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Put your own life under the microscope

Carla Kimbrough

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ckimbrough2@Unl.edu

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Hilary Rodham Clinton. John Edwards. Rudy Giuliani. John McCain. Barack Obama. Bill Richardson. Mitt Romney. Fred Thompson.

So many choices.

Honesty. Integrity. Knowledge. Wisdom. Experience. Intelligence. Leadership. Strength. Prosperity. Family dynamics. Health.

Such high standards.

As journalists, we are charged with exploring the issues and the candidates, revealing to voters the candidates' stances on the issues and who they are as individuals and leaders. We look at their experience, or lack thereof. Their voting record, or lack thereof. We look at their professional and personal lives. Their health, their wealth, their associations, their decisions are subject to scrutiny. We do this in the name of democracy, where freedom reigns supreme.

What would happen, though, if we turned the hot heat of examination to our own lives? If we're lucky, our lives, our decisions, will not be splashed across the Internet, radio, television and newspapers. Nevertheless, examination is good for the soul.

We live in a world where personal freedom is as second nature as breathing. For the most part, we choose our own careers, our own partners and friends, our

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neighborhoods, our food, our own paths in life.

Sometimes we take the choices for granted, or perhaps we pay no mind to the choices we make.

We look at the wealth of the candidates, shining a light on their investments and how they earned their money. But if we look at our own financial decisions, how are we doing? How about the basics of daily money management? Are your credit cards to the limit? Are you living paycheck to paycheck? Are you renting instead of buying? Are you spending rather than investing?

When Bill Clinton was president, we peered at his waistline and scrutinized his love of McDonalds. But what about our waistlines and our fast-food fascinations? Yes, we work in a fast-paced environment, where the closest parking space makes a difference in your press conference position. Yes, burgers and fries seem easier to devour than a salad while on deadline. But what is this lifestyle doing to our lifelines?

We look at Rudy Giuliani's marriages, divorces and relationships with his children. But what of our relationships? Do we have healthy relationships, people who we trust and who trust us? Does your life partner, if you have one, know that he or she is a priority? Are your children able to discuss anything and everything with you? If you have no children, are you making a difference in the life of a child? Can you be counted on in a personal crisis?

We look at Barack Obama's heritage, but when was the last time you broke

bread and shared a meaningful conversation with someone of a difference race, a different culture, a different economic status? And not when you're on the clock of your employer, but on your personal dime and time.

We look at Mitt Romney's religion, but do we have any connection to or respect for the spiritual side of life? If we do, do we dedicate the time to our spiritual growth? If we don't, are we investing our time to leave a lasting, positive legacy?

As we near the end of 2007 and look forward to 2008, there's no better time to examine our choices this past year and plan for better choices next year. The better choices take determination and forethought. They often require grit instead of a grin. Here are a few ideas:

In wealth, choose financial responsibility. Choose cash, instead of credit. Choose to save, not to spend. Choose to invest, not waste.

In health, choose a walk, instead of a ride. Choose a salad, instead of a burger. Choose a patch, instead of a puff. Choose rest, instead of ragged. Choose H2O to escape a DUI.

In our professional lives, choose to grow, not to stagnate. Choose the voiceless, instead of the usual suspects. Choose the tough or fresh story, not the one that can be done with eyes closed.

In our personal relationships, choose to forgive, not to remember. Choose family instead of material possessions.

Make choices that create a joyful tomorrow, instead of a tomorrow of sorrow.

So many choices, so many issues deserve our highest standards. ❖

Commentary by

Carla Kimbrough-Robinson

Contact her at: coaching@inspirehigher.net