

Free Press Viewpoint

Restore honesty to campaign debate

The jury is out yet on Monday's presidential debate, but whatever was said – and whatever else voters hear about foreign policy – we need to do something to restore some basic honesty to the discussion.

For its own reasons, whatever they may be, the Obama administration tried to paint the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens as the result of an out-of-control demonstration. Even during the vice presidential debate, Joe Biden persisted in trying to blame the intelligence community for this lie.

Anyone who watched the news the night of the attack knew this was not the result of a demonstration aimed at the U.S. in retaliation for an anti-Muslim video. It was apparent from reports available to the world even then that a coordinated attack by trained forces had overwhelmed the consulate.

The administration, from the president to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, tried to make us believe otherwise. The world was not buying it. Then the vice president tried to blame the CIA and the rest of the intelligence service. The secretary of state did the same.

One of two things: either they were taken in by false reports, or the intelligence they get is so bad they deserve to be defeated and thrown out of office.

Now on the defensive, the administration has taken to accusing Republicans of "playing politics" with the deaths of three Americans, including the ambassador. What, we wonder, were they playing when they tried to convince us this was some innocent, spontaneous demonstration gone awry?

As opposition parties are wont to do, the Republicans are threatening to investigate. By the time Congress gets around to it, though, it'll be a postmortem: the elections will be over.

To be sure, mistakes were made. The ambassador was staying at a location that, apparently, was far from secure, even though Libya is not exactly a stable location. A consulate, unlike an embassy, is not a fortress. It wouldn't have been designed to withstand a military attack.

Requests to Washington to beef up security were ignored, it seems. Now it is too late to do anything, too late certainly for those who died. Too late to save the truth.

Then Mrs. Clinton tells us she will take the blame, though as secretary of state, she *obviously* wouldn't have known about the security conditions. She said that, by the way, during an appearance in Peru.

Let the investigation roll. We'll find out what happened soon enough, but well after the voters have spoken. — *Steve Haynes*

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Janene Woodall - Advertising Representative
jwoodall@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

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TRENCH WARFARE...



Partisan politics nothing new

It's become popular to decry the deep division which has all but paralyzed our Congress in Washington.

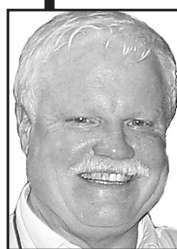
And it's true, partisan division is near an all-time high. But this is nothing new. It's been part of the Washington scene since the 1700s – remember, it's said that Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, once and later friends, did not speak when they exchanged places at the White House. Partisanship may have reached a bitter peak when Andy Jackson was president a few years later.

The intensity comes and goes for a lot of reasons, but for, again, a lot of reasons, the feelings are always there. Parties compete; that's why they form and what they do. But it's easy to miss the fact that often these divisions are not just about who gets to run the country.

Parties – and their followers, ordinary people like you and me – tend to vilify the opposition, especially when out of power. Thus, Republicans tried to get us to believe that Bill Clinton was in league with the Devil, then for the next eight years, Democrats told us the same about George W. Bush. In truth, neither was a bad, nor an innocent, president.

More important, though, is the fact that both parties, most parties of the past and probably of the future, start from some logical premise, a set of deeply held beliefs that attracts us to one or the other.

Scratch any Republican, and you'll likely find someone who believes with all his or her heart that deficits and debt will be the ruin on



Steve Haynes

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this country. Ask any Democrat, you'll probably find someone who thinks the government is not doing a good enough job to help and protect us, and that debt just stimulates the economy.

These people look at government decisions through different lenses, and there's nothing wrong with that.

Two things about politics today do stand out: The near gridlock which persists for years. Go back to the Clinton or Bush eras, you'll find that both parties blocked the judicial appointments of the opposition president – some for the entire eight years.

Today, though, the Democrat-controlled Senate refused to pass a budget and the Republican-run House is holding all manner of bills on vital issues, from saving the Postal Service to doing something about the "fiscal cliff" in front of us.

Holding onto principle may be a noble thing, but it doesn't get much done. And while we don't need near as much action out of Congress as some would like, a few big things should get done.

One thing that most people forget is that the nature of our system gives one party or the other control over a given branch of government or house of Congress, but only for a while. As a nation, we are so evenly divided when it comes to party and ideology that just a few votes can shift us from the liberal Bill Clinton to the conservative G.W. Bush to the ultraliberal Barack Obama – and now, maybe, back to the somewhat conservative Mitt Romney.

A percentage point here and there in any election can produce what looks very much like a landslide to the outside observer, but the current may run the other way in a month or two. Today, there's almost no such thing as "control" of the government, only shifting sands.

Why, then, if we're so close and yet so far apart, don't the "moderate" politicians of both parties dominate? Mostly, I suspect, because they have no power to stir men's souls. It's the partisans who generate the electricity. It may always have been that way.

But the closeness of our division, and the frequent change, may be a good thing. It keeps us from going too far one way or the other, even if it makes it hard for us to work together.

One day soon, that will come back. For a while, anyway. For a while.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Listen to what wasn't said out loud

President Obama and Mitt Romney had another heated exchange during their final debate.

They disagreed, cited facts and anecdotes and challenged one another. They also conveyed certain unspoken messages.

The President came across as peeved and patronizing. His conclusion was a hectoring lecture more suited to a Minister of Truth than an American political leader. He was interruptive and even demeaning, sarcastic to the point of being caustic. Consider his response to Gov. Romney with respect to the importance of the size of our navy: "We have these things called aircraft carriers, where planes land on them. We have these ships that go underwater, nuclear submarines." Poor Mitt – guess he never heard of them.

Part of the way I paid my way through college was a debate scholarship. I constructed cases, built arguments and made general verbal hay all up and down the West Coast for four years.

That experience gave me some insight into what moves people and what doesn't. It is possible to win every point factually, logically and philosophically and still lose a debate. Why? Because winning is more than demonstrating the superiority of one argument over another. It is about persuading, bringing the majority of your audience to your side.

Mitt Romney has been the same man throughout all three debates – no pretense, no acting tricks, no purposeful looks of intensity, contempt or bemusement (of which Mr. Obama has been a vivid study). Whatever his abilities and weaknesses as a communicator, he's real. One has the sense that "maybe" and "perhaps" do not linger in his usual vocabu-

Other Opinions

• Rob Schwarzwald Family Research

lary. In an era of nuclear proliferation and a resurgent al-Qaeda, such firmness is welcome.

There are those who have found Mr. Obama's last two debate performances rewarding because he was feisty, accusatory and assertive, at times even indignant (although with a timing that makes his outrage seem practiced). To some, these things convey strength and confidence, the toughness we need in our president in a dangerous world.

To others – including me – Mr. Obama conveyed arrogance, annoyance and even aggravation that he has to exposit his self-evidently wise and good policies to those (his 314 million fellow citizens, to be more precise) who should be thanking him for them. Transparent beneficence is offended when called upon to explain itself.

This attitude is grounded in the great narrative of many on the Left, the assumption that need not speak its name – disagree with the canons of liberal orthodoxy, and you are either intellectually dense or morally evil. Legitimate disagreement is an oxymoron in the vocabulary of many on the Left; over policy matters even of the most complex nature, one is on the side of the angels (aka, liberalism) or the legions of wickedness (aka, conservatism).

Writing in the middle of the last century, the

man who wrote about the "Truth Ministry" in his novel "1984" said, "Almost nobody seems to feel that an opponent deserves a fair hearing or that the objective truth matters as long as you can score a neat debating point."

Orwell was perceptive: Behaving rudely during a debate indicates a strongman's urge to shut an opponent up, not defeat his argument or advance one's own case. As voters continue to assess the two candidates, they should bear this in mind.

Rob Schwarzwald is senior vice president of Family Research Council Action. He has served as chief of staff for two members of Congress and as director of communications and senior writer at the National Association of Manufacturers. He has also served as president of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774
roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124
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