

AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT

SHEPHERD

That's all right, you can keep your seats. For the last couple of months, Senator Rumson has suggested that being president of this country was, to a certain extent, about character...

ANGLE - ROBIN

who's picked up the receiver from a wall phone and punches in four numbers.

She turns in to the wall to shield her conversation from the rest of the room.

ROBIN

(into phone)

Lewis...call A.J. and come on down here...I don't know, but something's happening.

SHEPHERD

...and although I have not been willing to engage in his attacks on me, I've been here three years and three days, and I can tell you without hesitation: Being President of this country is entirely about character.

LEWIS enters with A.J. and KODAK.

SHEPHERD

(continuing)

For the record: Yes, I am a card-carrying member of the A.C.L.U. But the more important question is why aren't you, Bob? This is an organization whose sole purpose is to defend the Bill of Rights, so it naturally begs the questions.

SHEPHERD

(continuing)

Why would a senator, his party's most powerful spokesman and a candidate for president, choose to reject upholding the Constitution? If you can answer that question, then, folks, you're smarter than I am, because I didn't understand it until a couple of minutes ago. Everybody knows American isn't easy. America is advanced citizenship.

SHEPHERD

(continuing)

You gotta want it bad, 'cause it's gonna put up a fight. It's gonna say, "You want free speech? Let's see you acknowledge a man whose words make your blood boil, who's standing center stage and advocating, at the top of his lungs, that which you would spend a lifetime opposing at the top of yours. You want to claim this land as the land of the free, then the symbol of your country can't just be a flag; the symbol also has to be one of its citizens exercising his right to burn that flag in protest." Show me that, defend that, celebrate that in your classrooms. Then you can stand up and sing about the land of the free. I've known Bob Rumson for years. I've been operating under the assumption that the reason Bob devotes so much time and energy to shouting at the rain was that he simply didn't get it. Well, I was wrong.

SHEPHERD

(continuing)

Bob's problem isn't that he doesn't get it. Bob's problem is that he can't sell it. Nobody has ever won an election by talking about what I was just talking about.

SHEPHERD

(continuing)

This is a country made up of people with hard jobs that they're terrified of losing. The roots of freedom are of little or no interest to them at the moment. We are a nation afraid to go out at night. We're a society that has assigned low priority to education and has looked the other way while our public schools have been decimated. We have serious problems to solve, and we need serious men to solve them. And whatever your particular problem is, friend, I promise you, Bob Rumson is not the least bit interested in solving it. He is interested in two things and two things only: Making you afraid of it and telling you who's to blame for it. That, ladies and gentlemen, is how you win elections. You gather a group of middle-aged, middle-class, middle-income voters who remember with longing an easier time, and you talk

to them about family and American values and personal character. Then you have an old photo of the President's girlfriend. You scream about patriotism and you tell them she's to blame for their lot in life, you go on television and you call her a whore. Sydney Ellen Wade has done nothing to you, Bob. She has done nothing but put herself through law school, prosecute criminals for five years, represent the interests of public school teachers for two years, and lobby for the safety of our natural resources.

SHEPHERD

(continuing)

You want a character debate? Fine, but you better stick with me, 'cause Sydney Ellen Wade is way out of your league. I've loved two women in my life. I lost one to cancer, and I lost the other 'cause I was so busy keeping my job I forgot to do my job. Well that ends right now.

SHEPHERD

(continuing)

Tomorrow morning the White House is sending a bill to Congress for its consideration. It's White House Resolution 455, an energy bill requiring a 20 percent reduction of the emission of fossil fuels over the next ten years. It is by far the most aggressive stride ever taken in the fight to reverse the effects of global warming. The other piece of legislation is the crime bill. As of today it no longer exists. I'm throwing it out. I'm throwing it out and writing a law that makes sense. You cannot address crime prevention without getting rid of assault weapons and handguns.

I consider them a threat to national security, and I will go door to door if I have to, but I'm gonna convince Americans that I'm right, and I'm gonna get the guns. We've got serious problems, and we need serious men, and if you want to talk about character, Bob, you'd better come at me with more than a burning flag and a membership card. If you want to talk about character and American values, fine. Just tell me where and when, and I'll show up. This is a

time for serious men, Bob, and your
fifteen minutes are up. My name's
Andrew Shepherd, and I am the
President.

SHEPHERD exits the press room, leaving a stunned room in his
wake.