

with policy made as close as possible to the people, and government policies that focus more on creating opportunity than on providing benefits.

*Opportunity* is the key word. Freedom is what I value most of all. Real freedom, not freedom *from*, which is another way to say security, but freedom *to*. Civil society must provide both freedom and security, but I think the tilt should be toward freedom.

As I have grown older I have discovered that at heart I am a libertarian. I think I always was. But I am a practical libertarian, so I vote Republican.

Is there a link between my Adventist heritage and my libertarian leanings? Perhaps. I was very interested in religious liberty issues in my teens. If Sunday laws were enacted, could the Mark of the Beast be far behind? Government would lead the persecution in the Last Days. Might it not be smart to be fearful of government even now?

Still, I may be stretching the point. Maybe I was attracted to religious liberty because I was already a libertarian at heart. Maybe I became more Republican as I accumulated wealth (my children's explanation). Maybe, in the end, my mother's influence was stronger than my father's. Who knows?

What I do know is that I am sometimes a reluctant Republican. I am, however, a most enthusiastic supporter of George W. Bush. Maybe this is because I have seen up close how effectively he has brought Democrats and Republicans together to craft compromise legislation in the best interests of all Texans.

Maybe it is because I have seen his leadership for education reform. Maybe it is because I have seen him build bridges to Texans of color. Maybe it is because I know him personally as a man of intelligence, integrity, and vision with extraordinary leadership skills.

But even if I did not have this firsthand knowledge of Bush, I would be attracted by his policy proposals. At the heart of everyone is a belief that individual Americans can be trusted to make decisions for themselves. They can be trusted to keep more of the money they earn and spend it for what they value rather than for what government values. They can be trusted to manage some of their own Social Security investments. They can be trusted to work through faith-based organizations to meet many of the needs of their less fortunate fellow citizens. And if public schools fail to meet the needs of their children, they can be trusted to choose schools that will.

So, I shall vote for George W. Bush on November 7. Perhaps my Adventist heritage has nothing to do with this vote. I am sure my politics owe more to Thomas Jefferson than to Ellen White. Still, I grew up valuing freedom above all else. Whoever taught me this was an Adventist.

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## I'm with Teddy Roosevelt and My Grandmother

by Roy Branson

I have spent delightful hours talking about public policy with Don McAdams and David Pendleton. I deeply respect both of them for devoting years of their lives to elected public service. But really, fel-



lows, when it comes to whom Adventists should support for president, the choice isn't even close. Just look at three specific issues.

First, Adventists are committed to preserving health and preventing disease, and have fought from the inception of their church for at least a reduction in alcohol and tobacco use. George W. Bush and his party have taken hundreds of thousands of dollars more than their opponents in contributions from the tobacco industry. Although legal, this industry aims its advertising at children. The result is that 90 percent of new smokers begin under the age of eighteen. Ultimately, over 400,000 people in the United States die each year from tobacco-related causes. Recently, Bush made a point of making a public pledge that if elected president he will stop a suit that the present administration has started against the tobacco companies. The Justice Department is suing to recover some medical costs that Medicare has had to pay for the care of people who suffer from tobacco-related illnesses.

Second, because of their commitment to preserving life, Adventists have historically frowned on their young members bearing arms—at least in the military—although they have not made it a test of fellowship. (Indeed, some Adventists have suffered imprisonment for this understanding of their faith.) As governor of Texas, however, George W. Bush, signed a bill that has made it easier to carry concealed weapons—even into church, if you are a minister of the gospel.

Third, Adventists have been raised on Ellen White's belief that nature is God's second book. George W. Bush canceled a state auto inspection program designed to cut smog, and signed a bill that allowed industries in Texas to cut pollution voluntarily. These actions have surely contributed to making Texas the worst or almost the worst of states for a wide range of toxic emissions. By now, we all know that Houston has become the smog capitol of the country, with America's highest incidence of childhood cancers.

On every one of these issues, Al Gore has gone in a different direction. Although he used to grow tobacco, he has become the fiercest opponent of Big Tobacco in the present administration. He fought for Senator John McCain's efforts in the Senate to make tobacco subject to regulation of the Food and

Drug Administration, just as it regulates every other drug. Gore favors raising taxes on tobacco, one of the most effective ways to decrease teen smoking, and supported launching the federal suit against the tobacco companies to recover tobacco-related Medicare costs.

Far from falling in step with the National Rifle Association (NRA) program to expand laws that permit one legally to carry concealed weapons, Gore supports at least incrementally greater regulation of guns: mandatory background checks on those who purchase guns and mandatory child safety locks. His White House would not be a place out of which the NRA could work.

In the area of the environment, where Gore has been given wide responsibility during the last eight years to implement federal laws and regulations, U.S. air and water pollution has declined sharply. Toxic emissions have fallen, acid rain has declined, tens of millions of acres of forest and pristine land have acquired preservation status, and animals such as the bald eagle and brown pelican have come off the endangered species list—all of this during a time of record economic boom.

As I was growing up, all of us in my Adventist preacher's family thought of themselves as progressive Republicans. Grandmother Bessie, a lifelong Adventist and denominational worker, never got over her loyalty to Teddy Roosevelt, who brought in food and drug regulation, fought the big financial interests, and protected the environment. In this election, just looking at the issues, I think I know for whom she and the rest of my family would have voted. (That's not even considering that Al Gore cared enough about his faith to study theology for a year, and chose a conscientious Sabbath keeper to be his vice president!) Disagree with me if you want, but shame on you, Don and Dave, for not going along with Grandmother Bessie.

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