

## Vote reactions give pause for thought

November 11, 2012 By Daniel J. Bauer

Among the more useful pieces of advice we've all heard is the one about topics to avoid in conversation. You know what I mean: religion and politics. That old saw came to my mind several times last summer as I visited friends and loved ones around the United States. Locus is relevant here. I spent a week in California before flying to the Midwest, where I stayed for a month and a half.

So, we're talking Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Ohio here. I also dipped a time or two slightly south into Kentucky.

In all of those places I spent hour after hour with people close to my life and heart. I enjoyed every minute of it. There was a lot of catching up to do, a lot of laughter, and a lot of affection. Through all but a small bit of the summer, however, I could sense that my liberal views on a range of topics had best stay locked inside. I told myself silently that, in many ways, the people of my former homeland are a deeply and painfully divided people.

Last summer was not of course the first time that I had these impressions. In previous visits stateside in the past decade, during the presidencies of George W. Bush, I began to note an increasingly sharp and occasionally ugly edge to the national political mood.

Just hours after the results of the election were announced this week, I flicked on my Facebook (FB) screen. I wasn't snooping around for poop. Like the line in a Big Bill Broonzy song, I was just riding along, minding my own business. Suddenly my eyes lit upon the exchange below, posted by a FB friend for a slew of others to see.

"My fears came true!!! Totally disgusted!"

In minutes, 27 FB fans had ticked "liked" to those words.

There then followed these responses, exclamation points included, from four other FB friends: "I'm literally ill" ... "I need some serious alcohol!!! And I don't drink the stuff!!!" ... "So concerned about the future of our nation. How can so many people be so blind?" ... "It is so unbelievable. I am so scared for my kids."

These reactions to the re-election of Barack Obama, including the 27 knee-jerk "likes," disturbed me.

What is the source of such extreme emotions, such intense insecurity?

How are we to explain venomous words like these about a man who just won the popular vote (admittedly by a hair) and the electoral college vote by a landslide? Why such cynicism, pessimism, and nastiness?

The vote breakdown is an intriguing reminder of the complexity not only of election 2012, but of today's American society. Blunt statistics that appeared Nov. 8 in the Chinese "Dz yo shih bao" made me pause.

The gender question mattered. Forty-five percent of all males voting backed Obama. Fifty-five percent of all females did.

It seems reasonable to assume that to some degree, race also mattered. Caucasians make up 72 percent of the American electorate today. Thirty-nine percent of the white population voted for Obama and 59 percent for Romney. African-Americans and Latinos account for 23 percent of all voters. Among black Americans, 93 percent voted for Obama. The figure for Obama support among Latinos was 71 percent.

To say it clearly, Caucasians, so long a huge majority, are perhaps now recognizing that their country indeed is composed of large groups of people of different backgrounds than their own. Citizens with different racial features than theirs are just as American and just as opinionated and just as politically involved as they are. This may make some in this formerly huge majority uneasy and afraid.

If it is reasonable to say race may matter in elections, it is also reasonable to say that for most voters, it does not. Voters for both parties were legitimately fired up by the state of the economy, the size of the national debt, doubts about health care legislation, the state of education in many American cities, and faith-related policies that touch on abortion, sexual identity, and sexual behavior. Questions about militarism and foreign policy surely also swayed voters.

Change of heart happens neither easily nor quickly. Opening our minds and embracing folks who are in some ways different than we are is not always easy to do.

Do you too sense there is something here for the people of Taiwan to contemplate?

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