

The Pulse of the Nation:

The Vice President was taken to the hospital the other day because of an irregular heartbeat. I, personally, am amazed they found one, a heartbeat, that is. From the way he has behaved since the early days of his career, it's a bit of a surprise that Dick Cheney actually has a heart. It was Lyndon Johnson (no stranger to cutthroat politics himself) who said, "Watch out for this boy, he's just plain mean."

As it turns out, the VP was just plain mean and just plain smart and just plain electable. He's the perfect combination of traits in the ultimate citadel of cynicism, Washington, D.C. This is a man who will have profited by millions of dollars from the Iraq war by the time he leaves office, via his Halliburton stock options and deferred salary. This is the man who helped concoct this whole stupid WMD, regime change, counter terror, democracy down-your-throat war along with the now useless Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz.

He may outlive us all because he doesn't need a heart. A heart would only get in the way. Get in the way of success and money and power and his enormous desire for each of them.

I'm having a hard time facing this vision of a completely corrupt human, leaving office having been responsible for the deaths of countless thousands, the depletion of the national treasury and the absolute wreck of America's respect. He's smiling and unrepentant, having made a huge personal profit from his years of "public service". That's a tough one to swallow for humanists like me.

I'm sure it's tough for the VP too, when he sees a bleeding heart like Obama or a believer like Huckabee getting attention and adulation for hanging his heart on his sleeve. I'm sure he has no use whatsoever for love in public life. I'm sure there is no bottom to his disdain for love. He is Dr. Strangelove incarnate. He is Henry Kissinger without credentials. What a fool.

He sees the world as a power game, a game that's no fun if you're not at the top. He's the schoolyard bully we all remember. But he has the skill to turn a simple bully's vision into a patriotic stance clothed in honor and pride and service. He is the Chevy truck commercial of political life. Somehow he can say, "This is my country" and get a lot of folks to connect with the message. This war profiteer represents America about as accurately as "The heartbeat of America" does. It's all marketing and he knows it better than any of us.

We were passed on the highway the other day by a young man in his brand new vehicle (temporary sticker in the window) weaving in and out of the traffic at more than 100 miles an hour, thinking so much of his own imagined NASCAR skills and so little of his neighbors' lives. Here was a man so involved with his personal agenda and his newfound power that he was oblivious to the well being of the world around him. Someday he may meet a nasty end wrapped around a light post. Or he may well go on 'til old age pushing his way past civilization, pacemaker after pacemaker. The world would be better off without the company of these men, the bullies. They harm the general wellbeing. They are in the way of all things peaceful.

In a justice movie, you know, the Steven Seagal genre, our hero would walk up to the bully and make delightfully slow work of knocking him down to size. We, the audience, would sit in quiet confidence that the good guy would prevail and that it would be fun watching him win. Unfortunately we don't live in one of those movies. We live in a world where bad guys often achieve power and stay there for as long as they want. They get richer and our sons and daughters die to keep them that way.

We do have the vote and that's a good thing. We do have a powerful collective voice, when we use it. But most of all we have a natural conscience, a voice that eventually speaks because we were raised right. We have a sense of things as they should be and therefore a sense of when things are amiss. I believe the Cheney message of greed and violence has been percolating for so long now that enough of us are starting to feel uneasy. We are beginning the long recovery towards thinking for ourselves. We are starting to make distinctions between candor and guile, between patriotism and violence, between achievement and greed.

I believe that the pulse of America is changing. I believe that our new heartbeat will tick just fine without Dick Cheney's pacemaker.