

Tucson Citizen

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: John McCain

Time to set upper age limit for presidents

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Sarah Palin joked about herself night as a hockey mom who is like a pit bull with lipstick. Some sexists may be agitated, some amused. All should remember that gender - or race - shouldn't matter on Nov. 4. But age does.

Our Constitution says no person can be sworn in as president "who shall not have attained to the age of 35." It says nothing about a maximum age. It should.

A study by Duke University Medical Center released earlier this year showed that more than a third of us age 71 or older have mental problems ranging from declining faculties to dementia or Alzheimer's.

I retired voluntarily from my day job at 65. At 84, I still can write a weekly opinion column and stir up strong pros and cons. But since 70, I haven't had the stamina or stuff necessary for a 24/7 executive job.

Examples of likely over-70 reactions in the White House: Critical calls after 9 p.m. or so are a concern. By then, most of us have fallen asleep watching "Larry King Live" or ESPN.

That "red phone" call at 3 a.m. is no problem. By then we're usually up for our nightly trip to the bathroom.

John McCain is 72. Whether he wins or loses, Congress should start the process for a constitutional amendment to make 65 the upper limit for swearing in a president. That would mean no person would face the conundrums in the White House after age 70.

I admire McCain. I'm grateful to him for his military and political service. I'm sometimes amused by his maverick means.

But I'll be crossing my fingers if at 72 and older he's calling the shots in the Oval Office.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Feedback

"Voters can decide whether a candidate is too old to serve as president. As for McCain specifically, by all accounts he is so robustly energetic that much younger aides find it exhausting just to be around him."

- Rich Lowry, editor, National Review?

"Al, you've got it wrong. Age should be a qualification, not a disqualification. Most people, like wine, improve with age."

- Walter M. Bortz, author of "Dare to be 100" and past president, American Geriatrics Society?

Al Neuharth is the founder of USA TODAY.