

Before the Debates Begin

Talking Past One Another at the 2008 National Conventions

When the Republican National Convention adjourned on September 4, 2008 it was clear who I would like to see become the next President of the United States. It was also clear which party I wanted to see occupy the White House. Unfortunately, the man and the party did not match.

I have been a Republican most of my life and surely John McCain embodies the spirit that I once felt in Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. Moreover, John McCain's choice for Vice President, Sara Palin, appears to be a fine woman with adequate credentials who also embodies the Republican spirit and could very well *shake up* Washington as promised. Nevertheless, times have changed since I last set foot in an American high school and nearly two decades have past since the *Iron Curtain* fell. In the end, tradition can never be more valuable than its applicability to the present, and I doubt that Republican values could serve the country well at this moment in history -- even if the McCain-Palin ticket could restore them to their previous health.

Perhaps my biggest disappointment was the way in which both national conventions talked past one another. Indeed, if the two conventions reflect the current state of the US political climate, then it will be a very long time before anyone on either side of the aisle will be able to achieve "Country First" for the entire country. It was as if neither side had been listening to the other for the past two years. Could it have that both sides believed that supporters of either side would not tune in to hear the other? Or, was it that they were both convinced that the general public is naïve and stupid? Indeed, the current polls indicate anything but a landslide victory for either side, and neither side appears willing to pay the other even a compliment that it does not use as a springboard for insult. Alas, let us not belabor our disappointment and move forward as both Senators John S. McCain and Barack H. Obama have encouraged us to do.

If we were to take both conventions at their face value, then we should vote Republican, if we drink beer, like Country Western music, own a gun, are into hero worship, and believe that any war that can be won is worth fighting. On the other hand, if we vote Democratic, we must believe that government sees the individual on an equal footing with itself and that the average citizen should expect to receive the same medical care as a US congressman or senator.

As I do not own a gun, am not into hero worship, and pretty much view President Bush as a war criminal, only my fondness for Country Western music and my belief in states rights, small government, and executive experience could get me to vote Republican at this point. Certainly I have never been able to swallow the idea that people become wealthy by being generous. On the other side of the aisle, I find it difficult to believe that the majority of people who work in government have ever put the rights of their fellow citizens above their own. It is one thing to change the spirit of the people whom government is supposed to serve, it is quite another to reform the attitude of those who are supposed to serve the people. Government bureaucrats are in the business of tax and control, not pledge and serve. In fact, I am elated when I can find a government official that views policy as something more than a line of defense behind which he can hide to make his own job easier. The pyramidal chain of command from the President to the front-line, federal bureaucrat is long -- a chain that resists change even when the top few links are replaced. In short, if changing the guard is to realize mine, the Democratic, and the Republican hope for change, then the change must occur in Congress, the Senate, and the White House where ideas become law and new structural initiatives can be implemented.

Barack H. Obama is a great orator and his oratory skills could be a most useful asset in the White House. From his purple pulpit he could sway the general public and thereby put pressure on wavering congressmen, congresswomen, and senators to move with the nation. This said, Blues is not Country Western and with just over half of the country listening to one or the other, how effective could he be? Moreover, in the South you can be any color you want just so long as you know your place -- I fear for Obama's life should he be elected. Worse still, if his movement were to fail he could set the country back 20 years. How long can the Democrats maintain their united front?

National health care is both a noble and achievable goal. Leading the world by example, rather than by force is not only wise, but what good leadership is all about. Reducing carbon emissions in whatever form will be costly, and a sacrifice probably well worth the effort. Surely, the world has become more dangerous, and world affairs are unlikely to become easier as we move ahead: working together with our neighbors has never been more important. Educational reform that would improve everyone's productivity, rather than only the productivity of the best educated, is not about sending everyone to college and will require significant reform at the primary and secondary levels. The result would be a happier, healthier, national spirit at home and would surely strengthen America's image abroad.

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