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Comment & Views

Comment

Hero in darkest hour

Obama poised to be the president U.S. desperately needs

National Report
Lawrence Martin


Crack open the champagne! The world — or so the script has it — changes tonight.

Rarely, if ever, has there been so much fascination in an American election. The anticipated triumph of Barack Obama is being built up as an epochal moment in time. Like John Kennedy in 1960, like Franklin Roosevelt in 1932.

The expectations being thrust upon the 47-year-old senator from Illinois are dizzying. Given the series of obstacles he faces — the

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wars, the debt, the deficit, the Wall Street crisis, the recession — there is a good chance he will be pulled down quickly from the mountaintop. Hopes that he will be a transformative president could begin to fade quickly.

One of Mr. Obama's singular character traits is his independent mind — his capacity to step outside his own prejudices and those of his country. The problem with politicians, he has said, is that they get to Washington and they get "sucked into the conventional wisdom." They haven't got the strength to withstand the pressures to

conform. They haven't conquered their inner territory.

One of the foremost challenges for Mr. Obama, who has an almost mystical quality about him, will be to avoid that trap, to avoid succumbing to the pressures from the political hacks.

On the campaign trail he has been sounding disappointingly conventional of late. He talks, like most every American politician, of the need for big tax cuts — this when the country has a staggering debt and deficit load which make such tax cuts incomprehensible.

He had a refreshingly in-

clusive foreign policy but under pressure from lobbies it has become less distinguishable from the old-line stuff of John McCain as the campaign has progressed.

Supporters suggest — and we hope they are right — that Mr. Obama is only playing the games that are required to be elected. To read his book Dreams for My Father is to get a sense how different Mr. Obama is, how universal he is. It is what his country needs after the Bush years — a leader with a global mindset as opposed to a narrow American one.

When the hour is darkest, someone said, the hero will appear. In the story of the United States, it may be that time.

Lawrence Martin is a Globe and Mail correspondent and author who writes about national affairs from Ottawa.

**Letters**
**Jennifer Sage Dwivedi,
TORONTO**

I am an American woman now settled in Canada. I found Rick McGinnis' comment (Sit this one out, ladies, Oct. 31) to be fundamentally flawed in that it assumes that, as an American woman, one would automatically identify with another solely on the basis of gender.

The article omits any other qualifying factor which would convince an American woman to vote for an individual, be it race, creed, policy views on health care, abortion, etc.

That is exactly the same error and assumption that John McCain made — that women would be swayed by another woman. Little heed was given to the fact

that Sarah Palin is an unqualified person at best.

Your point is well-taken but hardly the solution we need when this farce of a woman is allowed to run for vice-presidency.

Pierre Savoie, TORONTO

James Bissett's column urging a slowdown of immigration makes sense. We are still admitting a large number of people into Canada, as if we had a chronic labour shortage. We must tailor this rate to the tough times. What's worse, when masses of people move to more prosperous countries, they consume much more than before, leading to increased carbon emissions. A cutback in immigration must be enacted now or we will have no planet left at all.

Views

Abuse that breaks a child's trust

By Dr. Catherine C. Classen

The sexual abuse of children is wrong and damaging no matter how you look at it. To suggest otherwise (and believe me, some will) is to be naive, deluded or complicit.

Whenever the perpetrator is a trusted family member or some other trusted caregiver, the effects are particularly devastating.

Research has shown that the effects of being sexually abused by a caregiver are far worse than if the perpetrator is a stranger or someone they know but don't depend on, such as a neighbour.

Knowing this, you may be surprised to learn that the courts in Canada appear to think otherwise.

A study by the Cornwall pedophile inquiry has found that in the sentencing of pedophiles in Canada, those who held a position of trust with their victim received significantly shorter sentences. That's right, shorter sentences.


Dr. Catherine C. Classen

How can this be? One has to wonder whether we, as a society, cannot face the reality of abuse and its consequent damages.

Why is being abused by a caregiver so much more damaging to the victim? Psychologist Jennifer Freyd coined the term "betrayal trauma" to capture the particularly damaging effects of abuse by a caregiver.

A caregiver, such as a parent, is someone the child depends on to meet their basic survival needs, both physical and emotional.

The child abused by a caretaker is in the unten-

able position of needing to retain a relationship of dependency with the very person who is causing them great physical, emotional and psychological harm.

The child may use a variety of strategies in order to resolve this impossible and devastating dilemma, including blaming his or herself (rather than the perpetrator), repressing the memories (which, unfortunately, does not protect the victim from its effects), or creating alternate personalities to experience the abuse so that other parts of the child can retain a relationship with the caregiver.

None of these alternatives protect the child from the devastating consequences of sexual abuse by a caregiver; consequences which include a sense of being worthless and fundamentally bad and an inability to trust or to form healthy intimate relationships.

Sexual abuse by a caretaker can require years of

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psychotherapy and a lifetime to overcome.

We, as a society, need to face the disturbing reality of what it means when a child is sexually abused by someone upon whom they must depend. The courts need to send a clear message that such a betrayal of a child's trust deserves the full weight of the law.

Dr. Catherine C. Classen is associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto and academic leader of the Trauma Therapy Program at Women's College Hospital.

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