

EDITOR'S NOTE

Issues are important, but when all is said and done, this election will likely turn on how most Americans will answer the simple question: Which candidate is the better person to lead this country?

by Horace Johns

As we view the issues facing America and the world during this election year, it is obvious that we need to elect a strong leader as our next president. The challenges are mammoth: runaway oil prices and no comprehensive energy policy, an economy in turmoil, health care costs and the fact that many Americans are uninsured, war, terrorism, and the potential for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.

This is a time crying for dynamic, but stable and consistent, leadership. It is a time that we can ill afford to have leadership that is timid, hesitant, and lacking in confidence.

We need a leader who can get things done. Americans are disgusted over how little is getting done in light of so many challenges. President Bush and congressional Democrats can't seem to agree on the time of day. Bush's approval rating is about 28 percent, and Congress's is about 9 percent. The partisan bickering, "gotcha" politics, and gridlock are downright nauseating.

I read an interesting lecture given last fall by Paul Johnson, historian and author of several best-selling books, titled "Heroes: What Great Statesmen Have To Teach Us." Some of Johnson's remarks bear consideration as we prepare to elect the next leader of the free world. Johnson singles out five keys of statesmanship in addition to the ability to see the world clearly, draw the right conclusions, and take the right actions.

First, ideas and beliefs. Johnson says the best kind of leader has just a few, perhaps three or four, central principles to which he is passionately attached that he will not sacrifice under any circumstances. He adds that a great leader is someone who can distinguish between what must be done and what is merely desirable. He cites Truman, Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher as examples. And then there is Lincoln, who had only one overwhelming objective: to preserve the Union.

Second, there is willpower. Johnson says it is the most decisive quality in public life. Even with immense intelligence and all other virtues,

Paul Johnson, in his lecture "Heroes: What Great Statesmen Have To Teach Us," singles out five keys of statesmanship:

- * ideas and beliefs,**
- * willpower,**
- * persistence,**
- * ability to communicate, and**
- * magnanimity or greatness of soul.**

a leader has nothing if he lacks will. He cites Churchill and DeGaulle as examples.

Third, there is persistence. Johnson says that willpower is not enough, but there must be a determination to see the cause through at all costs. Patience and doggedness are part of persistence. He cites Washington and Lincoln as examples for their parts in weathering the dark days of the Revolutionary and Civil wars.

Fourth is the ability to communicate, to put across a few simple ideas with equal simplicity. Johnson says Reagan obviously had it, and I would add that Franklin D. Roosevelt did. But effective communication can also be achieved as Washington did by actions and personality.

Fifth is magnanimity or greatness of soul. Though hard to define, it is a supreme quality. Johnson says it is what makes you love the one who possesses it. He cites Lincoln and Churchill as leaders we deeply love.

The above qualities Johnson cited serve as good benchmarks for judging Senators McCain and Obama. Which has the greatest measure of these qualities and would be the greatest statesman?

Issues are important in this election, because they are serious and McCain and Obama hold different views. But, when all is said and done, this election will likely turn on how most Americans will answer, in their heart of hearts, the simple question: Which candidate is the better person to lead this country? ■

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