What Difference Would It Make?

Bush or Gore: How would they serve?

Bush would let his appointees handle details

By Alvin S. Felzenberg

With the longest campaign in American history drawing to a close, voters will be asking themselves what a presidency headed by Al Gore or George W. Bush would be like. How can they know?

Some clues can be found in stands both have taken on issues.

In their campaigns and in their present and previous offices, Bush and Gore have provided glimpses into how they might function in office. These, coupled with the political climate that would accompany their inauguration, suggest what might lie ahead.

Bush has shown himself a "big picture" man. He has advanced a few bold ideas, like privatizing a portion of Social Security, across-the-board tax cuts, increased defense capabilities and the use of federal funds to bring accountability and competition to public education. Like Ronald Reagan, he would set a tone for his administration but leave the details to carefully selected appointees.

His positions on issues of lesser priority conform to his concept of a "compassionate, conservative but smaller government." He pledges to end a decade-long Washington "food fight" by reaching across the partisan aisle, as he has in Texas.

Gore has proposed multiple solutions to myriad problems. His self-proclaimed expertise in foreign policy and environmental matters suggests he would use subordinates more as implementers than as advisers. Rather than touch sacred "third rails" like Social Security, he stands watch over all New Deal, Great Society orthodoxies and offers new initiatives of his own.

Once a "New Democrat" who battled for NAFTA and welfare reform, but now a "populist," he promises to "fight for" anyone with a perceived grievance against any corporation or business. Federal intervention remains his favored remedy.

Should Bush be elected, he will have to work with a Senate under GOP control and a closely divided House, with the GOP holding a slight edge. That bodes well for his ability to enact his mandate, providing he acts early, uses his days as president-elect well and assembles a top-notch team. With his GOP ranks holding, Bush would be able to attract support from enough Democrats to achieve a bipartisan consensus for his programs.

He has said he would like to resuscitate Democratic Sen. John Breaux's recommendations on Social Security. He may get additional help from Democrats such as Joseph Lieberman on defense and from others on other matters.

Gore would face a Republican Senate and a House that either party controlled by the smallest of majorities. That Senate can be expected to hold values and views different from those of Gore. It will also have a say on appointments, including those to the Supreme Court, the composition of which Gore has made an issue in the campaign.

As a senator and vice president, Gore was not on close terms with influential Republicans. He would not begin his presidency with working relationships across the aisle comparable to those Lyndon Johnson enjoyed with Senate GOP leader Everett Dirksen.

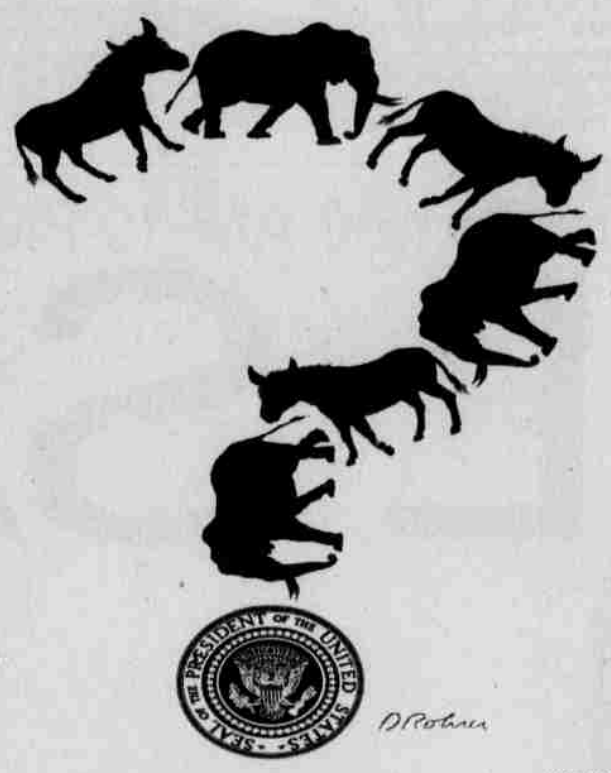
Nor can Gore expect to find unanimity within Democratic ranks. Having spent his entire campaign rallying his base, he can expect bitter cries of betrayal the instant he endeavored with the help of New Democrats to seek accommodation with already suspicious Republicans.

Through their respective demeanors in debate, Bush and Gore have provided some inkling of how they might appeal to the public for support. Bush exudes confidence both in the American people and in his capacity to lead. Gore appears earnest, bullying and condescending.

In how they would lead, they differ as widely as they do in their policy pronouncements. How voters decide between them will tell us more about U.S. society at the dawn of a new century than about the candidates.

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What Difference Would It Make? What would the practical difference be if either George W. Bush or Al Gore were in the White House. We've asked leading thinkers from the left and right to tell us. Read their answers this week.



DEAN ROHRER

Cerebral Gore seems suited for hands-on style

When the campaigning ends and a new president is elected, what kind of a presidency can we expect from either Al Gore or George W. Bush?

Predicting performance in the Oval Office is risky. Once in office, presidents often behave contrary to our expectations. Some presidents (Harry Truman and Gerald Ford) exceeded expectations, others (Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton) disappointed, while still others (Dwight Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter and George Bush) became, in retrospect, interim figures, or caretakers. A few (Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan) energized the office and the country, changed our lives and left striking legacies.

Will either a Gore or Bush presidency energize the country and change our lives? Their leadership styles, rooted in their differing personalities and professional experiences, offer clear indications of what we can expect.

Al Gore, solemn and studious, with a fondness for complex policy issues, digests large amounts of information before making a decision. Highly organized, intolerant of undisciplined meetings, and given to making lists, he has a felicity for statistics and flip charts. Once engrossed, he tenaciously focuses on an issue. An activist on the environment, health care, and arms control, he may be tempted to immerse himself too deeply in technocratic details (as happened to Jimmy Carter) or to micromanage.

Gore likely would be an energetic, hands-on president, one who delegates sparingly and (like FDR and JFK) sees his office as the hub around which all activity flows. Unafraid of difficult decisions (such as his vote to support the Persian Gulf War) and willing on occasion to take risks (as when he gained a last-minute agreement at the 1997 global warming conference in Kyoto), Gore probably will take an upfront leadership position initiating selected issues and using the bully pulpit to deliver stiff appeals for support.

Bush, affable and impatient, distrustful of details and long meetings, likens his leadership style to that of a corporate CEO. As governor, he relies on select advisers to present options in a brief, concise format. He listens, then decides quickly (even on death warrants), without further study or remorse. Congenial and persuasive, Bush may be tempted to rely too heavily on personal charm. His tolerance of ambiguity and his loathing of details could make him vulnerable to the errors of zealous staffers (as happened to Reagan during Iran-Contra).

Bush likely would organize his presidency along staff lines (similar to Eisenhower, Reagan, and his father), delegate substantially and establish the Oval Office as the place where decisions were made, rather than policies initiated. Bush points to his success in reaching across the aisle in Texas to work with like-minded Democratic leader Bob Bullock on several issues, and if elected, he likely would seek some bipartisan cooperation.

Gore's election would probably mean the continuation of divided government. Bush's election, because it most probably would be accompanied by Republican control of Congress, could bring the fulfillment of nearly 40 years of conservative aspirations, the dismantling of liberal policies and the installation of a conservative agenda. This would have a momentous impact on our lives, if Republicans, as promised, manage overhauls in tax policies, Social Security, and various regulatory agencies.

When it comes to vision, neither candidate has articulated a definitive presidential mission nor molded his ideas into a call to action. Nothing yet on the order of a New Deal or Morning in America has been forthcoming.

Neither candidate has stirred listeners through dramatic appeals (in the styles of FDR and JFK) or adeptly personalized issues (like Reagan and Clinton). They've promised much but demanded little of the American people, perhaps because these prosperous times of relative quiet do not necessitate redirecting the ship of state. More than a new course, perhaps we require only a steady hand on the wheel.

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Tomorrow: Trudy Rubin reports from the Middle East; Larry Eichel with "the Body Politic" and David Boldt

Acel Moore *Urban Perspectives*

Even polio and painful loss don't dim this veteran's helping spirit

Earlier this month I got a telephone call from a man whom I have known for 35 years. The call was from Arnold Snyder, 76, a retired pharmacist and a decorated Second World War veteran.

Whenever he calls me, it is to talk about his efforts to help others. He is an advocate for the disabled and is currently in the middle of raising funds and support for a veterans' memorial in Cheltenham Township. He has petitioned the township and the school board to name Cheltenham High School's football field after Wallace Triplett, a 1945 graduate and one of the school's great athletes.

His call earlier this month was different. He called to tell me that his son, Barry, 46, had died from complications of liver-and-kidney disease.

I can't think of a more devastating circumstance than for a parent to lose a son or daughter.

And it was apparent in Snyder's voice that he was profoundly saddened by his loss. Gone was the pleasant energy that was always present whenever I have talked to him.

I had known his son since he was a child when Snyder ran an independent family drugstore in East Mount Airy. I was deeply saddened to learn of Barry's death.

Three days later, I got another call from Snyder. And anticipating that he was going to get on me about having not stopped by to see him, I said, "Arnold, I know I told a you I would be by tomorrow."

But that's not why Snyder called. His call was out of concern for the family of one the health aides who takes care of him.

The woman's daughter, along with the daughter's four children, from one month to 13 years old, all live in a one-bedroom apartment in North Philadelphia. Their landlord has gotten an eviction notice because of the overcrowding.

"They are going to put them out on the street with that infant," Snyder said. "Can you call someone one who can help them?" he pleaded.

Snyder is an extraordinary man whose life's story is a study in perseverance.

Snyder has had to overcome much adversity.

He is a widower who is severely disabled. Snyder suffers from paralysis from polio that he contracted when he was in pharmacy school 52 years ago. He is now confined to a wheelchair and must be cared for by health aides.

One of the nation's most decorated combat veterans, Snyder, as an Army infantry officer, was a personal wrecking ball to the German defenders of Normandy. He survived the D-Day invasion and combat at Omaha Beach and the Battle of the Bulge.

Arnold Snyder is a man whose life is a study in perseverance. He has maintained a positive attitude.

Snyder was the recipient of three Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars for valor and bravery, and five Purple Hearts.

He returned home a hero and in good health, only to be felled two years later, by one of the most crippling forms of polio.

The extraordinary thing about Snyder is that he has always maintained a positive attitude. He had to learn how to walk and even write with a pencil in a different way.

Undaunted by his setbacks, events that would have certainly made most normal men depressed, Snyder graduated from pharmacy school and went to work. He married, raised a family, took over his father's business and ran it until he retired.

He still maintains his positive attitude. When I went to visit him last weekend and again expressed my sympathy over his loss, Snyder was positive as usual.

He spoke about his son with love and the care of a father, and felt that because of his son's pain and suffering, he was finally at peace.

He talked about the support that he gets from his daughter, his grandchildren, his sister and his other relatives.

After the short visit, I reached down to clasp his hands. He smiled as he asked me to write something about this project.

When I left Snyder, I somehow felt better than I did when I went to his home. All of the problems that I have seemed minor and I was inspired by his tenacity.

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Worth Repeating

Catholic teaching and party votes

The Republican Party's Catholic Task Force has made a far-reaching claim: that of all political parties, the Republican Party's agenda best reflects Catholic teaching....
The party's claims are unusually bold, given that most people who follow national politics would say that since the 1930s, the Democrats have more consistently reflected the social teachings of the Catholic church. Further, for most of that time, the majority of the Catholic vote has gone to Democratic candidates.
If there were a change in the historic alignment between Catholics and Democrats, it would be a dramatic, surprising shift. And if Catholics believed the recent Republican claims, and voted accordingly, it could have significant electoral results.... Up to now, the Republican Party, other than in its efforts to restrict legal abortions, has largely ignored the Catholic church's emphasis on a consistent ethic of life. This ethic teaches that all those born into this world should have adequate health care, decent housing, quality education and opportunities for jobs with living wages.... The Republican claim that it reflects Catholic teaching is limited. The fact is that the Republican Party departs from Catholic teachings on most issues that fall under the umbrella of social justice.
William V. D'Antonio and Jacqueline Scherer, Conscience, Autumn 2000.



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