

To help threatened families with children, George Bailey would support private and public efforts that put them first in line for access to renegotiated and publicly guaranteed mortgages. "Households with dependent children" would serve as the defining criterion. He would also probably agree with guidelines recently offered by the Heritage Foundation, including:

All government-assisted refinancing should go only to homeowners who use that home as their primary residence.

No help should be given to investors, speculators, owners of vacation homes, homebuilders, realtors, mortgage brokers, or bankers.

Help should also be denied to anyone who lied or made misrepresentations on their original mortgage applications.

George Bailey would surely marvel at the stupidity and greed of our current crop of great financiers, who make Mr. Potter look like a genius—even a humanitarian. George Bailey knew truly good capitalists: his friend Sam Wainwright earned money through manufacturing useful products (including, yes, war materiel). He would shake his head, though, at Wall Street's more recent "Masters of the Universe," who claimed their vast personal incomes and stock options simply by piling onto the latest investment fad. He would want to see these sham geniuses and their boards of directors held personally liable to stockholders and investors. He would expect criminal fraud to be vigorously investigated as well.

I doubt, too, that George Bailey would support a quasi-public bailout of Bear Stearns or any other threatened financial giant. He would probably agree with many contemporary analysts that Bear Stearns has been an unusually nasty

company without a shred of publicspiritedness. In its failure, it would merely have reaped what it had sown. Bailey would dismiss as preposterous claims that the fate of the American and world economies hinged on this rogue company's survival.

Over the long haul, George Bailey would probably try to return the housing and mortgage industries to their real purpose: providing homes to families. He would support limiting the tax deduction on home-mortgage interest to one principal residence per family. He might even favor a cap on the amount that could be deducted, so that only

good shelter—not princely luxury—enjoyed favored tax treatment. And he would probably redistribute tax benefits to families according to their number of dependent children, raising either the child tax credit or the per-capita deduction for children—or both.

As his father had noted, "These families have children." That, I believe, would be George Bailey's touchstone for reform. ■

Allan C. Carlson is president of The Howard Center for Family, Religion, & Society in Rockford, Illinois. His latest book is Third Ways.

First Loser

Playing the odds for the veepstakes

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

THE VICE PRESIDENCY is a baffling office. John Nance Garner said it wasn't worth "a warm bucket of spit," but its occupant is a heartbeat away from the presidency. Given little consideration at the Constitutional Convention, the veep's job was to preside over the Senate and be a placeholder in case the president died. John Adams expressed the uncertain nature of his duties, declaring upon his election, "I am vice president. In this I am nothing, but I may be everything."

Three of the last four vice presidents, George H.W. Bush, Al Gore, and Dick Cheney, were accomplished politicians when they assumed the office. Dan Quayle, a lightweight senator picked to satisfy ideological conservatives, serves as an object lesson in how not to choose a running mate. John McCain and the eventual Democratic nominee will consider which politician can win them a swing state or send an appropriate mes-

sage to the general electorate. They should also consider what their political partner wants to accomplish in office.

McCain will also deal with ideological groups that seek to place one of their own on the ticket. Bobby Jindal, the new governor of Louisiana, is a favorite of movement conservatives. He passed an ethics reform bill in his first month in office, but has no other executive experience or national profile. Beyond the good press he generates in conservative journals, there is little to recommend him. In an editorial for the *Politico*, Jeremy Lott, author of *The Warm Bucket Brigade*, urged McCain to pick Oklahoma Sen. Tom Coburn. The radical conservative has the budget-hawk bona fides to match McCain. Furthermore, McCain lost all primaries in the South except the one in which Coburn endorsed him. But Coburn's presence would energize liberals as much as conservatives. Does McCain want to answer

questions about Terry Schiavo or extemporize on whether abortion doctors should receive the death penalty?

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty is a more practical choice. Chairman of the National Governors Association, Pawlenty is a popular GOP chief executive in a blue state. He overcame a \$4.3-billion deficit without raising taxes but by cutting local government aid and state services. He is forgettable on the stump, however, and he recently incurred the wrath of some party insiders when he crossed conservative governors like Haley Barbour and Mark Sanford by proposing a \$6-billion addition to President Bush's stimulus package.

House Minority Leader John Boehner is promoting his friend Rob Portman, an Ohio congressman who generated support among House Republicans by donating half a million dollars from his campaign chest to the NRCC when he took the job of U.S. trade representative. But Portman is not known well outside the lower chamber and his Cincinnati district.

Most of the speculation about McCain's choice centers around Florida Gov. Charlie Crist. Just 51, Crist is popular in his home state, and his endorsement of McCain was seen as pivotal to knocking Mitt Romney out of the race. But his policy résumé is thin. His recent preoccupations include combating spam, opposing gambling, and supporting environmental issues—hardly the stuff of top executives. Crist also committed a potentially disqualifying gaffe when he suggested he was open to reparations for slavery. His stage presence—there is no other way to say it—is effeminate. In fact, several wannabe veeps come off this way, including Sen. Lindsey Graham and former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman.

On the other side of the political spectrum is the unmistakable presence of Virginia Sen. Jim Webb. While Obama is a northern progressive who appeals to independents, Webb is a southern inde-

pendent who appeals to partisan Democrats. Webb offers military experience (two Purple Hearts), authenticity, and appeal to working-class whites—making up for several of Obama's weaknesses. His decision to resign from Reagan's Defense Department because he opposed cuts to the Navy suggests he could work well with military brass. Some Democrats argue that Webb's presence on the ticket might even put Virginia in the blue column, especially with former Democratic governor Mark Warner likely to replace retiring Republican John Warner in the Senate.

But Webb's winning qualities make him problematic. His authenticity comes with a bulldog personality ill-suited to the tasks of vice president. He has an obvious distaste for the campaign hustings. And his appeal to ethnic white voters comes at the expense of pleasing gun-control groups and the multicultural Left. Democrats may also hesitate to relinquish his seat in the Senate, one Republicans will target in 2012.

Another freshman senator on Obama's list is Pennsylvania's Bob Casey Jr. An Irish Catholic and heir to a political dynasty in the Keystone State, Casey's selection would be a daring attempt to win a swing state that gave Obama trouble in the primaries. By choosing the pro-life Casey, Obama would give weight to his claims of being an independent. But Casey's short record on Capitol Hill would make it easy to attack the Democratic ticket as inexperienced.

Obama might choose Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. Not only would she add another "first in history" element to the ticket, she passes many liberal litmus tests and can claim some of Obama's post-partisan appeal by highlighting her record of working with moderate Republicans. Before Mark Parkinson became her lieutenant governor, he was chairman of the state GOP. Her fans point out that she is the daughter of pop-

ular former Ohio governor, John Gilligan. But Sebelius could be a drag on the superstar Obama. Her response to Bush's 2007 State of the Union was as stiff and flimsy as balsa wood.

A much stronger candidate for flipping Ohio into the Democratic column would be Gov. Ted Strickland. A former Methodist minister, Strickland got an "A" from the NRA and won over 20 percent of registered Republicans in 2006. He is more likely to be picked by Clinton, for whom he campaigned. But he has two problems: he lacks the foreign-policy credentials a senator might offer and has made the thankless job of reforming the criminal-justice system a priority.

In the interest of party unity, the Democrats may urge their eventual nominee to choose the runner-up. In March, Obama rebuffed the suggestion from Clinton that he become her running mate. And when asked at a recent debate whether they would consider each other, both candidates stood in awkward silence before declining to answer. After a year of clawing at each other, they make a highly unlikely political couple.

Unfortunately for the presidential candidates, the politicians most likely to reassure voters want to do more than attend funerals and play hatchet man during the campaign. They want to effect change on their pet issues—and they usually cause trouble doing so. Al Gore negotiated the Kyoto Treaty, which had no chance of ratification. And Dick Cheney co-ordinated so much of the Bush foreign policy that he is held personally responsible for its manifest failures.

Tyler and Truman proved that the vice presidency could make a man. Cheney proved that it could unmake one. When he entered the race in 2000, pundits from George Will to Jon Stewart touted Cheney's credentials and implied that he was a better candidate than Bush himself. He began his vice presidency as everything, and may yet be nothing by the end. ■

Mr. Zbig

Brzezinski brings wisdom—and controversy—to Barack Obama's campaign

By Philip Weiss

TO MEET ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI is to have no doubt that he is an important man. The morning of our appointment, I was informed that I would have 15 minutes, and 14 minutes and 30 seconds into the interview Brzezinski glanced at his watch and said, "One more question." Cordial, aristocratic, precise. He wore a fine pinstriped suit and black boots in a hunter's style, with a black strap crossing the throat. The famous hooded eyes gazed out at the street.

It was a couple of days before Brzezinski's 80th birthday, but it didn't seem like a landmark to him: "It doesn't look much different from anything else." When I asked whether he didn't feel a sense of satisfaction, he shrugged. "I honestly don't have any feeling about it."

His voice crackled with age, but he was immune to all pressure, especially when the name Obama came up.

"George Bush is more progressive than Obama on the issue of Israeli settlements," I said. "He says mildly they should go, Obama won't even say that."

"You can't expect of any candidate for president for any party to get into the technicalities and details of foreign policy in the course of a presidential campaign. That's not the context for a discussion of really detailed options."

"In the Ford-Carter debates on Eastern Europe they got into details," I said.

The hawklike head turned from the window to me for once. "Like what?"

"You called my bluff."

He smiled without a hint of triumph. "Sometimes it's wise not to bluff."

At 80, Brzezinski is nearly as relevant

as he was 30 years ago, when he was the hawkish, crewcut national security adviser to Jimmy Carter. "He's in fine shape. As clear-minded and articulate as he's ever been," says William Quandt, a professor of international relations at the University of Virginia who worked for Brzezinski in government. Quandt's book *Peace Process* says that Brzezinski has had a lifelong rivalry with Henry Kissinger, but Brzezinski is leaner and apparently healthier than the 83-year-old *wünder*, not to say more glamorous for having advised Barack Obama on foreign policy. Though he has no official role in the campaign, Brzezinski has become a lightning rod for hardline Israel activists, who fear that Obama will turn against the Jewish state. They point to Brzezinski's realist views, for instance his recent visit to Syria, which he says must be brought into American diplomatic efforts concerning Iraq and Palestine, and his endorsement of the book *The Israel Lobby*.

"I have my own views of foreign affairs, which I have been expressing publicly," he says. "Therefore I wanted from the very beginning to be known as a supporter but not as a spokesman for or some sort of fancy title—adviser, member of the team—and that's the way it's worked."

Brzezinski has nonetheless become a punching bag for Jewish supporters of Hillary Clinton, including Congressman Anthony Weiner and guru Ann Lewis. His name is a shibboleth among Zionists. When I e-mailed Norman Podhoretz, he referred me to his book *World War*

IV, in which he devotes several disdainful pages to Brzezinski, saying that he has an "obsessive animus against Israel." Brzezinski waved off the criticisms:

I surfaced in the public domain probably in the late '50s early '60s, the Kennedy years. I have been expressing views on foreign affairs publicly and often in a context which was controversial. ... My view of the Middle East is that it is in the interest of the U.S. to have a resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and the only resolution that is likely to be enduring and acceptable is one that both Israelis and Palestinians can accept, and that, in turn, means a two-state solution. When I first started talking about that, that was a no-no. Today a very significant portion not just of American opinion and, more specifically, Jewish public opinion accepts that perspective, and even more so in Israel. So I'm not particularly bothered by the criticisms of some people whose views don't change very much over time or are not particularly tolerant.

"Does it cause you pain?" The former National Security boss, who emigrated with his family to Canada from Poland in 1938, didn't bat an eye. "I honestly don't think that the people who speak the loudest necessarily represent the largest number of people in the Jewish community. At least I have on a personal plane not felt anything inimical,