

# Commentary

## Missing from the presidential debate: federal management

**W**e have been watching the race for the White House over the past 22 months. We observed the candidates during the primaries and have been paying close attention to the fall presidential campaign. We have been waiting to hear a discussion about an important national issue: the management of the federal government. We are still waiting.

In the discussion of the experience and background of each party's ticket, one gets the impression that just two people — the president and the vice president — will run the country for the next four years. The famous 3 a.m. phone call political advertisement during the Democratic primaries emphasized the role of a single individual — the president — in answering such a call.

What's been missing from the discussion is this important, overlooked fact: While the nation elects only two people, in reality the nation also is electing an entire government of political appointees. American voters will be "electing" a new Cabinet consisting of such important positions as the secretary of State, secretary of Defense, attorney general, and the secretary of the Treasury. In addition, nearly 3,000 other presidential appointees will join the new administration.

Cabinet members are critically important because they are the managers who will execute the policies that the candidates are presenting during the campaign. To bet-



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ter judge the candidates' policy proposals, we believe it would be highly valuable to know how they plan to implement them and who will do the implementing. For example, if energy independence is a key issue in the election, knowing the abilities and experience of the next Energy secretary would go a long way toward demonstrating that the candidate has found a skilled manager who could deliver the policy he proposes.

So we would like to propose a change for future presidential campaigns. We would like to see presidential candidates name their entire Cabinets a week after their party's presidential nominating convention. We know that the new Cabinet would have to be vetted and investigated, but this could be done during the summer months before the conventions. Just as the presidential candidates have to vet a vice president, they could vet and select their Cabinet during the same period.

Information about potential Cabinet members would give the nation great insight into

their managerial styles as well as policy preferences. Given the recent economic crisis, the country would clearly like to know who will be the next Treasury secretary and who will make up the new president's economic team. What experience will the new Homeland Security secretary bring to the position? Will the new head of the Office of Management and Budget have government experience? What managerial skills will the next Housing and Urban Development secretary have to lead us through the housing crisis?

Without knowing who will implement many of the campaign policies floated throughout the campaign, it is difficult — if not impossible — to evaluate the likelihood that a new policy will be successful. While we know the candidates for president and vice president, the nation is essentially buying a "pig in a poke" in regard to the rest of the government. We suggest that the nation would be better off if more time was spent examining who will deliver the campaign's policy proposals rather than just reviewing policy papers. The nation deserves to know the names of people who will be charged with implementing those policy positions and running our nation for the next four years. ■

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