

from our viewpoint...

Second fiddle debate worth the watch

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

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

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

For both campaigns the debate was a win because neither Biden or 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 in the final measure because people are voting for the person on the top of the ticket in this case for Democratic candidate Sen. Barack Obama or Republican candidate Sen. John McCain.

For her part Palin easily exceeded the expectations with her performance, and her folksy style and 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 Bush rather than attacking Palin.

After the debate the various news stations began their series of analysis and asking who had won of many "experts" trying to spin the debate for their candidate's best advantage.

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 Ferraro 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 venue.

Ferraro said it was good to have had that debate, and that it was another step forward for her gender. When asked if Palin won the debate, Ferraro said she would probably score it as a tie. She said she thought Biden did a good job of handling himself in the debate, 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.

Tonight the attention returns to the top of the ticket as McCain and Obama are on stage for the second of their three debates at 7 p.m. from Belmont University, Nashville, Tenn. The debate is being moderated by NBC's Tom Brokaw, and is to be in a town hall format, with questions coming from the floor and from outside through Brokaw.

McCain has promised to take the gloves off, and feels this is a night he has to score a decisive win to cut into Obama's apparent lead in the polls.

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

— Tom Betz



Steve's year ends in fine fashion

Steve ended his year as president of the National Newspaper Association on Saturday in fine fashion.

The convention in St. Paul was a success in terms of speakers, presentations and teaching sessions. Almost everyone seemed to have a good time and Steve shook so many hands he caught a cold.

I ended up with an overweight suitcase and six long-stemmed red roses.

After handing over the gavel to the new president, Steve got a plaque and a handshake. I got a half dozen American Beauties with greenery. Each rose had a little test tube of water attached to its stem so they would stay beautiful even without a vase.

We had flown to St. Paul with two pieces of carry-on luggage and one checked bag each — the maximum allowed without paying an extra \$50 to the airline.

But we collected books, plaques, just plain stuff and of course, six long-stemmed American Beauty red roses.

At the Frontier counter, I noted that our big checked bags weighed 55 pounds, but since the girls at the desk were admiring my roses, I hoped they wouldn't notice.

The one doing our tickets didn't, but her friend finally did.

Steve and I sat on the floor and dug stuff out of the big bag to put in a the smaller checked piece — shoes, a bottle of barbecue sauce



cynthia haynes

• open season

(hey, I told you we got stuff) and some dirty clothes. There wasn't much we could do about the weight of the suits and sports coats, but we gave 'er another try and both suitcases passed muster, barely.

With a silent prayer for the sauce in the wrong suitcase, we picked up our carry-ons and the roses and headed down the concourse.

I had a long, white flower box for the roses, but I left the lid off as I walked along. The eyes of every woman who saw them would light up. Steve was amazed at the response they got.

At the loading area, we walked on board without a murmur from anyone — two carry-ons each and that illegal box of roses.

We closed the box, and the flowers rode comfortably in the overhead bin on top of someone else's clothes.

At Denver, we deplaned and headed for the restrooms. I was left to watch the luggage while Steve went. I set the roses on a nearby bench and pulled by purse from a carry-on.

Then we were off down the concourse.

I read the sign at the end — No reentry without a boarding pass and going through

security — and just as I stepped over the line of no return, it hit me.

I didn't have my roses. They were still on the bench way back on the other side of the airport.

The security man was sympathetic but firm. No meant no, none, nyet, nadda.

However, Jim Campbell, a Frontier customer service scout, came to my rescue. He offered to go see if the flowers were still where I had left them.

In about 15 minutes, he was back with a smile and a box of long-stemmed red American Beauties.

He wouldn't take a tip, saying it was against the rules. The scouts, at least on weekends, are mostly teachers, he said. They push wheelchairs, help people with baggage and answer questions.

I mulled that over and at baggage claim asked another similarly dressed man what that meant.

I was told that people like the baggage claim man and Mr. Campbell work part time on weekends and holidays to help passengers at the airport. While Mr. Campbell's day job is a teacher, my friend in baggage was a middle school principal.

The roses, barbecue sauce and I all got home safely, thanks to my friends at the airport.

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Change we can spare



tom purcell

• commentary

"Boy, I can't wait for Obama to bring us the change we need."

"Change? What change?"

"At the Democratic National Convention, he said he's going to cut wasteful spending in Washington! We certainly need to rein in all the taxpayer dough those birds in Washington keep squandering."

"To be sure, Washington has been squandering plenty. President Bush's annual budgets grew from \$2 trillion to more than \$3 trillion in only six years. But why do you think Obama is the guy to rein in spending?"

"Because he and Joe Biden have a record of getting the job done."

"I hate to break your bubble, but, according to Citizens Against Government Waste, Obama and Biden are two of the biggest spenders in the Senate. Where spending is concerned, they are classified as 'hostile' and 'unfriendly,' respectively, according to CAGW's rating system."

"They are?"

"On a scale of zero to 100 percent — with 100 percent representing someone who manages taxpayer money frugally — CAGW gave Obama a 10 percent score for 2007 and a lifetime score of 18 percent."

"That's not so good."

"Biden was given a zero percent score for 2007 and a lifetime score of 22 percent. The rankings make perfect sense. According to the National Journal, Obama and Biden are ranked as the first and third most liberal U.S. senators."

"What's so wrong about being liberal?"

"Nothing, except that many liberals believe more government programs are the best way to solve America's problems. Both Obama and Biden have a record of promoting bigger government and more spending. Neither met an earmark they didn't like."

"What do you mean by 'earmark'?"

"An earmark is an authorization to use taxpayer money to fund a specific project. Our esteemed politicians frequently slip them into various bills when nobody is watching. Some earmarks are useful, but many represent wasteful government spending at its worst."

"Why have Obama and Biden never met an

earmark they didn't like?"

"Since he became a U.S. senator, Obama slipped nearly \$1 billion in earmarks into various bills, such as three-quarters of a million to fund a visitors' center and another \$700,000 to fund soybean-disease research."

"What's wrong with visitors and healthier soybeans?"

"I'm in favor of both, but why do you and I have to pay for them? As for Biden, he slipped in \$120 million in earmarks in 2007 alone. His earmarks funded everything from oyster-bed revitalization to the renovation of an opera house."

"You'll be thanking Joe the next time you go to Delaware to take in an opera. Besides, don't all the senators waste dough? Surely McCain is just as guilty."

"The fact is McCain has never asked for a single earmark in all the years he's been in the Senate. Last year, he was given a 100 percent rating by CAGW and classified a 'hero.'"

"A hero?"

"He would have been classified a 'super-hero,' the highest classification, had he not missed so many votes while on the campaign trail. McCain also was given a lifetime rating of 88 percent."

"OK, hotshot, then what about Sarah Palin?"

"CAGW's ratings apply only to members of the U.S. Congress. It is the Congress, not a governor, who funds earmarks. CAGW did, however, praise Palin for cutting wasteful spending in her state."

"Yeah, well what about that Bridge to Nowhere, the poster child of wasteful earmark spending?"

"Palin did support that project early on, but, like it or not, she was the one who finally killed it. And like it or not, it was McCain who opposed it and Obama and Biden who voted for it."

"So you're saying that Obama's promises of change and reduced spending don't correlate with his record?"

"I'm saying that if you want wasteful spending to be reined in, McCain is much more likely to do it than Obama — if that's the kind of change you're looking for."

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