

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Veep debate a win for both candidates

The second-fiddle people for each presidential campaign were on stage last Thursday, and it was probably the most watched and anticipated in the current series, with a woman in a debate for the first time.

Vice presidential debates have not been around as long as the presidential type, and this was the seventh time the second person on each ticket had faced off.

Depending on your political perspective, you could argue who won, and the spin doctors were at it almost before the debate had finished, either Sen. Joe Biden or Gov. Sarah Palin.

Neither Biden of Palin made any major gaffs that could hurt their running mate's chances. In the big scheme of the campaign, the vice presidential debate does not usually make that much of a difference because people are voting for the person on the top of the ticket, in this case for Democratic candidate Sen. Barack Obama or Republican Sen. John McCain.

For her part, Palin easily exceeded expectations with her performance, and her folksy style, talking to the camera and not worrying about what the moderator was asking, made her come across as a likable person. She had a few missteps, but in a 90-minute debate, they were pretty minor.

On his part, Biden seemed a bit hesitant in the first half of the debate, but warmed up in the second half and came across as well informed, and a bit more human than expected. He spent most of the debate attacking McCain's record and tying McCain to President George Bush rather than attacking Palin.

After the debate, the various news channels began their analysis, asking their many "experts" who won.

One of the more interesting people asked about the debate by NBC was former vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, who was the first woman on a national party ticket as the running mate for Sen. Walter Mondale back in 1984. Unfortunately for her, the first vice presidential debate was in 1988.

Ferraro said she was glad — as a woman — to see Palin had done a credible job, and was impressed with how Palin had handled being the first woman vice presidential candidate to be in a national debate.

When asked if Palin won, Ferraro said she would probably score it as a tie. She said she thought Biden did a good job of handling himself, and that she thought he finished strong and showed his human side when he talked about raising his two sons after his wife and daughter were killed in an accident.

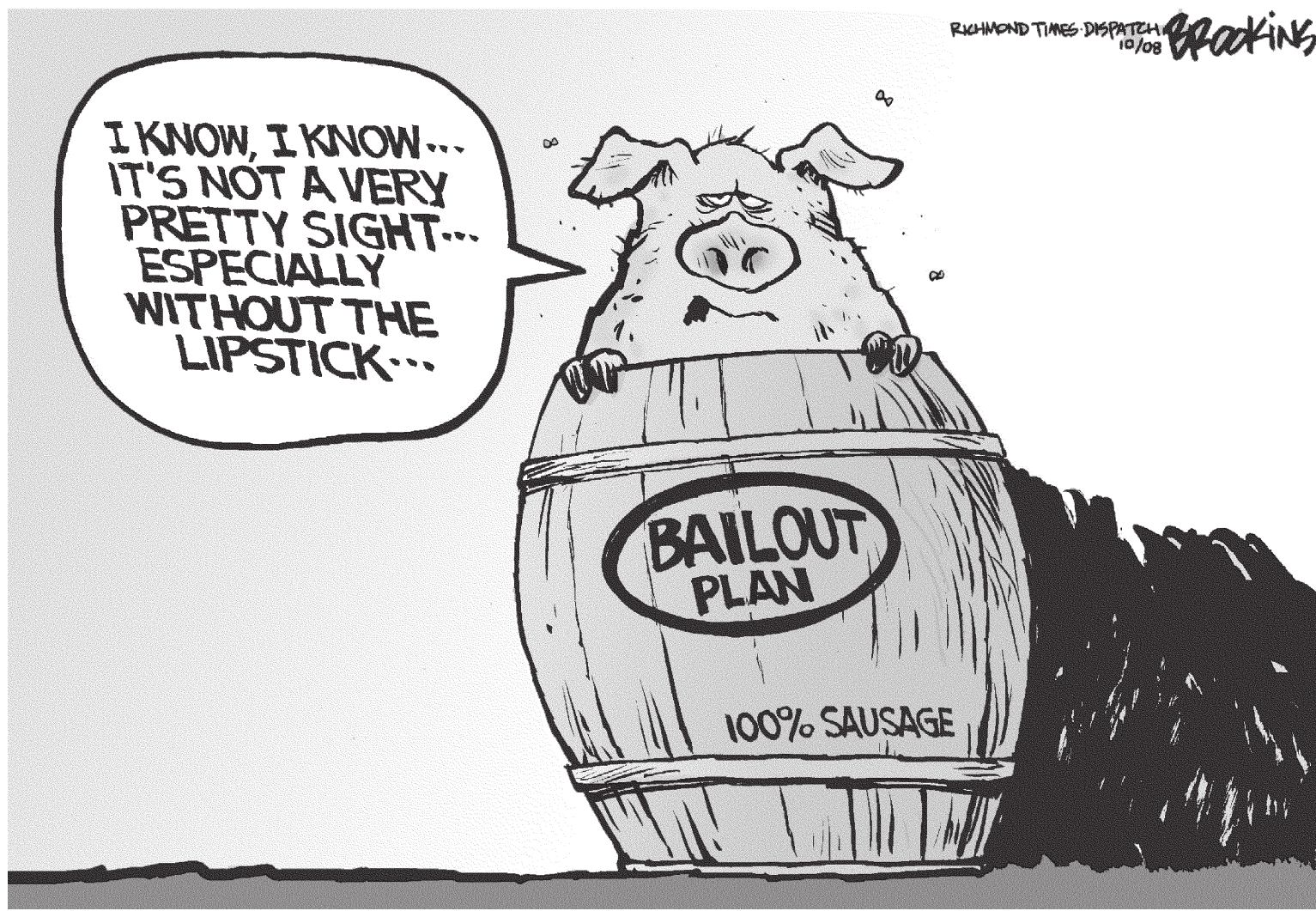
Most of the polls gave the win on issues to Biden, but style went to Palin. In most polls, both raised their approval ratings for their performance.

The election is less than 30 days away, and in some states, early voting has already begun. The intensity on both sides is ramping up and the extreme left and extreme right groups are cranking out negative television commercials.

The left seems to believe the Democrats are going to win big, and they are pushing hard to make that win as big as possible. On the extreme right, the fear is that the Republicans are losing, and the attacks are aimed at holding down the loses.

The long campaign is in the home stretch, and the race is close enough that either candidate can win. It will depend on what tactics and momentum they can garner in the next couple of weeks. Politics this year certainly has not been boring.

— Tom Betz



Rep. Moran saving up for Senate race

Congressman Jerry Moran has started to talk openly about his campaign for the U.S. Senate two years down the road.

The idea is nothing new. Rep. Moran, a Hays Republican, has talked with supporters about the possibility for a couple of years at least, and he's been committed to the race for at least a year.

For three or four years now, he's taken whatever speaking engagements and other invitations he could get from eastern Kansas, where he's not quite the household name he is out here in the 69-county Big First District.

Now, though, with his 2008 re-election all but in the bag, he's started raising money this year for the 2010 Senate campaign. He'll need it.

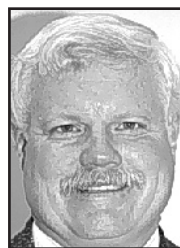
For several years now, former Sen. Bob Dole has talked up what he sees as the need to promote Mr. Moran to the Senate. As one of the more beloved of Mr. Moran's predecessors in the congressional seat, he should know a good candidate.

At first, the congressman was coy. He was happy in the House, he said.

But in the last year, he's admitted he could do more for Kansas and the causes he believes in the Senate.

The power of a single senator, he says, is incredible, especially when you compare it to being just one of 435 members of the unruly House.

A single senator can hold any bill by threatening a filibuster. In the clubby senate, the de-



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

sire of one member puts a "hold" on a bill that can be broken only by a 60-vote majority.

A couple of years ago, there was talk that Mr. Moran would come back to Kansas, run for governor and straighten things out in Topeka. He might of done that, but the opportunity for a Senate seat seems more attractive.

Sen. Sam Brownback says he won't run for a third term, leaving his seat up for grabs. There's no doubt, Mr. Moran can have the Republican nomination, just as he would have won the nomination for governor.

Being in the Senate would allow his family to remain in Hays, where his girls have gone through school, and being governor would require them to move to Topeka. That is not such an attractive proposition for lifelong westerners, even though the commute to Washington each week can be a grind.

Sen. Brownback should be a snap to win the governorship against a Democratic candidate far weaker than the incumbent.

That leaves Rep. Moran with what could be a tough race for the Senate. Or maybe not.

If Gov. Kathleen Sebelius is still in Topeka,

there's a good chance she'll run for the Senate, too. That would be a contest. The governor is popular, she's a good political operator and a great campaigner.

But if the Democrats win the White House, her strong support for Sen. Barack Obama could land her in a cabinet post. She's a star among Democrat governors, she had a prominent role at the national convention and she's a natural for the national stage.

Then who would the Democrats run? No one who would beat Jerry Moran, that's for sure.

Leaving a safe seat in the House is always a gamble. Mr. Moran could serve there until he dies or retires. That doesn't seem likely. He'd get tired of running for re-election every two years.

The congressman is one of the few decent, honorable and intellectually honest members in the House. He stands by what he sees as right, regardless of pressure from the White House or the leadership. He questions the growth of government and the trend toward Uncle Sam making all our decisions. All that, and he's a pretty nice guy.

He is, in short, the person we should have representing us in the Senate. That may happen, it probably will, but it'll be an interesting two years.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

Film shows real threat to economy

Something seems to be missing from all the bailout discussions and presidential debates. It could be called a dirty little secret, except that it is not at all little. In fact, it is so big that it has serious implications for how the federal government will be able to function in the future, and whether states such as Kansas can continue to expect federal money to fuel their budget growth.

What's the secret? It's the massive debt our nation is piling up. It should call into question the wisdom of huge increases in spending, especially given that the crisis on Wall Street pales by comparison to the debt.

Fortunately, there is a new documentary hitting screens around the country that deals with exactly this topic. The film, "I.O.U.S.A.," takes a hard look at the state of America's finances. The documentary follows former U.S. Comptroller General David Walker on a "Fiscal Wake-Up Tour."

Walker, who is now president and chief executive of the nonprofit Peter G. Peterson Foundation, resigned from his General Accounting Office post in February. He now devotes himself to the task of educating Americans about the nature of the real economic crisis they face.

In the film, viewers learn the national debt now accounts for 66 percent of the gross national product, and this is unlikely to shrink as baby boomers hit retirement.

"10,000 baby boomers will become eligible for Social Security benefits each day for the next two decades," the foundation says.

As they do, the national debt could rise from 66 to 244 percent of GNP by 2040.

Other Opinions

• Matthew Hisrich
Flint Hills Center

In fact, by 2027, the group says, federal revenues "will not even cover net interest, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid." The only way to pay for other programs — education, national defense and homeland security, for instance — will be to borrow even more.

"We must dramatically and fundamentally reform our health care system in installments over the next 20 years," he says, or we could face bankruptcy. "It's the No. 1 fiscal challenge for the federal government, it's the No. 1 fiscal challenge for state governments and it's the No. 1 competitive challenge for American business."

Here in Kansas, that means policy makers need to reconsider their approach to Medicaid and the state Children's Health Insurance Program, known as Healthwave. The numbers enrolled in these programs have continued to rise in recent years, and the costs per enrollee have risen at the same time. The costs were unsustainable before the full nature of national finances were known. With full knowledge of the situation, they appear completely out of control.

As a federal-state partnership, the Kansas Medicaid program depends on the federal gov-

ernment to pay the majority of its expenses. Up until now, this roughly 60/40 split has only encouraged additional spending by the state. The federal government's increasing inability to honor its obligations, requires Kansas policy makers to scale back their ambitions to better reflect economic reality.

Instead of looking for ways to usher in universal coverage through state programs, it is time for officials to focus their attention on two key areas. First, they must begin the work of real reform of Medicaid that will yield a sustainable program. Second, they need to look toward market-based solutions, such as expanding the use of health savings accounts, as a way to help those without coverage with medical bills. To do otherwise at this point is to put our future at risk.

"We are mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren at record rates," says Walker. "That is not only an issue of fiscal responsibility, it's an issue of immorality."

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Opinion Policy

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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