

VOTING AGAINST CANDIDATES

By William Nicoson

Heading into a hot summer of presidential politics, I have to admit I'm not proud of my voting record. I always seem to be voting against, not for, a candidate.

In 2000, for example, the Democratic nominee was Al Gore. As Vice President and presidential candidate, he was a memorable fundraiser – memorable not only because he raised a lot of funds but because a lot of those funds appeared to be raised illegally.

I remember the Buddhist temple rally at which nuns, sworn to poverty, contributed \$65,000 to Democratic coffers. Gore said he thought of the rally as “community outreach” but later admitted it might have been “finance related.” This event was arranged by Maria Tsia, Gore's longtime associate, who did time for creative fundraising involving multiple felonies.

Gore was also accused of soliciting political contributions from the Vice Presidential office rather than offices at the Democratic National Committee equipped for this purpose and used constantly by Democratic legislators. Gore famously announced that, as to use of government property for political purposes, there was “no controlling legal authority.”

I also remember that email-savvy Gore and his staff managed to lose all email records from and to his office in the 12 months from March 1998 to April 1999. Unlike the concurrent presidential email loss which could be reconstructed, the Gore messages were lost forever not only to well-disposed historians but also nosy prosecutors.

I remember thinking four years ago that Gore's message dump was probably an inadvertent glitch rather than the criminal destruction of subpoenaed evidence. But I also thought that any high official who mislays more than a year's worth of the federal records he was legally bound to retain seems an unlikely candidate for promotion.

So I voted against Gore.

Four years later I'm obliged to survey the record of President George W. Bush who seeks reelection this November.

After the horrific terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Bush launched an offensive in Afghanistan to destroy training grounds used by al Qaeda and eventually to overturn the Taliban regime which harbored al Qaeda. Richard A. Clarke, the terrorist expert for Bush's National Security Council, tells us in his book, “Against All Enemies,” that “Bush's efforts were slow and small.” Neither Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda's leader, or Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, have yet been found.

Clarke also concludes that the subsequent invasion of Iraq heightened rather than relieved the terrorist threat: “Nothing America could have done would have provided al Qaeda and its new generation of cloned groups a better recruitment device than our unprovoked invasion of an oil-rich Arab country.”

The invasion of Iraq has been nothing short of a disaster. Casualties rise steadily and relentlessly among both American occupiers and Iraqi civilians. Our force levels have been sufficient to win the war but not the peace. No plan had been made for maintaining order in the aftermath of hostilities. Looting was rampant until there was nothing more to loot. Insurgent forces have now risen against the occupation.

The appalling tales of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib have shattered our reputation as a nation upholding the rule of law. Both our friends and enemies now no longer wonder why Bush opposed creation of the International Criminal Court. Bush’s solution is to raze the prison and build a new one with American dollars. Yes, the prison’s to blame.

I guess you can guess whom I’m voting against this time.

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