

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Election fever. With Florida’s January 29th primary behind us and moving towards the much-anticipated February 5th multi-state primary, election fever is everywhere (I’m writing this on January 30th ... I’ll be in Honduras next week).

When I get back from Honduras, both major parties may well have a presumptive candidate waving the victory flag. Still, it’s exciting. Will it be McCain or Romney, for the Republicans (McCain has the upper hand at the moment)? And will Barack or Hillary prevail for the Democrats (John Edwards just pulled out earlier today)?

As is often the case in American politics, passions run high—as visions of the future and the values that nurture them, are proclaimed from both sides. I’m always amazed at the vast diversity of America and at the range and depths of people’s passions and commitments.

Of course, part of what makes *Election 2008* so unique is that the Democratic nominee, be it Hillary or Barack, will be making history. The first *woman*, major-party nominee for President; or the first African-American.

Pundits and enthusiasts in both parties not only have their *preferred* candidate, but also their *preferred* candidate to run against. At this writing, McCain has shown strongest for the Republicans in national polls; while, for the Democrats, many think Hillary can’t win in November.

Part of what’s great about our American democracy is that we have both the freedom and a process to work all of this through.

The challenge for our next President. As we are about to turn the page on George W. Bush’s two years at the helm, our nation is eager for a new face of leadership and a fresh voice. The 44th President of the United States will have huge challenges to contend with on multiple fronts.

The war in Iraq has sapped our resources, while compromising our integrity and denting our esteem in the international community. The economy is sputtering, in mid-stream *recession* by most estimates. Education, health care, and a protective interest in the environment sound shrill concern in the American spirit as well.

More than anything, perhaps, the challenge of our next President will be to lead. Our nation, the world—indeed, the whole international community—needs leadership. We need a fresh voice who can paint a picture of possibility, link it to the hopes and dreams of our highest ideals, and show us the way.

We need a leader whose words and spirit have a unifying impact, a visionary who believes in the value of searching out the common good and uncovering common ground.

Still more, we need a leader of strong moral courage and conviction, whose values are tied to a universal impulse, sounding a chord that is compassionate and relational around the globe.

With the inevitable rise of China and India and the rabid tribalism that continues to haunt nations in Africa; with the itchy irritation of fanatical, Islamic jihad, America must see and understand ourselves in light of the needs of all the planet.

Leadership that inspires. I don't know about you, but I want to be inspired. And I want to be inspired by a leader who displays *size* as a person. A person with *size*, a *big* person, is a person who can deal with the diversity of our human situation in ways that make everybody better.

A person with *size* is a person who understands ambiguity, that life doesn't come to us in clear shades of black and white but, rather, in various hues of gray. To have *size* is to— all the time—see the *big picture*, the inter-relatedness of all things.

For example, we can't simply ignore or, in whatever way, marginalize the poor, because they, too, are part of us. We can't turn our head to the countless millions without adequate health care, or to those deprived of educational opportunity, because we know it's simply not right.

What is not *good enough* for all of us can never be *good enough* for any one of us.

With all of the above in mind, our next President needs to have the capacity to bring us together as a nation; and then to show us the way in the new global community that is the reality of tomorrow.