

Stark Choices

On the cusp, or on the brink?

Historic and epochal political shifts come once a generation – if that! Forty long but all too brief years ago in early June 1968, I boarded a Greyhound from Eugene to San Francisco to do whatever I could to help Robert F. Kennedy win what promised to be a pivotal



Democratic primary on June 5. Kennedy had come to Eugene a few weeks earlier; we went out to greet him at the airport and cheer him on at Hayward Field. Although Gene McCarthy won Oregon's late May primary, it was Kennedy whom many felt could go the distance and reclaim the White House.

All of 23 years young – with a burning generational desire to bring our Vietnam War troops home and rekindle a rebirth of American idealism and world respect – I was magnetically drawn to what we'd hoped would be an historic, momentous victory on the way to restoring the generational torch-bearing path of JFK.

But on that fateful Tuesday, minutes after his great California win, time and eternity parted company for RFK, and with his passing went the golden hopes of tens of millions of Americans. With Republicans Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew, Henry Kissinger came five more years of protracted war-death-national discord, impeachment and resignation.

I saw the perennial face of American idealism and resurgent hope.

Standing in the May 10, 2008, sea of 8,000 beaming, cheering, earnest, mostly young faces fronting the UO quadrangle outdoor stage where Barack Obama was exhorting the massive crowd "to turn the page" of American history, I saw the perennial face of American idealism and resurgent hope and felt my own lips join in to intone, "Yes we can."

Elections have consequences. Body bags, prosthetic limbs, anguished cries and indescribable grief. More than 5,200 American Iraq War fatalities, including contractors; 30,000 grievously wounded. Iraq decimated with hundreds of thousands dead, at least one million made refugees outside their country, another million internally. Oregon has lost 106 of her sons and daughters, according to the governor's office.

Operation Iraqi Freedom has made Iran the preeminent Persian Gulf power and extended Shiite influence to Sunni Saudi Arabia's eastern border. The Bush-McCain Iraq debacle has eliminated the historic Iraqi counterbalance, installing Iraqi Shiite leaders who had lived for years in Teheran political exile.

And John McCain, the tragic war's chief Senate advocate, touts his vaunted "experience" and proclaims this a rousing success while saying a 100 year American-Iraq occupation is "fine with me"? Some "experience" should not be repeated!

As a guest, waiting in line to visit with Barack and Michelle Obama at a May 17 Portland private reception, I felt history unfolding – this magnificent and beautifully prepared spousal team – a potential great presidency in waiting – if only we Americans are up to the task! One sensed an almost tangible air of gravitas, positive energy and, yes, hope that I hadn't experienced since RFK and JFK.

Age-old scripture warns us: "Without vision, the people perish!" Obama sees an America reaching out across "a planet in peril," signaling a new global cooperation and outstretched hand. He sees a health care system whose first question is, "Where do you hurt?" – not, "How will you pay? He envisions an America with policies embracing "brotherhood from sea to shining sea." He declines the cheap shot, easy swipe or pander to the politics of mass distraction and its Pox News-driven culture of personal destruction.

John McCain resembles a general fighting the last war – with outmoded tactics and debunked propaganda – viewing the future through a smudged rear-view mirror. But Obama's early opposition to the Iraq War reveals habitually original and critical thinking – and *that* tells the tale of two stark choices for Americans this November!

Gen. George S. Patton's famous quote defines the difference: "If everyone's thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking."

What road will America take? More of the same? Or positive change? What will we be thinking come November?

Scott Bartlett is a member of Lane County's Budget Committee and has worked for decades as a campaign aid, political analyst/consultant and speech writer.

How to Be Happy (OPERA CONT.) by Shannon Wheeler



Letters TO THE EDITOR

COP FREE SPEECH

With 27 years as a union representative (AFSCME and Teamsters) and as an acquaintance of City Councilor Bonny Bettman who usually agrees with her, I have to object strongly to Slant's call (5/29) for "reining in" the Eugene Police Employees Association for posting a "disturbing caricature" of her, and its call to illegally "fire the responsible officers and discipline anyone in the chain of command who knew about it and said nothing."

I would expect an alternative newspaper to strongly defend the First Amendment right to free speech – even if you find it offensive. But you didn't.

A union certainly has the right to express its views, no matter how misguided and offensive they may be. If the represented employees disagree (as may likely be the case), they have the democratic right to replace their leaders at the next union election.

State labor law rightly protects union activists from retaliation for union activities, including exercising their right to free speech in criticizing public officials. If city officials disciplined union leaders for what they posted on their website, they would violate the law.

While I don't agree with the ideas and attitudes expressed on the EPEA website with respect to Councilor Bettman, I have to defend their right to take their positions.

By the way, if the *Weekly* found the caricature of Councilor Bettman so "disturbing," why did you reprint it in your paper?

Stefan Ostrach
Eugene

TASERING TRUTH

I was an eyewitness to the unjustified multiple Taserings by the EPD at a peaceful rally on May 30 organized by a UO student group to support an end to toxic pesticide spraying along roadsides in Lane County.

The EPD never for a minute thought

the water-filled spray bottle with the cartoon skull drawn on it was poison – something these students obviously oppose – otherwise why would EPD have left the bottle on the sidewalk for several minutes after the Taserings or done nothing when I picked it up in front of them and walked around with it for hours?

If the bottle was a threat to the EPD – rather than spin to make it seem like the Taserings was in direct response to the bottle itself, which it *wasn't*! – why didn't they take it as evidence?

The real story is what happened after the bottle was out of the picture: Two officers grabbed 140 lb. Ian Van Ornum from the sidewalk at the Kesey "Free Speech" Plaza, dragged him across the street (where another two officers arrived) and Tasered him once to knock him to the ground. Then, with a knee in Van Ornum's back, an officer grabbed Van Ornum's hair to bang his forehead on the pavement; then with Van Ornum still pinned to the ground – hands behind his back, handcuffed – the officer Tasered him another two times.

The outcome of this brutal incident will determine whether the Eugene police auditor is anything more than window dressing.

For video of the incident go to PictureEugene/Tasered on Youtube.com

Josh Schlossberg
Eugene

BUILDING VISION

With interest I read Suzi Steffen's cover story featuring Frances Bronet, dean of the UO's School of Architecture and the Allied Arts.

First let me extend to Dean Bronet a belated welcome to Eugene. Her expertise and vision is sorely needed here. Eugene's urban rehabilitation has been long delayed by a narrow understanding of the awesome potential for creating an urban landscape worthy of the natural beauty that surrounds us.

The outside does matter and needs once