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Chapter One

A Candidate's Perspective

I had been mulling about running for public office for some time. I had been close enough to the scene to know something of what is involved. On several occasions I had been present in Washington for Congressional hearings to offer testimony on matters having to do with education, the humanities, and veterans affairs. Each year, for ten years, I accompanied a delegation of students from the University of California, Santa Barbara, to Washington to learn more about the Vietnam War. In this capacity, in addition to studying the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, we had had meetings with numerous governmental officials, sometimes in House and Senate offices and chambers. When I was president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, I spent so much time on Capitol hill that I was able to schedule my haircuts in the Senate barbershop. None of this led to the acquisition of "Potomac fever", but I did come to recognize that much of our aspiration as a people cannot approximate full fruition unless it is validated by the legislative process.

Serious consideration of running for public office did not occur, however, until I became involved in Senator Bob Kerrey's campaign for President in 1992. I campaigned for and with Kerrey in New Hampshire, gaining some familiarity with campaign management, the rigors of the day-to-day contact with voters and voter groups, and the excitement and exhilaration of the teamwork one experiences when there is a shared or common goal and limited time to achieve it.

Thus, when I appeared in the offices of the Democratic Congressional Cam-

paigned Committee for exploratory purposes one autumn morning in 1993, it was with considerable forethought. I knew I was serious about wanting to make a run to challenge Michael Huffington for the congressional seat in the 22nd District of California. I knew this even before Huffington announced his retirement, and the race became a contest for an open seat. But I had never done anything like this before. I didn't want to do something that would turn out to be completely foolish. In addition, I wasn't sure I had the proper qualifications, the necessary prior experience, or even the attractiveness to voters that would give such a venture a chance to end well. In short, I coveted counsel and, perhaps, some indication of the moral (I wasn't yet seeking financial) support that I might request were I to make the decision to do this. I had scheduled this discussion with DCCC personnel along with discussion I would have with a number of other persons. I desired to sample as much wise opinion as I could assemble, to enable me to make a reasonable and informed choice.

In coming to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, I had prepared myself for a sober assessment. But, frankly, the leaders of most of the ventures to which I had attached myself in recent years seemed pleased to have my association, not simply because they were looking for volunteers but because I brought a modest but substantial resume of leadership experience. Against this expectation, I must say that I wasn't quite prepared for the scores of negatives that were thrown up against me in the first minutes of my conversations with DCCC staff personnel. The first subject (I should have known) was finances. Recognizing that I was a potential first-time candidate, and that I did not have the wherewithal to finance the campaign on my own, they warned me about the amount of time I would be spending on the telephone requesting money. This warning was reinforced by citations from other recent congressional campaigns, none of which

were successful, in which well over a million dollars was raised. "Think of the hours it will take you to raise over a million dollars," I was admonished.

The next barrier came in the form of an alarm concerning the amount of personal debt I would incur if I made the run. "The last candidate from your district to run was \$150,000 in debt at the end of the campaign, and is still trying to pay it off," I was told. To make matters worse, information about the candidate's personal life had come to light during the campaign, and eventually forced this aspirant to move out of the area, immediately after the campaign was over. "How will you feel if this happens to you?" I was asked.

Unable quickly to respond, I was given still another sobering reality to ponder. "And if you do all of this, make the calls and raise the money, you will also have to expect that you won't win. You probably won't win." While still reeling from this sudden reality check, I was forewarned that running for office is an identity-defining experience. "Perhaps nothing you have ever encountered will define you as deeply and as surely."

It's a good deal, I thought. If I do this, I will knock myself out making telephone calls for an estimated six to eight hours per day, asking people for money -- something I could never see myself relish doing. I'll run all over the voting district for several months, knocking on doors, talking to voters, wearing the tires on my 1984 automobile thin. Then, at the end of the time, even if I am successful in raising a credible amount of financial support, I will incur heavy personal or family debt, probably requiring us to take out a new mortgage on our home. And, to make the arrangement even more enticing, after we have done all of this, chances are that we will lose the election, and maybe go bonkers. Every two years a Democrat candidate from our district ventures out this way, places himself/herself in such vulnerability, then, somehow, after losing, tries to put what's

left of his/her personal life back together again, at least half of the time, the evidence con-firms, in a new location. It's a can't-miss proposition.

"But can I tell you why I've been thinking about running?" I inquired.

I was prepared at this point to say a few words about the nature of my career to date, my teaching in the University of California, specifically, a career in which I have been offering courses in the general area of "religion and public life," a career that has given me opportunity to reflect on the social and cultural impact of the Vietnam War, which, in turn, has taken me to the Soviet Union and to Vietnam. I wanted to mention the fact that I was associated with the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, the premier American think-tank in its day, and that, in this capacity, I had been thinking and writing about public policy issues for some time. I was prepared to mention that I had taught an undergraduate course with George McGovern, and another with Bob Kerrey, that one of my classes has been featured on "60 Minutes," and that my dear wife is a school (public-health) nurse, and has had ample opportunity to view American life from that vital perspective. I was prepared to emphasize that we had lived in our community for over thirty years, that our children were born and raised there, and had attended local schools. Our daughters were student-body officers at the local high school. Our son is a public school teacher in the city, and has been a leader of the Junior Lifeguard in Santa Barbara for well over a decade. I had hoped to be able to say that I had testified before congressional committees on two or three occasions, and that I had been monitoring life on the Hill rather closely. Had there been time, I would have wanted to say something about the subject areas of books and articles I have published: the New Religious Right, the influence of Alexis de Tocqueville, the cultural and political impact of

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the Vietnam War. I would even have been interested in discussing how Thomas Jefferson described public service, in terms of temporary office holding on the part of persons of various walks of life who are not seeking career changes, but fully intend, after serving for a time, to return to the places from which they came. I wanted to sketch in as much of this background as I could.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that I didn't speak quickly enough (I often joke about being a charter member of Slow Talkers of America, Inc.). But before I could get into any of this background information, I was actually told what the primary issues of the 1994 election campaign would be. "This is what you'll be talking about if you enter the contest. You'll be talking about jobs, crime, immigration, and Governor Wilson."

Since I was being given a specific list, I reached in my pocket for a pen and some paper so I could take notes. I looked at the items and thought that, if given some time, I could probably work up something on all of these issues. I'm in favor of jobs. I'm opposed to crime. I recognize that immigration is a complex issue. But I haven't thought a whole lot about Governor Wilson.

After a few more minutes of polite but swift pleasantries, both of the chief speakers left the room for other meetings, explaining that everyone was working long hours feverishly, I assume, because they had elections to win. When they were gone, one of the younger staff members, who had witnessed the conversation from a chair in the background, but had not been a participant in it, tried to explain that his colleagues had given me this stark assessment of my prospects because, as he put it, "academics usually don't make very good politicians." He explained: "it's the mindset, the work habits, the expectations that are skewed," adding that "here in Washington, everything is done in quick order. You don't have the time to reflect that you have when you are in the university." Then, wanting to do me a favor, he

asked me to consider that "teaching and doing politics are very different kinds of activities." He added that it is not "an easy transition to move from one to the other, especially when one has been doing academic work for a long time." Sincerely appreciating his thoughtfulness as well as his concern for my situation, I shook his hand, and

thanked him. I believe I tried to assure him -- he might have been 23 or 24 years of age -- that I was aware of some distinctions between academics and politics, though perhaps not as acutely as I had become aware now after entering the offices of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

I recall walking out of the Democratic National Committee building into bright sunshine, thinking that perhaps my quest had been brought to a premature closure. I sat on the bus-stop bench outside to try to assimilate what I had just experienced. Maybe I wouldn't have to do this after all. Maybe it had been silly for me to be thinking about running for office. After all, what did I know about crime, the economy, immigration, and Governor Wilson? What I did know, and knew rather well, was how to create and teach college and university classes, stimulate intellectual interest in a topic, conduct research, and, of course, think about beliefs and attitudes, individual aspiration, the spirit of our time, the desires of people all over the earth to live together in peace, the longings among the less fortunate for a life of realistic promise, and the desire of the young people (whom I have gotten to know over a thirty-year career in teaching) for an opportunity to live their ideals in a world that is given formation by hope rather than fear, and generosity rather than anger. What do I know about running for office? What do I know about issues? What do I know about national priorities? If it looked so odd for me to be thinking of submitting my candidacy to the voters, perhaps I could return home happily, and devote myself without compromise to the work I was still

very much enjoying, and to the life my wife, children, family and close friends share. I was disappointed with the conversation that had just transpired, but my initial reaction was that it was probably for my own good.

The inquiry didn't end at the doorstep of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Instead, what I learned there only made me more curious about the entire process of running for office. If others had confronted the same discouragement that I encountered (and why would I have been singled out?), why would anyone seriously consider running? Why would anyone of accomplishment elsewhere want to get into politics?

The obvious response to this thought is that we probably have no idea how many otherwise qualified prospective candidates decide not to do it. We probably don't know all of the reasons some persist and some do not. We probably don't even know why some individuals decide to go forward with candidacy. The desire to fulfill some public service would be high on the list. I imagine, too, that there are lots of people who are drawn to politics the way others are drawn to athletics, academics or to other professional or vocational arenas of life. But how, I wondered, do the young people at the DCCC know how to spot good candidates, and on what basis to discourage some and encourage others? What criteria do they employ? On what set of judgments are they relying? Clearly, more and more candidates for national public office are persons with sufficient personal financial resources to qualify. One can absorb the loss of \$100,000 if one can cover this amount out of one's own means. And one need not spend the required six to eight hours daily on the telephone if such support is available.

I would imagine that being able to identify where the money is coming from would be a large plus. But what are the other criteria? What about tackling

the issues? What about background experience? What about charismatic personal qualities? What about previous political involvement? How important is the often-referred to "fire in the belly"?

One looks around at who runs, who gets elected, who serves, and it seems almost like a dart game. Candidates who have been movie stars have become successful at it. Candidates who served in the military have become successful. Lots of lawyers become successful at it. Some community leaders become successful at it. But there is hardly a common profile. Come to think of it, many of the persons I know who have been successful in running for office were not known specifically for their convictions or positions on issues. A lot of them seem to have pursued politics the way careers are sought in any profession. Yes, even the issues that get addressed by politicians are very much in flux: the major issues of the 1992 campaign season were not necessarily the major issues of the 1994 campaign. The appearance of voter issues does appear to be somewhat circumstantial, and, if so, a candidate can probably work up positions (or position statements) on them. So is this what it is to become involved in politics? Is this how John F. Kennedy, or Lyndon Johnson, or Ronald Reagan, or Bill Clinton, or the Congressmen from our district got where they were? My curiosity was increasing.

I need not detail how it happened, but, even to my own partial surprise,
I did make an official announcement that I would stand as a candidate for Congress in the 22nd District of California. And I ran a good race, in both primary and general-election phases. Why did I do it? The reason has more to do with seeing it as an assignment, an expansion of vocation, believing that I had something to contribute, rather than fulfillment of a life's ambition. It was a simple matter at first. Had other good candidates been in the race, I probably

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would not have entered. But I didn't see them, and, in their absence, I thought I'd simply offer my candidacy to the voters, and ask them to decide.

Before we go into the personal story any further, I must quickly note that we didn't win. We fought hard, and were strikingly close. We came in first in the primary, our chief opponent being a candidate who had been endorsed by the Democratic Party. Then we came within 1500 votes of winning the general election, in a landslide Republican year, in a district in which the Congressional seat has been held by a Republican for the past fifty two years. This is all part of the historic record, and can be probed, if anyone is interested in the official documentation.

However, the story I prefer to tell has more to do with prevailing relationships between politics and citizenship as these are reflective of the ways in which democracy is being practiced (and not practiced) in our country. Yes, I believe I have a great deal to share (as do all candidates) about what happens to a person, and his family and supporters, who faces the day-to-day rigors of running for public office. In this respect, I found myself cheering for other candidates, recognizing that what we had set out to do, the discipline to which we had subscribed, the personal insults to which we had subjected ourselves simply by making ourselves available for public office, separated us from everyone else, and, paradoxically, even when we were running against each other, also linked us to each other.

I am not averse to telling what I know about how campaigning for office affects the campaigner -- the swirls of loneliness, the feeling of exile that haunts a candidate who moves from city to city, forum to forum, interview to interview, sensing in every place and at every stop the eyes of scrutiny, as if all that one is or stands for has been put out there on parade, the thrills that come when crowds are responsive, the satisfaction that grows when discussions with voters offer new

possibilities or probe fresh ground. It is no small thing to seek elected office. To be a representative of the people is to seek entry into important protected places of their lives, to ask them to attach their dreams and aspirations -- and, yes, their indignations -- to the candidate's instrumental abilities. A run for public office exhibits numerous public components. And what must not be overlooked is the highly individual and personal nature of the enterprise, from both candidates' and voters' perspectives. Bruce Babbitt, former Governor of Arizona and then Secretary of the Interior, told us that when one looks back on a campaign, one recognizes how much good there was in it, most of the good being associated with the people with whom one worked, and with whom one shared this portion of life. There is no doubt that both highs and lows are immense, and they often follow each other, or trample on one another, in quick succession. Adlai Stevenson, I was comforted to learn, would often slip away from a campaign appearance to absorb himself in a book, much to the dismay of his handlers. I found my solace in heart-to-heart (no, soul-to-soul) conversations with trusted friends, and in writing, the piano, athletics, and talking while walking the beach with my wife.

I am willing to tell what I can about these personal aspects of political campaigning. But I would hope to make this something more than one candidate's story. That is, I would prefer to concentrate on the nexes between politics and citizenship, and why I believe so many of our expectations and presumptions within this arena are fueled by mistrust and cynicism. We talk about a broken bond of trust, which brokenness I have seen in the eyes of citizens, in the voices of people who speak out at voter forums, in the attitudes of young people who wonder if participating in an election really matters at all. I should explain, however, that I was born to be a positive person, whose attitudes and ideas are

constructive and uplifting. Thus I have no interest in offering this treatise as a diatribe against contemporary American politics. In my judgment, this process has already drawn more criticism than can be accommodated. My goal is not to tag the way we do politics in our country with more scorn and disfavor, but, instead, to offer suggestions for some important corrective measures. The paradox is that my own direct exposure to political campaigning, as alarming and sobering as it sometimes was, mostly increased my respect for the workings of democracy, and heightened my awareness of the propriety of the power of the people. What Alexis de Tocqueville described in his classic Democracy in America is still alive and well, but it shouldn't be as difficult to discern as it is today, and it need not be so heavily mired in infectious, debilitating political professionalisms. Citizens are critical of their government -- indeed, when I ran the first time, respect for government was at an all-time low in the United States. My hunch (I shall elaborate on this shortly) is that disrespect for government is being confused with disillusionment regarding the way we conceive and do politics. Politics and government are not the same, though they are inextricably linked. I'd like to return to some old-fashioned, less-costly, less disingenuous ways of running for office in this country. I have confidence that this too is what the majority of the people are more than ready for. The fact that so many of them would choose to vote independent rather than express their satisfaction with the official candidate of either of the two dominant political parties is confirmation of this desire for improvement or transformation. I know we can do a lot better than we are doing, and that the electorate would welcome the changes.

But before considering some bold proposals, we need to understand just how this country got to where it is with respect to the dynamics of the election process. It has been, as we shall see, a protracted stage-by-stage development. If we are going to try to change or reverse any part of it, we will need first to

understand all of it. And in doing this, we shall gain a very fresh and promising look at democracy in America, that is, democracy in America today. If we begin with root causes, there is just the chance that we can find the way to revision
American politics.

Politics and Collective Narrative:

One learns quickly, when one runs for political office, that the national political climate is reflected vividly in the views and attitudes of the people who vote and thus decide the outcome of local elections. While these voters may not be able or eager to put all of the explanatory pieces together, they do indeed have some sense -- and sometimes it is a keen sense -- of the dominant social and cultural tendencies in the country. They seem to know what form or style of American life they most prefer. They seem to know just when that form or style was prominent. And they have strong awareness of the contrast, that is, the difference between the way things are today and the way they were when things were right. Their recollection of good times is highly selective, of course, as is their analyses of what is right or wrong in the present moment. But the contrasts they draw, the differences between what they wish for and what they find distasteful and disappointing about life in America today, bear heavily on how they make decisions, and, without question, on how they cast their votes on election day.

Thus, it happens that conversations with the voters -- I am reflecting specifically on the 1994 election cycle -- will be about the issues that are understood to be most critical by the press, pollsters, campaign managers, and the like. There is no doubt that the factors everyone seems to be talking are

being talked about for good reason. What tends to get overlooked in this, however, is the less discernible but very informative broader ideational framework that has been composed out of implicit narrative. When making voters' decisions about the future of their country, or even the future of their communities, the people invoke memories of the past, intrinsic senses of individual and collective well-being, some assessment of the current status of the country with respect to the comparative strengths and weaknesses of other countries, confidence or lack of confidence concerning the ideals and values that are being disseminated in those places (chiefly the schools, halls of government, and religious institutions) that carry spiritual and moral authority. This less tangible attitudinal voter matrix is composed in a highly idiosyncratic fashion, and yet always forces an evaluation of something out of the past. In 1994, for example, there was considerable discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Reagan Era -- indeed, there was more talk about Ronald Reagan than there was about George Bush. Because the election was occurring at the mid-point in the Presidency of Bill Clinton, there was quite a bit of talk and assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Jimmy Carter, the most recent Democrat President prior to Clinton. Accordingly, the way women's issues seemed to surface was in the form of a referendum on Hillary Rodham Clinton. Is she the appropriate exemplar of the new woman, the way we intend women of today to be, or does she represent what we fear women might become? My suggestion is that there is a much more extensive narrative concerning recent American history that comes to play in election-year choices. It is the time when the voters are forced to come to attitudinal decisions about the courses of events that have been transpiring. Indeed, what has made recent elections both intriguing and

frustrating is that two dominant narrative accounts have been competing with each other, and voters are being asked to make a decision concerning which of these two accounts they prefer, or, as the case has become, they dislike most. This means that a candidate for public office never runs within some intellectual or political vacuum, but always within an implicit historical framework (always partial, and usually barely discernible, under-articulated, and highly informal) to which all political, ideological, and moral judgments own direct attachment. Pollsters can discern voter opinions on the issues, but polls are less effective in identifying prevailing narrative contexts. In specific senses, 1994 voters voted for a reduction in the scope and pretense of government. But the anger and vehemence they registered in so doing really added up to a resounding negative response to the story of America that has been unfolding in recent years. They simply no longer like the country in which they live, or, to be more exact, they like other versions (even fanciful ones) better.

Thus, there were a number of measures on the ballot -- I am thinking primarily of the situation in California -- that gave voters an opportunity to put things away, to hide them from our daily gaze, or, more specifically, to lock them up. By 1995, for example, 25% of the citizens of the State of California are foreign born, and this does not count the large number of undocumented peoples that are not accounted for on official census counts. According to prevailing narrative, these numbers are too high. They contradict that sense of well-being to which the majority population continues to subscribe. Thus, something must be done if the sense of what this country is is to be correlated with what it appears to have become. This, in my view, is responsible for the intensity that accompanied discussion of Proposition 187, the initiative that barred "illegal immigrants" from receiving educational and social services. It mattered little to the voters that the proposition had little chance of being enforced. The important thing was that the

proposition gave voters an opportunity to vent their displeasure with the changes that have come over the country -- changes, they recognized, that had something directly to do with demographic shifts, and the influences of these shifts on senses of individual and collective well-being. The changes in the ethnic and cultural makeup of the society had produced sufficient unease among the citizenry that something definite had to be done. The truth is that a majority of people looked out and didn't like what they saw in the big picture of contemporary American (specifically, California) life, and voted resoundingly to eliminate the items in the picture that seemed most contrary to desired expectations, the items, in this instance, that are most alien. The success of the proposition demonstrated that the citizens wanted someone somewhere to bring the big picture back into proper or acceptable focus.

When dealing with the composition of the prevailing narrative, we should try to understand the linkages between present attitudes and the events that occurred in the 1960s, with which events, we suggest, the country is still trying (and, sometimes, not trying) to come to terms. We return to this era for the simple reason that there is some common agreement regarding which events are the important events of the era, though there is certainly no agreement yet as to what the events mean or portend. Another way of saying this is that there appears to be a shared history that can be told about American up through the World War II era, including the 1950s. But this unanimity is broken in the early 1960s, and the shared narrative accounts that are projected forward from the time of Kennedy and Johnson are widely divergent, in spite of the fact that the story tellers seem to agree on the identification of significant events. The important events include the following: the tragic death of President Kennedy in 1963, the inauguration of Great Society legislation in 1963 and 1964 with the ascendency of the Presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson, the dramatic develop-

ment of civil rights legislation affecting the minority population, the occurrence of the Vietnam War, the birth of the counter culture, the rapid increase of mind-altering drug use, dramatic shifts in artistic and cultural styles, together with concerted efforts to achieve social and economic equality on behalf of women.

As noted, there is as yet no consensus concerning the propriety of these events, as there is not consensus concerning which are the most important and/or the most destructive and/or the most constructive. There is as yet no consensus within the evaluation of the impact of these events on the health of the society, for there is, as yet, no consensus as to how this health might be assessed. Indeed, in all of these respects -- as the furor that accompanied the publication of Robert McNamara's book about the Vietnam War demonstrated -- attitudes and opinions concerning events within the 1960s remain very much unsettled and manifestly controversial.

It is interesting that the period of time under scrutiny can be narrated in at least two dominant ways. Viewed from what we will simply call the "progressive standpoint," the decade of the 1960s stands as the beginning of the modern era. It is here that civil rights compulsions gained clear focus, at long last, as well as strong legislative status. One need only recall the monumental influence of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., with the March on Selma, Rosa Parks' unwillingness to move to the back of the bus, King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," the resistance of Governor George Wallace, the struggles between federal marshals, the F.B.I., and local officials and law-enforcement agencies. We move on into the turbulent mid-1960s, and then into 1968, with Eugene McCarthy's challenge of President Johnson, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the assassination of King, Hubert Humphrey's unsuccessful bid for the Presidency, the election of Richard Nixon, the escalation of the Vietnam War, continued war protests, continued social and political unrest, the student protest movements, Kent State, and on and on. When progressive re-count

this history, they draw upon a story line that portrays the dominant theme as pertaining to the extension of civil rights and individual liberties to more and more segments within the population, accompanied by the anticipated resistance to such extensions, confused and compromised by the country's misguided involvement in what should have been seen as a highly volatile civil war in a small country in Southeast Asia. We call it a controversial military expedition. It is true, of course, that the war initially had the support of the majority of members of Congress; recall that only two U.S. Senators (Morse and Gruening) voted against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August, 1964, for example. But as increasing numbers of American lives were lost, the Vietnam adventure quickly fell into disfavor, and became the rallying cry for the anti-government opposition that eventually forced President Johnson from office, and assisted the election of Richard Nixon to the Presidency in 1968. This, in sketch, is how progressives would do the narrative on the 1960s. Certainly they would add that the war that split the nation first split the Democratic Party. And, if they were honest, they would acknowledge that neither of these two splits has been satisfactorily overcome. In this respect, George McGovern continues to be the figure upon whom the legacy of the 1960s, from the progressive standpoint, most deliberately and exclusively falls.

When one considers the same period from the conservative perspective, the events remain the same, but the attitudinal posture toward shifts very dramatically. Yes, conservatives were aware of civil rights legislation, which they sometimes opposed, sometimes accepted with considerable reluctance, and sometimes appeared to be encouraging, but never whole-heartedly, never without serious questions. And they were aware of the dawning of the counter culture, of which they were uniformly suspicious. Without question, conservatives knew about the

war in Vietnam, but what they most knew about it was that it was unlike World War II. In this respect, conservatives were not happy with the Vietnam War, for it was not a war that they started or even one for which they had taken much initial responsibility. And they were nervous about its ambiguities, as they were distrustful of the cultural modifications and transformations that had come into prominence with the birth of the counter culture. In the main – though it is extremely difficult to generalize – conservatives were mostly suspicious of and resistant to the changes that were affecting American society in the 1960s. They were not in the forefront of the emancipation of women, for example. They preferred to concentrate on the glories of World War II rather than have to deal specifically with all of the irresolution that had become part of the war in Vietnam. The one consistent theme in all of this for conservatives was anti-communism. Conservatives had been and remained singularly anti-communist throughout the 1960s, and, for that matter, to this day. Indeed, the largest wave of anti-communist fervor came during the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan was President, whose presidency can appropriately be described as a deliberate anti-communist crusade. Indeed, what previous anti-communist leaders had sought to achieve in earlier periods, Ronald Reagan did in fact achieve by making it impossible for the Soviet Union and its satellites to win any kind of war against the free world. It was a strange juxtaposition. Progressives, in the 1960s, were the initial sponsors of the war in Vietnam, but became less and less anti-communist as the decade proceeded. Conservatives continued their anti-communist rhetoric, and used it on every appropriate occasion, as a rallying or battle cry. And yet, the conservative heir to the events of the 1960s, Richard Nixon, who pushed the war to closure, had to share whatever success or unsuccess was implicit in this with the ignomy of being brought down by the Watergate scandal.

The Election of 1994

So, what did of this mean with respect to the election of 1994? The answer is that the campaigns of the two political parties were on a highly volatile collision course. They no longer shared a common history of the nation. They had no consensus whatever on the meaning or the outcome of the war in Vietnam. They were decidedly mixed about what to make of civil rights advances, or even if the changes that had come about could be termed advances. They tended to be on opposite sides concerning how to interpret the transformations that had occurred with respect to changed women's roles as well as shifts within women's self-understanding. They were on opposite sides concerning whether communism remains an ideological or military threat. They could find little common ground respecting how the United States should conduct itself within the international geo-political context. They didn't even agree on the characteristics they were looking for in the selection of elected leaders. Thus, the election itself became a contest between two competing but only rather loosely-defined agendas. And this, I suggest, is why the sound-bites and the 30-second commercials dominated. Whatever convictions or philosophical principles were at stake were so under-conceptualized and conflicted that they were overpowered by sheer emotion evoked by pictures of the status of things (both current and intended) within the country.

So, on what basis did the parties and the candidates request voter support? The one side continued to work on its civil-rights agenda, still confident that civil rights are a good thing, and should be extended to all qualified groups and individuals. The other side projected that civil rights had gone far enough, indeed, too far, for the partnership between civil rights and welfare programs had created a situation within which too many citizens -- and those who hold no citizenship -- were looking to the government to supply their needs and answer

their wants. Thus, progressives were condemned by conservatives for stimulating a society that had gotten out of control, and the criticism was effective at the federal level of government because Democrats had been the majority party within the House of Representatives for the past forty years. For its part, then, conservatives made great headway simply castigating progressives for the irresponsible way they had governed the country, the chief example in point being the run-away budgetary situation that was linked directly to increasing welfare costs. This meant that conservatives could mount a winning election strategy without invoking anti-communist rhetoric, for, with the focal object being the illegitimate beneficiaries of out-of-control welfare policies, the fundamental enemy became those in leadership positions who had assumed that government (the "tax-and-spend liberals") should be functioning in this manner. Prominent in all conservative portrayals of the social disaster was talk about increasing crime and violence, undocumented workers making a mockery of international border protections, gangs in the cities, dysfunctional families, teenage mothers, homosexuals, abortion clinics, pervasive welfare culture, indeed, the almost complete breakdown or subjugation of the nation's traditional and dependable ways of life. Because conservatives had never ever really bought into the social transformations of the 1960s, they retained title to the way of life that had prevailed in the country before the progressive (or liberals) had taken charge. Conservatives did not need much of a positive or constructive program of their own. All that was needed was an all-out assault against the forces that were understood to be destroying the nation. This time around, in the absence of the intensity of the Cold War, the threatening forces were not associated with the ambitions of a foreign power, but, instead, were internal. And they were identified with the ideology that was most contrary to conservative ideology, not communism this time, but the worldview of the counter-culture, the so-called secularists, or

ethical relativists, who had been holding power in Washington, under the warrants and guidance of the policies of the Clinton administration as authorized by the Democratic Party.

Thus it became an all-out culture war, a contest for the soul of America. The election invoked intense competition between two contrasting ways of life, Each of the two could lay claim to being authentically American. Each of the two could also find philosophical support (or so they said) in the writings of the founders of the nation. And each of the two had an impressive body of advocates and true believers.

How did these dynamics come to play a role in the election? The answer is that the discussion among the voters was most essentially about what the United States had become in contrast to what it ought to be. And, in this discussion, the progressives were put in the position of being completely on the side of the defense. Since Democrats had been in charge of Congress, and thus of the policies and practices of the federal government, Democrats were forced to explain why the tell-tale signs had appeared. Why had family life become so thoroughly decimated? Why had the divorce rate accelerated upward? Why were more and more young Americans victimized by drugs? Why did crime in America's cities appear to be so completely out of control? Why had the teenage pregnancy rate gone so high, and why were increasing numbers of babies born illegitimately? Why had so many previously nice, safe, liveable neighborhoods become victims of gangs and gang activity? Why was the homeless population increasing? Why are there so many apparently lazy, shiftless people on America's streets? In short, what had happened to the spirit of the nation, that once indomitable spirit, that would allow all of this to happen?

Those asking the questions were not always certain of the answers, but they were clear and united concerning one fact: Whoever was in charge of the policies of the nation was not doing a good job. Moreover, whatever policies were in force needed to be seriously questioned, for they seemed to be producing consequences that were deleterious and destructive. If one accepts the thesis, and joins with the application, there is only thing to do. Get rid of those who are in power in Washington, and replace them with representatives who will establish an alternative agenda. This, it seems, is exactly what happened in the voter revolution of 1994. In fact, the outcome of the election, as we view it in retrospect, was entirely predictable. With the exception of the President, who was not on the ballot this time, the position of virtually every Democrat who held national office was threatened. With few exceptions, only those Democrats who represented areas where there were large numbers of voters (and not simply of citizens) who had benefited from extended-1960s policies were assured of election or re-election, and even in many instances even these races were close. In open-seat situations, the pro-1960s candidates were placed at a strong disadvantage. Democrats who looked like Republicans had a chance, as did those who tried to avoid being identified with either side of the culture-wars conflict. Progressives got some assistance by championing the attitude that government reform was indeed necessary, but not in the extreme form that an opponent conservative candidate was recommending. And then there were others who contended under a banner of being "fiscal conservative, but progressive on social issues," which tended to encourage voters to make decisions on other than ideological or strict party lines. In the end -- the conditions for this occurrence now seem so clear in retrospect -- Republicans gained majorities in both the House and the Senate, and captured a number of gubernatorial positions they had not held before. But it was less a victory for one political party over its opponent, and more a dramatic signal that the big-

picture the progressives had been putting forward had fallen into disfavor. Or, perhaps it was that enthusiasm for the achievements of the 1960s, however they should be enumerated, had been exhausted. But the more important point is that conservatives won, and progressives lost, not because conservatives were offering constructive proposals. On the contrary, conservatives won by calling the traditional programmatic agenda of the progressives into question. The "Contract with America" which, subsequent to the election, was touted as the conservatives' new creed, concentrates on the need to reduce the size and reach of government. In no sense can the "Contract" be construed as a recommendation of a new set of constructive national proposals. Indeed, the "Contract" is framed within a deconstructionist mode -- an instrumentation designed to eliminate the programmatic design that had been there before, but, under conservative analysis, had shown itself to be responsible for so much social, economic, and convictional mischief

The Rudiments of the Campaign

The campaign professionals who were advising us, all of them exceptionally congenial and well-intended, thought it important that we stress (we agreed) our pro-choice position with respect to women's reproductive freedoms. Our opponent was a well-known anti-abortionist, a woman of traditional Roman Catholic religious piety, whose attitude was so resolute that she even flirted with the idea that anyone who has an abortion should be punished by law? We learned how to question her, as follows: if abortion is a crime, it is a misdemeanor or a felony? If a classifiable crime, it can hardly be a misdemeanor (that is, if it really is murder). But if it is a felony, does it fall under capital punishment jurisdiction, therefore earning the guilty party the death penalty?

If the answer to the felony question is "no," we were prepared to ask "why not?" Or, conversely, if the answer to the question is "yes," we were eager to ask some additional questions, say, about how would one reconcile a view that taking the life of the mother is preferable to taking the life of the embryo, or, conversely, how one would harmonize support of capital punishment with obedience to the biblical command, "thou shalt not kill."

Our point in all of this was to demonstrate that our opponent's views had not been carefully thought out, and were actually too extreme to be representative of the people of the 22nd District of California, 76% of whom were avowed pro-choice. So, again under reliable professional advice, we developed radio and television ads which made this very point: our opponent's views, we asserted, were "too extreme," meaning that she was a right-wing conservative (which she was, and is) whose extremist views would destroy too much of the prevailing social fabric. The fact that she drew upon her theological sensibilities to offer the judgment that the 1991 earthquake in San Francisco was a sign of God's wrath against homosexual activity there, and that the devastating fires in Malibu as well as the earthquake in Northridge were both attributable to the same cosmic vengeance, helped us make our point. But this range of issues, though they registered with some sharpness in the conversations and debates, were not sufficient to overcome the bounty that our opponent was receiving by being on the delivering end of the criticism against the present government in Washington. In the end, the election results did not turn on the pro-choice/anti-choice competition, or even on who offered the most compelling national theology.

Rather, in the end, the election turned on the dynamics that characterized the principal frame, and this had to do with the contest between two competing narrations of recent (that is, post-1960s) American history. The one we were advancing had run into obstacles for which there was no easy philosophical way out.

The one our opponent was advancing was counter-history, offered primarily from an attack position, skilfully equipped to do battle, to bring down, to conquer, to vanquish, so as, eventually, to replace with a clear, albeit diametrically opposed alternative.

From the opponents' perspective, for purposes of the election, it was enough to offer critique and to try to make it as pointed and devastating as possible. The way she did this was by linking her opponent (me), as often as she could, with the people in Washington (Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Congress, et al.) who had taken the nation down the sorry path into over-spending, easy-welfare morality, and the undermining of traditional values. This, actually, is all that had to occur. The details concerning the conservative program that would follow after the questionable progressive program had been demolished could be left to post-election announcement and proclamation.

Viewed from the other side, the way the dynamics of the election were organized put progressives in a frustrating position of having nothing or no one to criticize. Since Democrats held the majority in both houses of Congress, while occupying the White House as well, there was no one to blame but Democrats for legislative mistakes or failed policy. Of course, some relative weight could be awarded to the contention that Republican office-holders had been highly obstructionist, or that the President (as well as the Democrats in Congress) hadn't received proper recognition for the many fine achievements of the administration's first two years. But while these assertions were made, and, to a degree, perhaps, appreciated, it was still the case that there was too much within the country that seemed out of control, or, at least, running rampant, contrary to the positive, constructive spirit that citizens cherish when they are certain that the foundations are in no danger or jeopardy. This left Democrats no position from which to criticize

Republicans, for Republicans had only oppositional status. So contest after contest devolved into accusations and counter-accusations on demonstrably personal, characterological grounds. It is predictable that when this happens in an election, commitment to principle is jettisoned, substantive debate is not allowed to happen, and the consequent voter cynicism is extended further and deeper. In sum, out-of-power Republicans were effective in criticizing in-power Democrats, and polished the techniques of this criticism within a voter atmosphere of increasing disillusionment and anger. Thus, when we, in our campaign, admonished "vote your hopes, not your fear; vote your ideals, not your anger," we were attempting to cut through the tension fueled by big-picture competition to appeal to both pre- and post-ideological human sensibilities. I think election results will confirm that we were moderately successful, but, to a large extent, our successes came via a calculated unwillingness to endorse either of the two competing big-picture frameworks. We believed it to be honest and proper to position ourselves this way, for we fully believe that neither of the two pictures is currently sufficient to move the nation forward, and that the ceaseless competition between them is a source of much of the current political stagnation, misfocused spiritual nostalgia, and the potent and debilitating combination of moral self-righteousness and ennui.

Another way of putting this is that when the election was over, the two competing readings of recent American history remained in competition. Nothing had happened to resolve the differences. No intellectual breakthrough had occurred to bring clarity to the impasse. Progressives could continue to feel the way they did previously about civil rights, the counter culture, and the Vietnam War. Similarly, conservatives could continue to feel the way they did previously about those same subjects. Following the November 8, 1994 election, all that has changed is that those with the conservative reading of recent American history are in positions of power,

and thus can accuse their opponents of being "un-American" for positions that were taken with respect to United States military involvement in Indochina, for being "counter-culture McGovernicks" (to use Newt Gingrich's phrase), or for being soft on "illegal immigration" and/or unrepentant on affirmative action.

This dynamic played powerfully into election discussion. "How do we know that you are not another Bill Clinton?" we were asked at nearly every campaign stop. We tried for a bit of humor some of the time: "I'm not Bill Clinton; I play the tuba" (which I do, and did in parades in many of the towns and cities of our congressional district). But the humorous response did not suffice. The voters were fearful that a Democrat in Washington would simply tax heavily and spend heavily, almost by an innate, definitional budgetary reflex action, and then the troubles would be further compounded and the country would be in worse situation than before.

When, in the midst of the heat of the campaign, when the DCCC sent us advice as to how we might counter our Republican opponents' "Contract with America," I recall wanting help instead on how to respond to but a single question: how does one explain what is wrong in Washington when Democrats are a majority in both houses of Congress and hold the White House? I wanted to be able to say something that was convincing and compelling. My first take on the Republicans' "Contract" was that, in diagnostic terms, parts of it were rather good, and some of it was very much on target. Some of the time I wished that those sponsoring me had worked out the tenets of their (our) political faith with comparable philosophical precision. Throughout the campaign, I was straining for the same objective myself.

Given the position they were enjoying, were the Republicans vulnerable?

The answer is yes, absolutely, but only if they could be pushed into a position of having to offer positive recommendations after leading with potentially devastating criticism. Given their attack mode, their smartest strategy was to deliver the onslaught, that is, stir up strong opposition to the people in charge, and then run for cover. Our opponent never ran directly against us. Rather, from all of her campaign statements, her co-opponents were the Democrat-controlled Congress and the Clinton administration, to which combination she always added "and their failed policies." If they accepted the premise, voters knew precisely what they should be doing, i.e., they should work to clean up (as well as clean out) Washington. The Republican candidate for Congress functioned as the voters' vehicle of anger. All of this left us in a highly vulnerable position. We could claim that we were the real instrument for effective change in Washington, for in sending our opponent to Congress the voters would be relying on still another politician (in contrast to which we would serve simply as effective representatives). But our opponent had command of the winning proposition: "send my opponent to Washington, she warned, and you will only get more of the same!" Or, "Democrats are what is wrong with government in Washington; we would be out of our minds to rely on still another one." Then, being the channel of voter anger, our opponent was asked to do no more than protect herself from danger. She studiously avoided direct confrontations with her opponent, as would have happened had she committed to a series of debates or had she appeared, side-by-side, in the same discussion panels. It was a strategy that worked well, for all that needed to be accomplished was heavy, credible collective opposition to whomever and whatever was in charge.

The Larger, More Enduring Issue: A New Call for Democracy



It is one thing, of course, to develop the strategy that will enable one to beat an opponent in an election. But the more serious questions concern the possibility that the nation itself might one day come together after being divided the way our analysis has portrayed it. Is there any way that, from a shared understanding of how the major events of the 1960s should be identified, there could be a merging of perspectives, or even shared understanding of sufficient breadth and depth that the two political orientations might one day find themselves on the same course? Is it possible, perhaps, that we could discover, uncover, create or construct a narrative that would be inclusive, that would give us a truer, more representative picture of our actual situation in the world?

I think the answer to this vital question is yes.

The clue to the resolution lies in the observation that the two-party political system has served as a kind of systole-diastrale, yin-yang dialectic that has given us the capacity for the vitality of the democracy we practice here. For much of the nation's history, those who were deliberating about the best course for the country understood that it was democracy that they were practicing, to which partisan loyalties were secondary. In recent years, however, the discussion has degenerated into charges and counter-charges -- I recognize that this is a serious charge -- and loyalty to party has increased in inverse proportion to loyalty to democracy. These shifts in loyalties and enthusiasms have created the kind of situation Alexis de Tocqueville describes wherein "patriots" are forced to view the growth of party power "with alarm". The political parties would do much better were they trim their sails a bit, that is, if they lower their own partisan expectations. The founders of the nation never fell victim to the presumption that an adequate system of government could be distilled from either Republican or Democrat principles. But this is precisely the way our representatives are behaving at the moment. They have created a fierce contest between competing political orientations, both of which have

the right to talking and debating with the other, but neither of which has the right to be the substitute for the democracy that each -- each together, each in conversation with the other, each in contradistinction to the other -- is obligated to protect.

The situation is similar to the story that Soren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth century Danish philosopher, tells about the gentleman whose trousers were wrinkled, and who, therefore, is pleased when he spots a sign "Pants Pressed Here" in a tailor shop. But when he enters the shop, points to his trousers and points to the sign, the tailor responds, "Oh, yes, that sign is for sale." Kierkegaard explains the allegory by suggesting that this is too often how it is in human life. One goes into the church in search of salvation, then learns, with disappointment, that, should this be desired, one can purchase the religion. Or a person takes a course of instruction in philosophy, presumably, in search of truth, or, in more modest terms, to develop the ability to reason well. All at once, to one's surprise and dismay, one learns that one is being offered a philosophy. One can actually purchase one of the isms.

Democrats and Republicans have made grand promises about the ingredients of a vital democracy, but when one gets up close, examines the claims carefully, one learns that one can sign up to be a Democrat or a Republican. That is, it isn't stewardship respecting democracy that is most highly valued, but partisan loyalty, devotion to the party's creed, and service to the party's cause.

The reason that so many citizens today are drawn to an independent stance is that the dominant political parties have promised more than they can deliver, and, for this reason, are not doing what they ought to be doing well. Voters should not be asked to vote the Democrats' form of democracy, or the Republican's version of democracy. We should not have allowed the country to become embroiled in the divisive political and cultural war through which prism every current issue is being forced or directed. When this happens, we don't have real democracy any longer.

What we get instead is a poor, dissatisfying substitute: a near death-fight between the competing political programs of the competing political parties. Sure evidence mounts daily that this fight has

strangled legislative activity at both state and federal levels. In truth, it is a selfish squabble that has paralyzed the nation, for, under such auspices, there is no real possibility of moving forward.

Readers who believe this judgment to be too harsh or excessive should consider that the primary documents which gave foundation and direction to our government -- the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Emancipation Declaration -- are not partisan documents. Moreover, the best, most ✓ memorable Presidential speeches the nation has ever witnessed --

heard -- the Inaugural addresses of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, perhaps Ronald Reagan's first one, and Maya Angelou's poem -- have hardly ever ✓ been partisan speeches, though, of course, the speakers were proud, as they should have been, to be identified with one or another of the parties. The incentives that

have lifted us highest have not been partisan calls, but calls to unity, invocations to that which brings out the best in all of us, exhortations that challenge us to see America in unitary and unitive terms. Whenever we've settled for less than this,

we've shortchanged ourselves and put limits on our capacities and enthusiasms. To be a good Democrat today is not necessarily to be practicing the wide range of democracy's virtues. To be a good Republican today is not necessarily to be practicing the wide range of democracy's virtues.

Alexis de Tocqueville warned that political parties own the ability to function in near despotic ways. They do so when they assume that they can control the nation's agenda, precisely by assuming that their interests and the nation's interests are one and the same.

Another nineteenth century Danish writer, N. F. S. Grundtvig, has emphasized that "democracy is born in conversations." But today the conver- ✱

sation has become accusatory, rancorous and noisy because advocates of each of the two competing positions are requesting acceptance of their stances instead of dedication to the common good. Democracy is not born in talk that has become rancorous. Democracy is not born when analysis becomes superficial. Democracy is not born in predictable reflex reaction to facile stimuli. Democracy is not born when the will of the people is made subject to the constraints of party politics.

The tragic side of these latter-day developments is that today's citizens are capable of dealing with infinitely more intellectual complexification than they are being allowed to when the debate is dominated by public-relations agendas and the issues are presented as if Yes or No votes would suffice. Voting either Yes or No on Proposition 187 (the Illegal Immigrants Initiative) in California in 1994 really did nothing to clarify or resolve the problem and challenge of persistent and ceaseless migration of peoples across national borders when the economic and political relationship between the contiguous territories is asymmetrical. Voting (either Yes or No) on an initiative to repeal Affirmative Action legislation will do nothing at all to resolve or clarify what enlightened human beings should be doing today to come effectively to moral terms with a collective self-history whose dynamics have been regulated by the presumed rights of colonizers with respect to the colonized.

The founders of the nation recognized that democracy is the object of deeply-seated innate desire. They had a firm conviction that human beings simply want and need democracy, or, as someone has said, the immigrant's dream is the soul of democracy. Recently, however, we've been treated to larger doses of politics than to democracy, and this has functioned as an impeding force. Politics in support of democracy is a worthy -- yes, even a potentially noble -- undertaking. The ancients, Aristotle, in particular, waxed eloquently concerning the nature of politics, observing that the affairs of the state precede the welfare of families and individuals

"as the whole is of necessity prior to the part." But politics in the interest of politics is a deterrent to democracy. Indeed, present political practice is the equation, indeed, the stultifying redundancy, that democracy must overcome if the will of the people is to find ascendancy again. The fact that slightly more than 10% of the citizens of our country have high regard for either political party is not so much a sign of citizen apathy as confirmation of the fact that present political practice is fundamentally out of touch. The people have rightly lost confidence in the politics of enervation because it gives them too little -- too little to be inspired by, too little to stimulate their thinking, too little to generate their enthusiasms, too little to respond to their hope that somewhere, somehow, in all of this, there will be some advance toward the realization of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,"

It is time for a comprehensive rethinking. It is time to refer rightful human expectations to a firmer foundation. It is time for a New Politics that understands itself not as the master, but as the steward and guardian of democracy. The hope here is that the people already know what they want, but have not yet developed the language to say the words clearly. The current cacophony of competing voices is consuming valuable spiritual energy. Divisiveness of such magnitude can probably not be resolved, but it can surely be overcome by being effectively transcended. It is time, yes, high time, for political reconstruction.