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A Matter of Judgment

It is a matter of judgment. It is a matter of honesty. Truth-telling is the most important just peace principle in my formulation of the theory. Truth and Love are powerful. Many of the conflicts we face in our personal lives and in the world arise because we do not tell or face the truth. We want to spin facts to the point where the truth is lost. We see this happening in our public discourse today around the selection of Gov. Sarah Palin as John McCain's vice-presidential choice.

Political pundits and Republican apologists commenting on John McCain's pick for vice president are doing the American public and the world a disservice by propagating the idea that Palin is equally experienced for the job of president as is Barack Obama. They are doing the public discourse a disservice by describing this choice as risky. The truth is: this choice is reckless.

Sarah Palin may be intelligent, determined, and fully capable of being president some day in the future, but she is not ready now. And to say that she is as qualified as Barack Obama is absurd. McCain's choice of Palin demonstrates McCain's contempt for the intelligence of American women and a reckless disregard for the difficulty of being president of the United States in a complex world.

Experience. Republican apologists say that she has more executive experience than does Barack Obama. She has been governor for about as long as he has been running for president. Alaska has a population of about 670,000 people; it is the 6th wealthiest state in per capita income and is the least densely populated state. Running a nationwide presidential campaign requires executive skill and he has run one of the more innovative, inspirational, and effective national campaigns in American political history. He has met a payroll, while redefining the way political campaigns are financed in the United

States. The campaign has caused him to traverse the length and breadth of the United States and meet with people from all walks of life and to learn about their issues, their struggles and their hopes for the future. He has been studying domestic and foreign issues for the entire time of his campaign and even before that during his tenure in the Illinois State Legislature. Illinois has a population of nearly 13 million people, about 23 percent of whom live in Obama's home town of Chicago. He may not have had executive experience in Illinois, but as a state legislature he had to consider laws that would benefit the lives of urban, suburban and rural populations. He has also had to think about foreign and domestic issues as a member of the United States Senate in a way that Palin has not. I am sure Sarah Palin is knowledgeable about the issues facing Alaska. However, during his time in the US Senate, Obama has served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and his vice presidential pick chairs that committee.

Before and during his campaign, he has surrounded himself with some of the finest mind in the nation on domestic and foreign policy; he has heard from ordinary people all over the nation about the reality of their lives; he has developed positions on some 23 issues from civil rights to women's issues. He has run in arguably the most hard-fought primary season in American political history and emerged the victor. American voters from sea to shining sea have had an opportunity to say yes or no to his ideas. His foreign policy ideas have driven the public discourse during this election season. He advocated military action in Pakistan in pursuit of terrorists. George Bush adopted this idea. He called for more diplomatic contact with Iran. George Bush adopted that policy. He has called for a timeline for the United States' exit from Iraq. Both Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al- Maliki and the Bush administration are now in negotiations to make such a timeline. Neither Sarah Palin nor John McCain can make this claim. Moreover, Obama has demonstrated that he has the gravitas to be president when he met with the heads of state in the Middle East and in Europe this summer.

Before entering politics, he was not only a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago, but he was president of the Harvard Law Review and he has taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School. He at least has a clue about what the duties of the vice president are, and he has an idea about how he wants to utilize the office of vice president to help him govern. Palin admitted not long ago that she is not sure what the vice president does.

A postmodern thinker. Obama has proved himself to be a thoughtful person able to think beyond bumper stick slogans and applause lines. We live in a moment in human history where the old paradigms no longer work. The modernist approach to asking and answering questions reflective of the Enlightenment, the binary division of reality where questions are framed in either/or terms, where there can be only one correct answer, where one ideology must necessarily triumph over another is obsolete. Obama knows this. So, when he is asked a question such as he was asked by Rick Warren about when a baby ought to receive human rights, he knows that theology, science and political philosophy will have different answers to that question. He is clear about his arena of expertise which is government and gave an answer where he tried to balance the state's responsibility to a woman and the necessity to care for her health, to maintain her integrity over her own body, while recognizing the sanctity of unborn life. Thus his solution comes from two different camps, where the state protects a woman's right to choose an abortion while, at the same time providing help for her to be able to choose not to have an abortion. Such an answer destabilizes ideological certainty and thus reframes the discussion. It is complicated and nuanced thinking, a way of thinking that the next American president will need to master.

Similarly, in a complex world, old cold war thinking of the evil them and the good us is also not adequate. Obama has been criticized for his evolving statements on the Russian invasion into Georgia, but in a dangerous and evolving situation where America's true options are limited, his statements were wise. John McCain sold wolf tickets that he cannot cash. First, he is not yet president, and second, the United States would have to craft a response in concert with the international community. We do not know whether or not Sarah Palin had then or has now an opinion on the matter. And most important, he has not made "victory" in war a campaign slogan. There is no such thing as victory in war. Everyone loses.

Moreover, he has proven to be a leader who is able to inspire the American people and this is no small thing. He is a celebrity, but people become celebrities for a reason. It is a mystery, but celebrities touch masses of people on a very deep level. They connect. He has connected both through this campaign and through two best-selling books that he wrote himself. In times such as these, with the United States fighting two wars, an economic recession heading toward possible depression, at a time when we see food riots around the globe, where one-fifth of the world's population is living in poverty, where genocide still happens and nations still want nuclear weapons, the United States and the international community need a leader that can articulate both human hopes and human possibilities, who can breathe a resuscitating breath into a weary world panting after peace and surcease from its existential fears. It needs to hear someone say "Yes we can" together make this world better.

Further, he has shown an ability to ask the nation to face perhaps its most difficult challenge. His speech on race was a well crafted and thoughtful example of his ability to understand the various resentments and fears in a difficult situation, and to invite the nation to face its stubborn demons. Neither John McCain nor Sarah Palin has demonstrated such ability. Palin has become an instant

celebrity. She too has connected with many Americans. However, she has not yet demonstrated the ability to say something more than what the McCain campaign has given her.

Barack Obama, in his first presidential decision, showed impeccable judgment by selecting Joe Biden as his running mate. He chose someone who can help him govern. He chose someone who has the knowledge, wisdom and gravitas to step into the presidency at a moment's notice. John McCain demonstrated no such judgment. The pundits and Republican apologists have kept the discourse mired in trivia and deception. The truth is that Sarah Palin is nowhere near as qualified to be president as is Barack Obama, and with this choice neither is John McCain.