

It's not black and white

The world is waiting with bated breath to see whether the next president of the United States of America will be black or white. But the real question, says Melville-Brown, is whether he will be green

The job for the top slot in America has come up for grabs, and you'd have to be younger than two or living in the depths of the rainforest not to have noticed. The world is gearing up for the big fight, which will leave one candidate carrying off the largest prize in the world and the other face down on the tarpaulin.

In the red corner, there is Republican candidate Senator John McCain supported by his lipstick-wearing attack dog, running mate Sarah Palin, Governor of Alaska. In the blue corner there is Barack Obama, the Democrat candidate from Illinois and his running mate Joe Biden from Delaware.

Flying the green flag

There is much to differentiate these two wannabe presidents: their political parties, their age, their style and, let's not shy away from this, their colour. In politically correct terminology of the US, ethnic minorities in America are described as "of colour". (This always strikes me as odd, suggesting that Caucasians are no more coloured than a glass of water and conjuring up an image of the HG Wells character, the Invisible Man.) But putting that aside, if instead both were a shade of green, who would be the greener of the two?

Both men have waved the green flag, lauding the importance of environmental issues. But there are other matters for them to consider, not least the wealth and happiness of the all-important voting population. The Arizona/Alaska team has the big oil men to please. Decreasing oil production is not on the cards for McCain, who intends to ensure that

there is more drilling off the US home shores. His opponent Obama promised in his speech accepting the Democratic vote in September this year to end dependence on oil from the Middle East within 10 years. But that didn't mean more drilling at home; he is proposing to invest US\$150 billion over that time in renewable energy.

What about the environmental poster boy, the polar bear? It's perhaps not surprising that Palin should appear to be putting the demands of her Alaskan voters before the needs of the predator who shares their harsh landscape, opposing the bear's listing as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. And while earlier this year McCain was reported to have likened drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling in the Grand Canyon, of late he is reported to have said that he would reconsider this possibility (referring to the former - for now, presumably, the Grand Canyon is safe).

Of global warming there has been either a lot of hot air expended or much credible scientific research offered, depending on your viewpoint. Obama's camp has called for an 80 per cent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050, while in Governor Palin's view the jury is still out on man's involvement in global warming.

The jury in this presidential election are the millions of good men (and women) and true of the American people. After their deliberations, who will they find wanting and who will they want to find in the White House? Is colour important to them, and if so, is it just a matter of black and white? Perhaps in choosing one or the other they may be showing their true colours and the extent to which they believe that the only colour that really matters, is green. ■

