

unabated. The supermajority required to overcome a Senate filibuster is the principal culprit. Only if there is a dramatic shift in the political makeup of both legislative bodies along with a concurring president will there be an opportunity for the GOP or the Democrats to impose their legislative will. This is a very unlikely case since all the current polling information indicates a tight race—traditionally close races are the ones that produce something like deadlock and that means very slow going for any sort of ideological shift.

Of course there will be some change imposed by whoever wins but it will not be a sea change and will not be pivotal. Ronald Reagan and Franklin D. Roosevelt were involved in the last sea change elections—the only two of the twentieth century. The 2004 election will not follow in that tradition.

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## ***Hoping for a Decisive Victory*** **Amitai Etzioni**

The 2004 election is pivotal because it will either help bridge polarized America or deepen the divisions. I very much hope, although do not predict, that the winning side will win decisively by a hefty, and above all, clear margin. If the presidential election is going to be decided by a small group of voters, whoever loses will attack the legitimacy of the outcome. Unfortunately, this will not be difficult to do because every election has irregularities. Most of the time the side that

considers itself injured realizes that irregularities happened on both sides and correcting for these irregularities would make little difference.

Not so in 2004. Whatever one thinks happened in 2000 in Florida, few believe that another presidential election decided by the Supreme Court would be a healthy outcome for American democracy. Similarly, the smaller the margin of victory, the more Americans will feel—right or wrongly—that the other side violated the rules and will contest the outcome, deepening the already deep divide in the nation.

I cannot foretell what the frustrated millions will do. There is no danger that they will join with the military in some kind of coup, the way B movies would have it. They may march on Washington or form a tent city on the Mall like the Bonus Expeditionary Force did in 1932.

Much more likely is that many more Americans abandoned participation in public life because they considered it unresponsive, if not illegitimate or crooked. (I once asked a cab driver if he thought that politicians were crooked. He responded: “Is water wet?”)

Still fewer Americans might vote in the future, which is not a welcome development. Fringe groups at both ends of the political spectrum would gain support. All this is much more likely if the elections are not won fairly in a highly visible way.

Even if the outcome is clear-cut, whoever is next in the White House had better launch a major initiative to reduce polarization and to build unity.

Dealing with the deficit and the need to reform Social Security and Medicare by bipartisan commissions is a well-known and often well-used way to proceed.

Truly consulting leaders of the minority party helps—even when they can be readily outvoted in Congress. We need a bipartisan agreement on limiting the obstacles set in the way presidential appointments are made. We need to define grounds for impeaching a president.

We need nationwide dialogues on the values to guide us, to see if we can build a wider consensus on issues such as stem cell research, gay marriages, and the death penalty. We have had successful dialogues in the past—on civil rights and women's rights.

Above all, we must discuss the criteria that should guide our war against terrorism. We learned after Vietnam that wars carried out without very broad and deep public support undermine both our war efforts and our social well-being. The debates about the Patriot Act and preventive war have been much too polarized, with much political posturing.

After the election, nothing is more pivotal than for us to come together on what makes for just wars and the legitimate means for protecting us from the next terrorist attack at home.

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## **Let's Not Go It Alone**

**Arvonne Fraser**

From my Farmer-Laborite father and my own experience in politics, I've

learned that every election is important, but some are pivotal. This is one of them. On November 2, every citizen eligible to vote must decide between two distinct opposites—the go-it-alone, individualistic, and paternalistic approach or the collaborative approach. The first is simplistic and sometimes contradictory; the second is more complex and responsible.

President Bush takes the individualistic approach both domestically and internationally. He took our nation into war with Iraq without allies. He believes in privatizing Social Security. Individuals should be able to save enough to cover their retirement and the loss of family income through the disability or death of a wage earner.

Nations—by definition collaborative institutions—can take pre-emptive strikes against other nations if they have large armies and great firepower. On economic issues and social issues President Bush and the current Republican Party are also paternalistic and theocratic. Men with money and power are endowed with a divine right to govern. (*And I do mean men.*)

John Kerry takes the collaborative approach. He understands that no individual and no nation can go it totally alone, but that both nations and individuals have responsibilities. He's seen war and knows that nations need allies, that soldiers must rely on their compatriots as well as their leaders, and that war should be a last resort. He understands that economic growth is the result of entrepreneurship and a capable, educated workforce and that the worker should share in the benefits of