

"USA TODAY hopes to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation."

—Allen H. Neuharth, Founder, Sept. 15, 1982

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The recent crash of the Concorde tookoff from Paris has, once again, brought air safety to the forefront of public attention. The images of the most exclusive jet trailing flames grab our attention and will remain in memory like the mystery of Egypt 990 or the explosion of TWA 800.

For a number of reasons, commercial aviation accidents are a compelling story, and they receive significantly more media attention than other areas of public safety risk. In a bad year, several hundred people perish in air disasters with USA, while more than 40,000 people die in car accidents, and some estimates indicate that more than 90,000 people die from medical errors.

There is an argument that media coverage has been one of the factors that has driven air transportation to the very levels of safety we have today. Wh

COURTESY WFSB

Gore selects S
AS VICE PRES. R

Making history: Sen. Joe Lieberman nominated as a presidential ca

Gore's VP pic

Women, blacks again passed over for top political jobs

With one bold stroke this week, Vice President Gore shattered a political barrier by naming Joe Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, as his vice-presidential running mate. Now, after decades of trepidation about how such a decision would play, Gore is basking in plaudits from across the political spectrum.

So where is the equally bold action that will propel a woman or a minority into one of the nation's top political jobs? Nowhere, this year. For all of their talk of inclusiveness and diversity, the two major political parties are again offering voters slates populated exclusively by middle-aged white men.

Some barriers, it seems, will have to wait at least four more years to be shattered. Even then, change is likely to depend on leaders willing to leap hurdles built on entrenched stereotypes and perpetuated by the dearth of women and minorities in jobs traditionally leading to the vice presidency.

For female politicians, there is an intractable predicament. Many voters still question whether they're tough enough to hold the highest offices. But because women rarely get a shot at those roles, they can't prove the perceptions wrong.

For example, while an overwhelming majority of voters say they are willing to vote for a female president, many voters believe that women aren't as strong as male leaders, according to a 1999 survey by Democratic pollster Celinda Lake. Some question whether men would follow a woman as commander in chief, says Republican pollster Linda DiVall. This, almost 20 years after Margaret Thatcher steered Great Britain to victory in the Falklands, and nearly 30 years after Golda Meir led Israel to triumph in the Yom Kippur War.

Nor is the pipeline to high office gushing with prospects. While women were making steady strides in the feeder pool of state legislatures and Congress in the 1980s and early '90s, that progress has stalled, hurt by a general disillusionment with politics and states' term limits. In offices that are the farm teams for vice president — governor and U.S. sena-

Political presence grows

The number of women and African-Americans in state legislatures and in Congress has increased since 1979:

Percentage of women in Congress

1979 3%
1999 12%

Percentage of women in state legislatures

1979 10%
1999 23%

Percentage of blacks in Congress

1979 3.1%
1999 7.2%

Percentage of blacks in state legislatures

1979 3.8%
1997 7.6%¹

¹ - Figures not available for 1999
Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

By Peter Photikoe, USA TODAY

tor — women's numbers remain small. Ten ran for governor in 1998. Two were re-elected, bringing the grand total to three. Even where women have succeeded — there are nine U.S. senators — they've not made the short lists for vice president.

For minorities, the situation is far more bleak. There are only 39 black members of Congress. Since Reconstruction, there have been two black U.S. senators and one governor. None today. Clearly, blacks are not going to reach the White House through some "growing trend line," says David Bositis, who studies African-American politics.

There are occasional breakthroughs. In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro was a Hail Mary choice for vice president by a doomed candidate. Colin Powell, with an 81% approval rating in a recent Gallup Poll, might have had the GOP nod this year. He wasn't interested.

But progress can't wait for a twist of fate or the emergence of a unique individual who transcends race.

One cultural barrier was knocked aside this week. History will need a courageous shove if others are to crumble.

Today's debate: Mobile Internet access

Mobile Web surfing limited

Our view:

Phone ads fail to list restrictions, extra fees, inviting FCC to step in.

Before rushing to buy a mobile phone that can glide around the Web, consumers should make sure their mobile company isn't planning to clip their wings.

Mobile phone services, which in recent months have begun marketing new Internet-enabled phones, are restricting users' access to Web content. By doing so, Sprint, Verizon and AT&T are inviting the sort of backlash that already has led regulators to crack down on mobile services in Europe.

AT&T is peddling "free and unlimited ac-

custom selecting a home page with a menu of e-mail, financial and news services they're already loyal to. And during the time it takes to click to those services, they can incur extra phone charges.

Walling in users makes business sense, the mobile services say. Their home pages earn revenue from transactions the user conducts, such as book purchases or stock trades. But the practice inconveniences the user. And in Europe, where mobile-phone use is more prevalent, companies already have clashed with users over the competing priorities, inviting a slap-down by regulators.

In June, British Telecom's Cellnet said it would help users unlock a code that blocked them from choosing anything but British Telecom's own home page. The move came