

from our viewpoint...

## Attack ads fly from both sides

With two weeks to the election, both presidential candidates have stepped up their attacks, and we can expect the level to ratchet up again this week.

Both Republican Sen. John McCain and Democrat Sen. Barack Obama are accusing each other on a personal level.

Those who watched the final debate on Wednesday and support McCain probably were pleased with his feisty performance. Those supporting Obama probably felt his coolness was the winning factor.

Pundits and pollsters gave the third debate to Obama on similar points as the first two, and most agreed the debate did not really cover much new ground. The campaign remains close, but there are signs in some battleground states that Obama is leading. The next big question is if he will bring other new Democrats into the winning column.

Two things that came out of the debate were a celebrity, "Joe the Plumber," who has been facing news crews since he was mentioned about 20 times in the 90 minutes. McCain brought Joe up in the debate as a dig at Obama's tax plan, but Obama held his own and both used Joe to make points.

The real person is Samuel "Joe" Wurzelbacher, 34, who confronted Obama recently at a campaign stop near his home in Holland, Ohio. He questioned the Democrat about his tax plan, saying he thought it would raise his taxes as a worker who was looking to buy the business from the person he worked for.

Turns out Joe is not a licensed plumber and is not an independent voter, but registered as a Republican to vote in the primary. He apparently has another beef, with the state of Ohio, as he is about \$1,200 behind on his taxes.

After giving several impromptu press conferences this week at his home, Joe seemed to admit he may have been wrong about having higher taxes under the Obama plan. A host of experts said Joe's taxes probably would not go up under the Obama plan.

The second exchange was McCain's zinger to Obama, saying that he was not George Bush, and that if Obama wanted to run against George Bush, he should have run four years ago.

Obama came back and said he was sorry if he got McCain confused with Bush, but that as much as McCain has supported Bush, he could not tell them apart.

The other claim McCain pushed aside at the debate was the accusation Republicans are using that Obama has "palled around with terrorists." Some tried to tie Obama to Bill Ayers, a Chicago professor who was a leader in the Weather Underground, a radical group back in the 60s that demonstrated and threw incendiary bombs at public buildings. Ayers was never convicted of anything, however.

When Ayers was in college in the '60s, Obama was barely in grade school. The two, who happen to live in the same Chicago neighborhood, were members of a board trying to improve education in the city's schools.

McCain said Wednesday night he did not care about "an old washed-up terrorist" like Ayers.

For his part, Obama condemned Ayers' actions of 40 years ago, and said the former radical was not involved in his campaign and would not advise him as president.

With all the charges flying it's sure not dull.

Registration has closed in Kansas for the election and early voting will begin soon. Whatever your political bent, this is an election where you want to be sure to record your vote for the man of your choice. — Tom Betz



## A movement to break the silence of churches

In the summer of 1954, an ambitious senator from Texas running for re-election became afraid that he might not win re-election because several large churches in the state were speaking out against his liberal politics. So what did he do? Powerful Sen. Lyndon Baines Johnson rammed through Congress legislation that stripped these churches of their free-speech rights.

Fifty-four years after this travesty of justice became law; a courageous group of voices is breaking the silence.

Johnson manipulated the process and his fellow Senators who were anxious to leave for summer recess in 1954. No hearings, testimony or comments by any tax-exempt organizations occurred before this prohibition entered the Internal Revenue Tax Code. His amendment to the IRS Code bans intervention in political campaigns by organizations, including churches, which receive federal tax-exempt status. If a pastor speaks too loudly, the entire church can lose their tax-exemption. It worked like a charm for Johnson, and it stopped all criticism of him in Texas churches.

On September 28, a heroic group of pastors challenged the ban by testing their First Amendment rights. They are speaking out in their pulpits on politics.

But the question that begs to be answered is: has this prohibition contributed to moral decay in America? The moral decline of the nation accelerated after the ban was instituted. Abortion, sexual crimes, rape and pornography have all increased dramatically since Johnson's gag order was passed.

"I believe the church has been silent too long, which is why we have so much corruption in the world now," said one of those courageous ministers, Rev. Mike Gonzalez of Columbia, S.C.



### floyd, mary brown

• commentary

The First Amendment of the Constitution provides that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Erik Stanley, legal counsel for Alliance Defense Fund, the organization that sponsored the Pulpit Freedom Sunday, argues, "IRS rules don't trump the Constitution—and the First Amendment trumps the Johnson Amendment."

A cloud of intimidation has been hanging over churches since 1954. "Pastors have a right to speak about biblical values from the pulpit without fear of punishment," Stanley said. "No one should be able to use the government to intimidate pastors into giving up their constitutional rights...Groups like Americans United intentionally trigger IRS investigations that will silence churches through fear, intimidation, and disinformation."

"They use that to keep religion out of morals," says another pastor, Rev. Phil Ellsworth, who points out the church has historically always been involved in politics, using as examples the abolition of slavery, child labor laws and civil rights. "What some people call social issues, I call Bible. It's our job to be involved."

That's why Rev. Gonzalez said to his congregation on Pulpit Freedom last Sunday, "I urge you not to vote for Barack Obama or any candidate that stands in the same positions and activities that the Lord condemns."

"The intimidation of churches by leftist groups using the IRS has grown to a point that

silence the church."

This ban on pastors "has always troubled me" said Rev. John W. Yates, a clergyman in the shadows of Washington from nearby Falls Church VA. "I'm skeptical about the government's authority to dictate to the church in this way," he said. "There is a cultural elitism in America that would like to keep religion privately comforting but publicly irrelevant! But if our biblical faith does not inform and shape our thinking on public policy and guide us in whom to vote for, we are simply failing in our responsibility as followers of Christ. We won't always agree with one another, but it is unthinkable that followers of Christ wouldn't evaluate candidates' policies in light of the Word of God."

Prior to the ADF designated Sunday encouraging pastors to defy the ban on political endorsements by churches, Yates said he did not plan to break the law. "But I could envision a time arising when I would feel that I would be disobeying God not to speak...about some political issue or election."

Now we await the government's next move, will they persecute the pastors that had the courage to stand up to this tyranny? America is watching.

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Sweaty, wrestling scholars have yet to establish whether it's a Chinese, Arabian or American curse; nonetheless somebody once said, "May you live in interesting times."

And sure as God made the larva of the codling moth eager to worm its way into the core of the little green apples, we are knee-deep in the middle of one of those "interesting times." Any more interesting and psychiatrists will start franchising electro-shock therapy treatments at shopping mall kiosks.

The good news is Congress rewrote its \$700 billion bailout bill and turned it into an \$800 billion rescue plan. Totally different. Now it's a rescue plan. Instead of a bailout bill. Sounds much friendlier. Besides, what's \$100 billion amongst friends?

The bad news is they still haven't done anything about it, which is surprising in the same way that discovering that the development of webbed fingers makes picking up dimes difficult, not to mention hair management.

What's frustrating for us normal citizens who do not hold a doctorate in weekly misplacing the Gross National Product of Ecuador, is having absolutely no idea of what's going on. And neither can anyone explain what this monetary CPR will or won't do, or exactly who is going to end up with all that cash, or where they're going to put it, and whether they'll need countersunk hinges for the steel vault doors set over their newly dug underground bunkers to hide it all.

We have many questions. Such as who are we helping out: Wall St. or Main St.? Will I still be able to afford premium cable? Is this a Band-Aid or a full-body containment suit? Can displaced homeowners pack future CEO Golden Parachutes? And finally, and most importantly, is Nancy Pelosi's face capable of any expression at all?

## Interesting times



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Twenty-five hundred dollars for every man, woman and child in America to help out broke stockbrokers just seems so, what do you call it, wrong. For all we know, Henry Paulson's big bailout blueprint is to head straight to Vegas: "900 billion on red." And that's another thing. When everybody in America knows the name of the secretary of the treasury, that's not good.

First the Sec Treas called it the Troubled Asset Relief Program. Then it was rejected as the Bailout Bill and embraced as the Rescue Package. Now it's the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008. Glad they threw that date in on the end so that we'll be able to distinguish it from the Emergency Economic Stabilization Acts of 2009, 2010 and 2010A.

## where to write

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

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; web e-mail address — brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; Fax (202) 225-5124 web address — www.jerrymoran.house.gov

The fact that this Bailout to Nowhere is growing faster than time-lapse bamboo may be prompting some members to pass it quickly before it swamps DC in paper and debt. In less than a week, it bulked up from 3 pages to 102 to 451 pages and is swallowing buckets of steroid-ed earmarks as we speak.

Rumors have it that one of its newer provisions loosens accounting rules for Wall St. HEY! Isn't that what got us into this mess in the first place?

Being largely a crisis of confidence over our foundering Ship of State, it is more comforting than polar bear fur against a naked buttock knowing that George Bush is steady at the helm. He actually said out loud in front of people holding microphones "we're working hard on economic turmoil."

Thanks George, Mission Accomplished. Finally gets one thing right, and its economic turmoil. I ask you now: What are the odds?

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