

Call for Brain Scans of Presidential Candidates to Detect Mental Health Problems

by David Gutierrez

A neuropsychiatrist who runs a chain of private brain-scanning clinics has issued a call to scan the brains of presidential candidates in an opinion piece published in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Dr. Daniel G. Amen is the chief executive officer of the Amen Clinics, which carry out brain scans in order to diagnose and manage everything from physical brain trauma to anxiety, depression, school failure, underachievement, aggression, obsessive compulsive disorder and the effects of drugs and alcohol.

The American Psychiatric Association does not currently recommend brain scans for clinical or diagnostic purposes.

In the article, Amen says that brain scans could help warn of mental abnormalities that voters need to know about before electing someone to high office. He compares such scans to the complete medical history of the president that the White House issues each year, or to the questions about the health and age of candidates that are often debated during elections.

"As a neuropsychiatrist and brain-imaging expert, I want our elected leaders to be some of the 'brain healthiest people' in the land," Amen writes.

Amen notes that President Ronald Reagan clearly exhibited the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease during his second term, which led to unelected officials taking over the reigns of government. Brain examinations, he says, have shown success in detecting Alzheimer's between five and nine years before symptoms appear - which, in Reagan's case, would have been before his first term in office.

Amen also questions whether Clinton or the current president might not have brain abnormalities.

"President Clinton's moral lapses and problems with bad judgment and excitement seeking behavior," Amen writes, are "indicative of problems in the prefrontal cortex."

Meanwhile, President George W. Bush's "struggles with language and emotional rigidity are symptoms of temporal lobe pathology."

"Maybe we shouldn't leave the health of our president's brain to chance," Amen says. "We have the tools; shouldn't we look?"