

POINTS OF VIEW

Authenticity has political attractiveness for country

The first time I ever heard the word "authentic" in connection with politics was about three years ago when I was talking with former U.S. Sen. Don Riegle.

I didn't take notes during our conversation, but as I remember it Riegle said something to the effect that candidates these days would have to be "authentic in order to be effective."

What he meant, of course, was that people couldn't run as a blow-dried, spin-doctored, consultant-manipulated, poll-reliant candidates, but as real people comfortable in their own skin.

"Authentic" has been rattling around inside my head ever since, but never more than now, when our politics are so infested with non-authentic candidacies of all sorts. Usefully, my dictionary defines authentic as, "Conforming to fact and therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief."

The most recent outbreak of authenticity in Michigan politics occurred last week, when Sen. John Schwarz (R-Battle Creek) endorsed U.S. Sen. John McCain for president

and shortly thereafter was named chairman of the McCain presidential campaign in the state. Evidently, birds of an authentic feather flock together, as both Schwarz and McCain are conspicuous practitioners of the politics of authenticity.

Schwarz is an eye, ear and nose surgeon who served in naval intelligence during the Vietnam War, became mayor of Battle Creek and then was elected to the Michigan Senate in 1988. Smart, blunt and well informed, Schwarz is hardly one to back away from a fight or suffer fools gladly. McCain, a Navy pilot who endured five years of torture in a Viet Cong prison before being elected to the U.S. Senate, gives the impression of being a whole lot like Schwarz.

"No, I don't think all the emphasis on authenticity is just because of Bill Clinton, although his career has been an object lesson," Schwarz told me. "Authentic people running as who they are have been increasingly rare in politics over the last 25 years. More and more, candidates are being con-



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trolled by non-office holding consultants, pollsters, spin doctors. The result is a bunch of finger-in-the-wind images who make me, at least, into a doubting Thomas whenever they say something because I always wonder who told them to do it."

The political attractiveness of authenticity seems to have national appeal. A recent poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People found overwhelming majorities rank honesty and the ability to connect as priorities, well ahead of a candidate's stand on particular issues.

Voters traditionally have been

attracted to candidates who share their values, empathize with their problems, address their concerns. But these days I sense a real hunger for candidates who are what they seem, unscripted and unrehearsed, men and women who are comfortable enough with themselves and where they stand not to have a compulsion to try to be all things to all people.

I asked Schwarz who he would be supporting for president if he were a Democrat. "Bill Bradley," he answered at once. "Although I've never met him, he seems secure in who he is - far more than Al Gore, who seems to need consultants for that purpose."

Schwarz's comment hit a nerve. In the past month or so, I have talked with a lot of politically informed people in Michigan. Many are in office while others have political obligations; for public consumption they favor either Texas Gov. George W. Bush or Vice President Gore, depending on their partisan affiliation.

But when I ask them, off the record

and for private discourse only, who they really like in their heart of hearts, overwhelmingly it's John McCain and Bill Bradley.

Why? Some cite a diversity of life experiences. Some point to candor and honesty, while others are attracted by a "natural" style, unaffected by consultants and pollsters. In other words, because both McCain and Bradley come across as authentic, whether by nature or by design.

I've seen a lot of elections over the years, and I've never seen such a big disconnect between the candidates who the odds-makers say will win the nominations - Bush and Gore - and those who are provoking deeper, more genuine responses. Something interesting and important may be stirring here.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 963-2047, ext. 1889, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net

MORE LETTERS

Failures must end

As long as the citizens of Farmington Hills continue to accept the existence of lifetime politicians who are not held accountable for their failures, the city is going to have fewer and fewer people like me who have the strength and vision to question the inadequacies of our existing government and are willing to put up with the abuse I knew would come my way.

The end result is that people like me who have achieved success in problem solving in the private sector and who have the education and experience in the private sector and are willing to contribute the benefit of these qualities and that experience to the community in which they live, are less likely to step forward, and that is sad because then the whole community

loses.

Let us also remember that the current mayor and city council have 731 days until the next election in which to create a win-win solution with Detroit Edison - which is something the previous mayor and city council failed to achieve for at least the last 10 years they have been in office.

Anything short of total success on this issue by the current mayor and city council shall be considered unacceptable by the citizens of Farmington Hills.

George Sarkisian
Farmington Hills

Clearly failed

The best game is one where the outcome is not contingent on the call of a referee or official. The outcome should not be determined by an out-

side influence or Observer. If Farmington or Harrison lost a title game due to a "bad" call by a referee, the whole community would be screaming for justice. What about the recent election, Farmington Hills?

In this case, it was the Observer who seemed intent on determining the outcome. It not only failed to provide its readers with the facts as to Ron Olivieri's credentials and background, but the Observer somehow only printed letters to the Editor that were negative in nature. And to take it one step further, the negative letters printed were far from factual and bordered on good(?) fiction.

In the past, I have looked to the Observer as a source of community information. But this time, the Observer has clearly failed, both to the community it is supposed to serve, but also to a candidate worthy of

much fairer treatment. Is this what we are to expect in the future or will this newspaper do the job it was created to do? The citizens of the Farmington community will be watching.

Bill Smith
Farmington Hills

Failed policies

Thanks to Pat Murphy for the enlightening article on the U.S./UN imposed sanctions on Iraq. And thanks to the Oakland County residents who will make the difficult journey to Iraq to bear witness to the devastating effects the sanctions are having on the people of that country. Firsthand witnesses are so important. There are UNICEF reports and other independent studies which demonstrate that somewhere between 4,000-

6,000 children die monthly as a direct result of sanctions.

But to see the faces of children who will die of leukemia, pneumonia, typhoid fever, and even malnutrition (all previously preventable or treatable in Iraq) is to understand what sanctions are doing to the people.

Prior to sanctions the Iraqi people enjoyed prosperity which included excellent and free health care and education. As an Iraqi American I realize that the sanctions have plunged the average Iraqi into poverty.

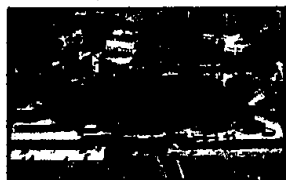
I am grateful to those, like the Oakland County delegation, who bear witness and shed light on the situation in Iraq. It is a step in the growing movement to end the failed policy of sanctions against Iraq.

Dr. Donna Denno
Farmington Hills

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