

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Obama, McCain slug it out in debate

When the two principle candidates for president took the stage Friday night in Mississippi, some people expected it to be a definitive show and produce a clear winner.

Just getting to the debate produced some pressure, with Sen. John McCain saying earlier he wanted the event delayed because of the country's financial crisis. He had vowed to suspend his campaign to return to Washington to work on a solution.

Sen. Barack Obama scored some point when he said he did not see a reason to delay the debate, as neither he nor McCain were central figures in the negotiations. In a jibe at McCain, he said as a president he would have to be able to handle more than one thing at a time.

Both men flew down to Mississippi on Friday, and put Oxford on the presidential map with the first debate of this campaign.

Many had expected this to be McCain's debate, as it was supposed to be on foreign policy, which is not considered Obama's forte. However, with the financial crisis on everyone's mind, moderator Jim Lehrer gave both men an opportunity to talk about what they would do if faced with such a situation.

The first 40 minutes were spent on the economy, with Obama making some points, but McCain kept hammering away at wasteful spending in Washington.

In the second half, which turned more to the foreign arena, McCain appeared to be more comfortable, but Obama was able to make some major points on Iraq and Afghanistan.

At the end, both men appeared with their wives and shook hands with many of the people who attended.

Neither scored a major knockout, and as you would expect, both later claimed they'd won. McCain's staff put out a press release saying he had won almost before the debate was over.

It was something of a setback for the Arizona senator, who has fallen off the pace and is back to trailing Obama in most of the national polls by 2 to 9 points.

This week, the two vice presidential candidates will face off in St. Louis, and a lot of people will be interested to see how well Alaska Gov. Sara Palin has been prepared for the meeting with Sen. Joe Biden. Palin's entry a month ago as McCain's partner gave the Republicans a big bounce coming out of the convention in St. Paul, but questions have apparently softened that effect.

Thursday's debate, starting at 7 p.m. at Washington University in St. Louis, will be moderated by Public Broadcasting's Gwen Ifill.

There will be two more debates between McCain and Obama before the election, and some experts think a lot of the undecided voters may wait until the last debate to decide who to support when they vote on Tuesday, Nov. 4. The second debate will be at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 7, at Belmont University in Nashville, moderated by NBC's Tom Brokaw. The final event will be at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 15, at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., moderated by CBS's Bob Schieffer.

Friday, many experts and many of the national polls give Obama the win. Being on top in the polls, the Illinois senator has to be careful not to give McCain a big opening, and being behind McCain wants to be more aggressive and find a way to get Obama to give him that.

— Tom Betz, *The Goodland Star-News*



Bonding different for boys, girls

Last summer, I wrote a column on the difference between girls and guys, specifically my brother and I. Since coming to this college, I have seen similar differences played out before my eyes.

In the dormitory community, I am part of a smaller dorm section, which includes about 15 girls as well as a resident assistant to lead and encourage us as we go through school. While I am just starting to get to know some of these girls, I always enjoy their company whenever we get together to watch "My Fair Lady," go shopping, drink coffee or borrow each other's shoes. It's been a great opportunity to peek into the lives of those I see each day.

My section has a "brother" dorm section. Occasionally, we will do activities with our "brothers" so we can get to know them, minister to each other and create a community with each other. However, these young men are quite a contrast to the girls in my section.

See, I was informed a couple weeks ago about their idea of bonding with each other, which includes fist-fighting (I prefer to term it "wrestling") in the hallways and sudden impulses to stand on each other's shoulders to display their muscular abilities. (They did this as a performance for us girls during our first activity together.)

I ate lunch with several of them the other day, and listened to their excitement of the Tom vs. Richard fighting match a few days ago. One of them elbowed the guy sitting next to me and said, "Dude, I still need to take you



Michelle Myers

• A Moment with Michelle

down."

Another guy across the table piped up, "Dude, I've already tried! He just put me in a head lock and I was paralyzed! My throat closed up and my body went limp. It was crazy, man."

The others nodded in agreement. However, that is only one dimension to this group.

I saw another side of them this last Saturday when our two sections went to the Oregon coast for a getaway retreat. Besides relaxing, shopping and swimming, we played games that required teamwork. The objective of one of the games was that we girls had to carry each guy over a bar, which was above our heads, without dropping him or letting any part of him touch the bar. Our hands and arms also couldn't touch the bar, or we would have to start over. After we finished, the guys would have to do the same.

As we listened to one of our leaders explain this game to us, our jaws dropped. Most of us girls are under 5 feet, 5 inches tall, and our upper-body strength is basically non-existent. However, we were determined to succeed. We

planned out our strategy, stretched our muscles and nominated a volunteer to begin. Though we struggled with some of the bigger guys, we were amazed that we did it.

It was now their turn to carry each of us over the bar. We had complete faith that they could do this and do it safely. But how exactly does a group of young men lift a girl above their heads without touching her inappropriately and also making her feel she is safe? For them, this was the main objective of the game.

Before they began, they huddled in a circle to discuss how they were going to execute this mission. It was then that I witnessed the depth, tenderness and potential of these men.

They didn't make degrading jokes about our lack of strength; instead, they cheered us on when our strength wavered. There was no inappropriate humor about inappropriate touching. They didn't make a move until we told them we were ready. And they always made certain that we knew that they were not going to drop us and that they were capable of keeping us safe in their arms.

I don't know these guys very well yet, but I pray for them daily and I am anxious to see what this year will bring for them, for us and the joining of our friendships.

Michelle Myers, a Colby native, is a student at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., majoring in Bible and journalism. She enjoys the 32 Starbucks found within five miles of her campus.

Social promotion comes to college

The practice of promoting an elementary student to the next grade even though the student has not passed the coursework is called "social promotion."

By the time we reach high school, the term involves "grade inflation," when higher grades are given for lower-quality work, and "content deflation" when less work is required than before. Thanks to educationist fads like "mastery learning," where students repeat work until they "earn" an "A" or "B," and standards that reduce expectations to narrow test items, many more high school students are receiving high grades.

The K-12 curriculum has been diluted to the point where foreign exchange students cruise through our coursework as if on vacation, while our equivalent-level students struggle in foreign schools. And the ranks of our true A students are diluted with lesser scholars who have been misled to believe they also are A-students.

To be honest, there are still schools and teachers that maintain rigor, where an "A" still is an exceptional and uncommon grade.

But for students who have been misled into believing that they are "A" students, and aren't, the realities of university-level course work are a hard lessons. Broken dreams. Wasted money.

While the K-12 education system in the U.S. is recognized around the world as mostly substandard, U.S. colleges and universities have so far been considered to be world class. This is about to change as social promotion comes to U.S. colleges.

The term being used is "retention," and the pressure is on for universities and colleges to

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increase retention of their students. Not retention of students who can successfully do college work. Just retain the students, and continue the creeping grade inflation and content deflation that has riddled K-12 education.

I see the problem because it contrasts so dramatically with the rigorous system in China, where only students who pass an entrance exam can attend college. When I lectured there this last May, I asked a university official, "How do you solve the problem of pressure from rich parents who have a student who doesn't make the cut score on the leaving exam — your 'B' students?"

"No problem," he replied. "Since these par-

ents have the money to send their child overseas, many Chinese universities arrange exchange programs to improve their English and then send them to the U.S." Thus the United States not only gets A-plus students from China, but also some B students. This defuses the pressure from rich parents that would erode the academic integrity of the Chinese university system.

"Does this bother you?" he asked.

"No," I replied. "Twenty years ago, of 10 U.S. high school graduates in the United States, four would go to college. Three were college material. Today, seven out of 10 go to college, but still only three are really capable of genuine college-level work."

Most of China's B students have the study skills and work ethic to beat those four out of 10 American students who are wasting our educational resources."

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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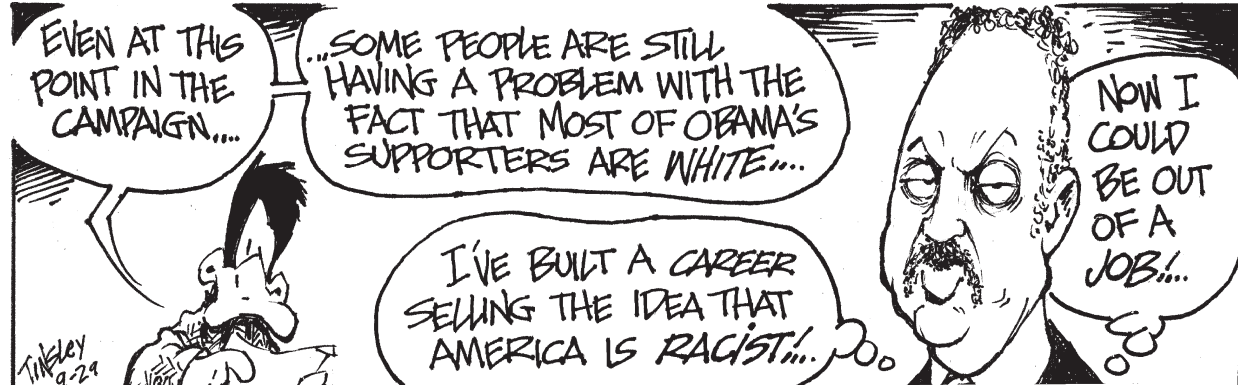
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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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