His intent, is not subject to variance regardless of the source. This is a singular view that will insist on having its way.

As the world increasingly experiences the effects of technological progress and population pressure, it must continue to shrink and grow together. This means that new voices and new ways must be accommodated although the process may be painful. In this tectonic motion of cultures it is difficult to see how fundamentalist views of any faith can be inserted into our current harsh political dialogue while maintaining our historical separation of church and state. Even though this is primarily a religious argument, it produces very difficult political results.

The old adage of “Be careful what you pray for, lest it be granted” applies here and the Bush administration may face the dilemma of being called upon to accept restrictions from or grant favors to its evangelical wing.

America, because of its global prominence, its UN commitment and its lax immigration policy over the last fifty years, has had to broaden its experience of religions

other than Christianity. This has been a slow and somewhat difficult process the brunt of which is borne at the local community level. The newly found and greatly increased political power of the Religious Right is capable of complicating both domestic and foreign policy and even drawing a much wider line of separation between moderate and fundamentalist Christians. Unfortunately, we already suffer from enough forms of polarization. We do not need more, but it seems unlikely that our deep-seated spiritual differences will disappear.

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“Without ethics, morality, and religion there will be no lasting liberty.”— John Adams

Is America polarized? The answer is “yes”, and our division is reflected in the continuing closeness of the popular vote in presidential elections. But our polarization is not primarily political. Again, it does not derive from politics, but is reflected in them. Most Americans are not antagonized by their fellow citizens’ choice of political party, but they take strong exception to what they see as unfairness as it metastasizes in government, the corporate world, academia or other areas of our society — often with the approval of our elected representatives (see item entitled Pennsylvania Christmas In July on page 6).

Because of the growing bitterness of our political

campaigns the idea that Americans are not primarily polarized along Republican/Democrat lines may be a difficult one to accept. This may be due to the fact that the obscenely large amounts of money now being raised from the public (just over \$2.2 billion for both parties for the 2004 elections)⁵ are channeled through the two major parties and their spokesmen. But are they that different, that divided?

Today, we are in the second term of a Republican administration that initiated the war in Iraq and has passed legislation creating the largest levels of budget deficit and national debt in our history. Yet it was not so long ago that Republicans claimed, and were seen to offer, fiscal responsibility. And, in their campaigns, they referred to Democrats as “the party of war” because Wilson, FDR, Truman and Johnson had presided over our four major wars of the twentieth century.

“...blurring the image we see in our political mirror.”

These would seem to be clear instances of fitting the issue to the politics, rather than vice-versa, with the potential to confuse voters as well as observers. While recognizing that this may be a natural by-product of our political duopoly, it has a way of blurring the image we see in our political mirror.

The current reality is that many different types of Americans with many different opinions about many different

issues are forced to wear one of two labels in order to vote. This forcing of our political expression onto two narrow tracks sets up the circumstance whereby it can be more easily manipulated by the parties and the media they employ.

It also creates friction and a classic pressure-cooking system in which energy/pressure is applied to a mass in a confined area. In the laboratory this usually results in a loss of control and a change of form, and it can hold equally true in politics.

This process has been on the rise for several decades during which major change and confrontation have been avoided. Today, however, we are faced with some very powerful issues that have the capability of drastically changing the way all Americans live — social security, immigration, war, nation building, budget deficits, and debt levels. Then add to these the environment and population with their global consequences of natural resource and species depletion.

Overarching all of these is the larger question of who and what we are. Never mind the textbook quotes from our eighteenth century origins. We tend to bring those out to fix the image in our political mirror, to make it the way it was, the way we like to see ourselves. But it won't work; the world has turned over and around too many times. And only the reality can change its reflection.

We think that we are faced with a mood and moment in America that can provide the answer to who and what we are in a peaceful and positive way. To

do that our process must become more open and our government fairer and more beholden to common, rather than special, interests.

Over the past half-century the rich mix of wealth and power in our society has had the effect of making some of its elements far more volatile than they have been in the past. This is a trend that must be moderated and the best way to do it is to formulate and pass legislation that addresses the major issues we have cited above in a way that recognizes their importance to all Americans

Only by doing this can we find our way back to a point of balance, reduce polarization and hope to regain our ethical compass. Some may argue that any such effort would be doomed to failure, but we believe that there exists beneath the rhetoric of both parties a common ground of loyalty that cuts across many of our differences and which, if identified and called upon, could produce a fairer, more efficient and more unified government.

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PART II A NATION OF LAWS?

Well, yes; of course. But whose? And how are they enforced or observed? These are key questions as America seeks to define its identity in the twenty-first century. We know we are not the way we were. But are we only Number One, the sole superpower? Or is there some meeting place from which we can

gain the perspective necessary to simultaneously recall our origins and control our (and others') destiny?

There is nothing that so dilutes and denigrates democracy as selective law enforcement/application and the dual standards that derive from them. Look around in any direction, and they are there — in corporate America, in our state and federal legislative bodies and bureaucracies. Take your time; take a long, leisurely look. They won't go away. And then ask if these are the ethical values with which we must answer the questions "Who are we?" and "What are we?" and which we will pass on to our children and grandchildren as our best use of the time, knowledge, and power that we were fortunate enough to come by.

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PENNSYLVANIA CHRISTMAS IN JULY

In the last twenty years the growth of legal gambling via slot machines has been phenomenal. Initially only two states (NV and NJ) allowed gambling; now there are 30 with 900,000 slots producing annual revenues of \$30 billion. This amounts to more than 70% of casino revenues.⁶ In some states where slot machines have been specifically prohibited by law they have been renamed "video lottery terminals" and are included as part of existing (and legal) lottery systems. With the proper motivation government can produce creative solutions.

Last July in Pennsylvania,

arguing that slots improve the state's finances and lower real estate taxes by about \$1 billion a year, Gov. Rendell and the legislature granted permission for 61,000 slots at 14 locations.⁷

Displaying a high degree of personal interest in the matter, the lawmakers inserted a provision that permitted them and other public officials to own up to 1 per cent of any new slot machine venture.⁸ This specific legislation would, of course, trump any existing, general conflict of interest regulations, and substantially ease the approval process for the new slots operators while providing the legislators with a chance to participate in the usually highly profitable enterprises which they have the power to regulate.

“...and the ‘smart money’ is on the owners, not the players.”

This is selective law enforcement at its worst. It does away, we suspect, with any real conflict of interest and leaves a “done deal” in its place. The PA legislators were, apparently, unwilling to take a chance with previous law and had to pass superseding legislation to assure their place at the cash-in window. They're in the right place, however; slots are highly manipulable and the “smart money” is on the owners, not the players.

Technically, of course, this is neither selective law enforcement nor application. Rather it creates a special law for very special interests. It's so outrageous it had to be included.

If we leave the Pennsylvania legislature at Harrisburg and travel one hundred miles almost due south, we find ourselves in the nation's capital. Surely, the bending of the law to personal profit, or purpose, would not be evident here, and yet we find that the ethics enforcement procedures in place in Washington are as unable to withstand manipulation by our elected representatives as they were in Harrisburg.

Congressional rules require that anyone under indictment for a felony crime must vacate his/her seat. Tom DeLay, the Republican House majority leader, came under felony indictment for corruption and infractions of the campaign/election laws in his home state of Texas. Rather than adhere to the House's rules, a measure was proposed and passed that absolved DeLay of any culpability and, basically, gave him a free pass. The Republican majority, in defense of this action, claimed that Ronnie Earle, the prosecuting District Attorney for Travis County, Texas, was a politically motivated “partisan crackpot” Democrat. However, quite to the contrary, Earle stated that he has brought indictments against four times as many Democrats as Republicans during his term of office, adding “This is not about Democrats and Republicans. This is about cops and robbers.”

In both the Pennsylvania and Washington cases existing rules designed to establish ethical standards of operation were superseded by specific legislation targeted to nullify them. This is

undoubtedly the most obvious, and probably the most destructive, form of selective law enforcement available to any government, whether representative or authoritarian.

Similarly no clearer proof of institutional failure is needed. Charged with the responsibility to pass laws for the common good, both legislative bodies opted for private benefit. It is a cause for national shame and sadness.

LATE BREAKING NEWS — As we go to print, house majority leaders have just rescinded the recently passed rule to allow Tom DeLay to remain in office while under indictment for a felony crime. This about-face seems due to recognition by the house leadership that its original “pass” for DeLay was just too brazen and would create an issue that has already generated unacceptable political heat on both sides of the aisle, and promises even more in the future.

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On a far larger scale is the unenforced body of immigration law the consequences of which have the power to threaten aspects of our national security and our social and economic priorities. Notwithstanding, our law of the land runs a consistent second place to the law of political pursuit and protection practiced by the Congress, the executive branch and the involved departmental bureaucracies.

Here we note that Asa Hutchinson, Undersecretary of Homeland Security for Border

and Transportation Security, has credited the compassionate nature and lack of will of the American people for government's failure to enforce its own immigration laws.¹⁰

We only recently came across campaign statements of the Republican and Democratic positions on immigration. There were very few, if any, points of difference because there were no points at all. These texts were notable for being masterfully crafted in double-speak, generalities and evasion to the extent that immigration must now be even more of a "third rail" topic than social security.

We'll see. The race is on, but it will not go the swift. There is no swift here.

"...it blossoms like a teen-age girl."

Once the subject of selective law enforcement, which includes non-enforcement and wrongful enforcement, is subjected to real scrutiny, it blossoms like a teen-age girl and finds ways to be viewed that we didn't know existed before.

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On a truly large scale consider our tax code. Our current income tax was initially imposed in 1913 with a rate of 2% for all. In time, this was seen as an unfair burden upon low income payers and was replaced by a graduated tax that called for progressively higher rates as income increased. Those rate differentiations have become known as brackets of which

approximately five are currently in use.

It would be a simple matter to write a progressive tax law that would prescribe payment of x % of one's income at the lowest level of payment (presumably there will always be a group of payers with such low incomes that no tax is levied) and then stated multiples of x in ascending brackets. Allow space for a few definitions and such a tax code could easily fit onto a couple of pages.

But our tax code is well over a thousand pages in length! All of those extra pages are filled with text that qualifies, modifies or grants outright exemptions from the intended tax. These "loopholes" have developed a life of their own independent of the tax and are spread throughout our country and its economy. There is no industry, no profession and no tax constituency that does not, in keeping with our time and culture, claim them as "their rights".

One man's right can be another man's wrong, but this does not seem to be the case in our tax codes where exemptions/reductions are sought, obtained and enjoyed by all. The tail wags the dog; and with such a complex code enforcement becomes more difficult and complicated. It becomes in short, selective, as the original intent is reduced and amended by political pressure.

In 1986 the tax code was overhauled and simplified with many loopholes and points of tax creation removed. Within a few years most of what had been taken out was reinserted, as the clear, fresh air of life without loopholes turned out to be more than some taxpayers and elected

representatives could bear.

The subject of tax reform has gained ground in the last decade, but it has always come to grief in very determined clashes over turf and philosophy in both chambers of Congress. Mr. Bush has promised a broad tax revision. It will be interesting to see the results (i.e., what comes, what goes and what stays) and, finally, by how many pages the tax code will be reduced! If he sets goals of greater fairness and simplification, he will earn the support of the nation; and if he achieves them, its gratitude.

* * *

There is another truly massive area of our national life to which the perspective of selective enforcement can be seen to apply, albeit somewhat indirectly. We refer to the almost total control of national and state voting machinery by the two major parties. This control of access to the ballot is a mixed blessing. In channeling voters' participation into two choices it makes the voting process more efficient and less confusing than what we might expect from a multi-choice ballot, although the problems in Florida in 2000 suggest that mistakes can and will be made under any circumstances as long as the human factor dominates.

And yet it can't help but cast some doubt on our claims as to the purity of our democracy. In an authoritarian government you can vote for anyone as long as he belongs to the party in power. Here, we can vote for anyone as long as he's a Republican or Democrat. We have expanded the choice by a factor of one.

Can we do better?

Every once in a while a candidate appears that seems to have the power to attract voters from a wide variety of backgrounds and to present arguments that set him/her apart from the duopoly. But it is anything but easy to transform those advantages into being listed on ballots in fifty states.

In 1992 Ross Perot created the Reform Party to support his candidacy, and his considerable appeal and wealth enabled him to run as a viable third party candidate. In an extraordinary showing he captured just under 20% of the popular vote, but the true measure of his candidacy's importance lies not in his politics, but what he might have, but failed to, accomplish for third parties in general.

The Reform Party in 1992 was an important moment in American politics as we look back upon it. Essentially, it enjoyed absolutely unlimited funding which was combined with a largely young and idealistic segment of our population to make volunteers available in large and enthusiastic numbers. The last critical element for Perot's, or any other, third party candidacy is management. Perot was able to provide this for his headquarters and major field offices from the wide range of skills in his business enterprises. For the smaller field offices and special efforts such as media, polling and electoral tactics he could hire from external sources.

Had Ross Perot been elected, his would have been a most interesting presidency. At the least, he would have rerouted many of Washington's political

power lines and left it in a state of shock.

The real tragedy and disappointment for the country is not Perot's failure to be elected but his abandonment of the Reform Party and the subsequent disintegration of the structure and political presence he had created. What he had accomplished required the substantial commitments of vision, energy, intelligence and resources necessary to give any third party candidacy viability.

We believe that had he remained involved and continued the Reform Party as a political voice, even though it might lack a worthy candidate for national office, it could have been held in reserve until the next such candidate might emerge. Today the Reform Party is a marginal entity that can still have access to the ballot in some states, but wastes that asset by proposing lesser candidates.

“...a political opportunity wearing a smile of availability and offering the chance for courtship.”

With its founder gone and its momentum lost, it exists primarily in name only. And yet in politics things can change with the speed of light. In the future it could be re-energized by a candidate who could use it as a nucleus to again attract and deploy the resources Perot provided. In that sense it is a political opportunity wearing a smile of availability and offering the chance for courtship.

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A nation of laws? Yes, but by and for whom? We make them and we break them. We deplore them and ignore them. We cite them and we fight them. We have built a luxuriously staffed “palace industry” that constantly challenges their interpretation and applications so that a great part of our general legislation mirrors the special benefits of our tax code.

Indeed, much of our legislation is processed and passed without ever being read by our elected representatives. The language is just so long and unwieldy that its review is divided among staff members.

A notable example of this was the passing of the \$388 billion omnibus appropriations bill this past December. This type of bill comes into existence because the 535 members of Congress were unable to pass a budget bill when it was due in October. It appeals to those in Congress because by combining a mass of vastly different expense items, including “the good, the bad and the ugly”, political cover for any vote is available to one and all.

In the recent omnibus bill an unidentified member of the House inserted a provision that gave the Speaker, or a representative selected by him, the right to inspect the tax returns of private citizens. Such a measure is ample proof of the extent to which “selective” law enforcement has become accepted throughout many areas and levels of our government.

This addition to the omnibus bill was only noted after its

passage by a House staff member. Publicity about it caused some momentary embarrassment on Capitol Hill and corrective legislation was quickly passed, but this whole procedure lends new meaning (and reason for questioning) to our being “a nation of laws”.

Over the years, in order to extend, defend or interpret our system of government we have proclaimed, more than anything else, this identification with law. Do we speak truth or metaphor? With this mantra do we persuade others or deceive ourselves?

These are important questions that are central to any debate of who and what we are. They must not be excluded or deferred. They must be faced and they must be answered now. And by us, not others.

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SPEEDREADERS WANTED BY U. S. CONGRESS

The recent 615 page intelligence reform bill was brought up for its House vote twenty-four hours after its final drafting. To have read it in its entirety in that period would have required a pace of just over twenty-five and a half pages per hour. That's non-stop and makes no concessions to thirst, hunger, eye-strain, boredom, sleep, going to the bathroom, taking notes, making/taking phone calls, consultations with colleagues or other House business or appointments. And yet the Congress is sometimes referred to as a “deliberative body”.

END NOTES

¹ Washington Post — 11/6/04. Bush — 59.4 million; Kerry — 55.9 million. Information as to the percentage of those eligible to vote who voted and of reelected congressional incumbents will not be available until spring. Stay tuned.

² Palm Beach Post, 11/6/04

³ Parents Television Council via Parade Magazine 7/11/04, p. 15

⁴ Orlando Sentinel 11/17/04 — Far From Theocracy Under Bush - Kathleen Parker

⁵ Washington Post — 12/30/04. Republicans — \$ 1.14 billion; Democrats — \$ 1.08 billion.

⁶ New York Times — 7/13/04 Lemons In a Row. E.d.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ NOW With Bill Moyers — PBS — 11/19/04

¹⁰ Washington Times — via Fair Immigration Report 10/04

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In the past year we have received suggestions for editorial matters and/or research directions from Richard Leavitt, Louise Stephaich, Jacqueline Dunnington, John Dietze, Jane Dommerich and Stanley Flink. We very much appreciate their interest and input.

EDITOR'S BIO

Mr. Ault has a background in marketing of consumer products and financial services. He is a graduate of Yale University, a special limited partner of the Venture Capital Fund of America, NYC, NY of which he was a co-founder, and the author of *A Retail Food Study* (La Roche & Co. NYC, NY 1957) which described the emergence and growing dominance of the supermarket in American food retailing.

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