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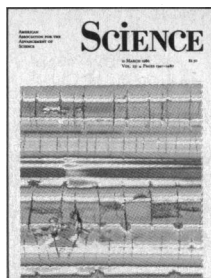
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COVER Optical micrograph of zoning in a natural (570 million years old) zircon single crystal from Sri Lanka, viewed in a petrographic thin section between crossed polars. The field of view is 0.8 millimeter in length. The order of interference colors correlates inversely with UO_2 and ThO_2 contents of the layers. The microfractures perpendicular to the layering are the result of stress caused by anisotropic expansion of the unfractured layers, which have accumulated the greatest alpha-decay damage. This single crystal has a range of alpha-decay dose which spans the transition from the crystalline to the metamict state. See page 1556. [B. C. Chakoumakos *et al.*, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque 87131]

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The Budget for Motherhood

THE time has come to adopt a more scientific method for selecting presidents. The recent debate over the roles of character versus issues has highlighted the fact that issues actually get short shrift in any presidential campaign. Everyone says that we should discuss the issues, but practically no one does. The reason is that most pronouncements on issues are duller than daytime television. Character is important, and private life does reveal character, but interest in private life inevitably escalates beyond an appropriate level as the chance of distinguishing among candidates on issues diminishes.

The problem with issues pronouncements is that essentially all candidates sound alike. One can confidently predict that presidential hopefuls during the next year will proclaim that they are for a stronger defense, a greater safety net for the underprivileged and the elderly, strong support for farmers, greater emphasis on education, fairness to immigrants, affirmative action for minorities, job protection against cheap imports, increased competitiveness, no new taxes, and a decreased deficit. These feats will be accomplished by drastic elimination of waste in the military (except in the candidate's own district), fearless elimination of mismanagement in welfare programs (except when it becomes heartless), and the possible imposition of some trifling new taxes that are painless because they do not really apply to anyone. Coming out foursquare for motherhood might not only be more courageous but also more interesting.

The press, which loves scandal and controversy, rarely prints candidates' position papers, aware that few individuals read them. The public does not read them because they are Pious Parchments (see Editorial, 6 March, p. 1125) that reveal little. Candidates are identified as liberals because they sound sincere when they are denouncing the military and are not to be taken seriously when they propose welfare reform; conservatives, on the other hand, are identified because they sound sincere when they demand welfare reform and perfunctory when they talk about eliminating military waste.

To improve the selection process, a genuine objective test would require each candidate to devise a total federal budget. In that way the candidate could no longer hide behind platitudes and would have to reveal his or her true priorities. To make it a real test, the previous year's federal budget, including the actual federal income and expenses, would be used as the control. Candidates would be asked to present only the differences they would suggest from the previous budget for their proposed budgets for the following year. In that manner, advocates of increasing the budget in any category would have to name the new taxes they would levy or confess that the total deficit would be increased. Those who state that they would reduce military or welfare budgets would have to indicate how, by how much, and where the money was to be shifted. Last year's income and outlay figures would be essential so that candidates would be prevented from indulging in dubious estimates about the rising gross national product allowing all proposed spending increments without concomitant increases in taxes. Allowing only changes to be articulated would prevent pages and pages of sleep-inducing rhetoric which, when deciphered, turn out to recommend a 1 percent cut in the military budget or a 0.5 percent cut in subsidies to farmers.

Those weak of heart would say that candidates would refuse to follow this procedure, but in recent years candidates have learned that they must provide their income taxes and financial statements, that they are expected to take part in public debates, and that their private lives are fair game. Persistent questions (mainly from reporters) demanding hard decisions instead of soporific clichés would lead some candidates to take forthright stands and shame others into following suit.

This plan is a particularly appropriate innovation for the upcoming race in which no candidate has yet assumed a clear lead. If candidates really wish to discuss issues instead of having their private lives examined, they will have to discuss issues in a meaningful way. Proclaiming love of mother costs nothing and is banal. Stating that you will sell your Porsche to support her in the manner to which she has become accustomed is meaningful and arouses interest.—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.