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Al Gore for President

Despite all the complaints about the difficulty of falling in love with either Al Gore or George W. Bush, these two very different men have delivered a clean, well-argued campaign that offers a choice between two sharply contrasting visions of the future. Even though Vice President Gore is a centrist Democrat and Governor Bush has presented himself as the most moderate Republican nominee in a generation, they have sketched very different pictures of the role of government and how actively the president should help families secure adequate education, health care and retirement. This is also the first presidential campaign in recent history centered on an argument over how best to use real, bird-in-the-hand resources to address age-old domestic problems while also defining the United States' role in a world evermore dependent on it for farsighted international leadership.

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Having listened to their debate, we today firmly endorse Al Gore as the man best equipped for the presidency by virtue of his knowledge of government, his experience at the top levels of federal and diplomatic decision-making, and his devotion to the general welfare. We offer this endorsement knowing that Mr. Bush is not without his strong points and that Mr. Gore has his weaknesses. But the vice president has struggled impressively and successfully to escape the shadow of the Clinton administration's ethical lapses, and we believe that he would never follow Bill Clinton's example of reckless conduct that cheapens the presidency. Like Senator John McCain, Mr. Gore has been chastened by personal experience with sleazy fund-raising. He has promised to make campaign finance reform his first legislative priority, whereas Mr. Bush is unwilling to endorse the elimination of special-interest money from American politics.

We commend Mr. Bush for running a largely positive, inclusive campaign. He has not reviled government like Ronald Reagan in 1980 or played on divisive social themes as his father did in 1988. But on women's rights, guns and law-enforcement issues, he has a harsh agenda, and the centerpiece of his domestic program is a lavish tax cut for the rich that would negate the next Congress's once-in-a-

and stabilization of Social Security and Medicare.

Leadership

Mr. Bush has asked to be judged by something more than his positions. He offers himself as an experienced leader who would end the culture of bickering in Washington and use wisdom and resoluteness in dealing with domestic social problems and international crises. But his résumé is too thin for the nation to bet on his growing into the kind of leader he claims already to be. He does have great personal charm. But Mr. Bush's main professional experience was running a baseball team financed by friends and serving for six years as governor in a state where the chief executive has limited budgetary and operational powers. His three debates with Mr. Gore exposed an uneasiness with foreign policy that cannot be erased by his promise to have heavyweight advisers. John F. Kennedy, as a far more seasoned new president, struggled through the Cuban missile crisis while his senior advisers offered contradictory advice on how to confront a Soviet military threat on America's doorstep. The job description is for commander in chief, not advisee in chief.

The vice president has admitted to his limitations as a speaker. But Al Gore has a heart — and a mind — prepared for presidential-scale challenges. When it comes to the details of policy making, he will not need on-the-job training.

Taxes and the Economy

Preserving the nation's remarkable prosperity must be considered the thematic spine of this election. Mr. Gore helped stiffen Mr. Clinton's resolve to maintain the budgetary discipline that erased the federal deficit, stimulated productivity and invigorated the financial markets. Now, Mr. Gore and his running mate, Senator Joseph Lieberman, promise to maintain fiscal rigor while using the surplus on spending programs and tax breaks for the working families that profited least from the biggest boom in American history. More specifically, Mr. Gore would seize this opportunity to improve the environment and spend more money to hire teachers and build schools. We like his capitalism with a conscience more than the trickle-down sound of Mr. Bush's compassionate conservatism.

To be blunter, Mr. Bush's entire economic program is built on a stunning combination of social inequity and flawed economic theory. He would spend more than half the \$2.2 trillion non-Social Security surplus on a tax cut at a time when the economy does not need that stimulus. Moreover, as Mr. Gore has said repeatedly and truthfully, over 40 percent of the money would go to the wealthiest 1 percent of taxpayers. Mr. Bush would expand some programs for schools, but he

also embraces the Republicans' ideologically driven approach of using vouchers to transfer money from public to private schools. There is nothing compassionate or conservative about blowing the surplus on windfalls for the wealthy instead of investing it in fair tax relief and well-designed social programs.

The nation's biggest domestic need remains universal access to health care. Neither candidate would move as fast as we would like. But Mr. Gore has outlined steps that would start us down the road to covering the 45 million uninsured Americans. He would expand Medicare, guarantee prescription drugs for seniors and provide more opportunity for the uninsured to obtain coverage. Mr. Bush favors a bipartisan approach on these issues, but his proposals have seemed reactive rather than driven by an inner passion.

Mr. Gore's commitment to Social Security is deeply rooted, too, and more responsible. His proposal to supplement the system with personal investment retirement accounts is superior to Mr. Bush's plan to privatize part of the system. The governor's scheme would siphon money out of Social Security at the very moment when both seniors and younger taxpayers want to see long-term fixes to ensure its solvency.

Foreign Policy

Upon his arrival in Washington more than two decades ago, Mr. Gore set out to master the intricacies of arms control and foreign policy. He broke with his party to support the war against Iraq in 1991. He was an advocate of military force in the Balkans, and today he calls for a more muscular approach to using American forces to protect the country's security interests and prevent genocidal conflicts abroad.

We have expressed concern here that Mr. Gore might sometimes be too eager to project power overseas. But it is also true that Mr. Bush's repeated objections to using troops for peacekeeping and nation-building do not add up to a mature national-security vision. Neither does his promise to rely on his running mate, former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, and his likely secretary of state, the retired general Colin Powell.

Mr. Gore will have advisers, but he will not need a minder. He understands that in order to influence the allies an American president must lead from the front. He has already been eye to eye with the world's leaders. While Mr. Bush has a contracting definition of national security, Mr. Gore has been in the forefront of redefining it to include issues of health and environment and the containment of regional conflicts that can metastasize into threats to world peace.

Rights and Values

Mr. Gore has said that abortion rights are on the ballot in this election. So are other issues such as civil liberties, environmental protection and gun control. The next president may appoint up to five Supreme Court justices and thereby exercise a lasting impact on the daily lives of Americans. A court tilted by conservative Bush appointees could overturn *Roe v. Wade* and assert a doctrine of states' rights that would take environmental protection out of federal hands. Ralph Nader and his supporters are not simply being delusional when they say there is no real difference between these candidates. They are being dishonest, and dangerously so.

Mr. Gore brings a lifelong record of protecting basic rights for women, minorities and gays, while Mr. Bush has almost no record at all. The vice president has been the driving force in this administration's environmental successes, and he understands the need for federal regulation for environmental tasks like saving the Everglades and for American leadership to combat global warming. Mr. Bush is for an unrealistic regimen of negotiating with industry on air and water problems and for letting the oil companies loose in sensitive areas.

The Real Choice

Most citizens know that Mr. Gore wins any comparison with Mr. Bush on experience and knowledge. Yet many voters seem more comfortable with Mr. Bush's personality and are tempted to gamble on him. We do not dismiss this desire for someone who they feel does not talk down to them and would come to the White House free of any connection to Mr. Clinton's excesses. But it is important to remember that the nation's prosperity, its environmental progress and its guarantees of civil rights and reproductive freedom took years to build. They could be undone in a flash by a pliable and inexperienced president driven by a highly ideological Congress.

Mr. Gore does have a tendency to be patronizing and to exaggerate. But he has a career of accomplishment that can stand on its own without exaggeration. Despite his uneven performance in the debates, the content of his campaign in these final days demonstrates how much he has grown in the last year. Voting for him is not a gamble on unknown potential.

We support Albert Gore Jr. with the firm belief that he will go just as far in bringing "honor and dignity" back to the White House as Mr. Bush, and that he will bring an extra measure of talent and conviction as well. His seriousness of purpose, his commitment to American leadership in the world and his concern for those less fortunate in American society convince us that he will lead the country into a creative, productive and progressive era at the beginning of the 21st century.

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