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OPINION

Biden vs. the Barracuda



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— *Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle is reporting for Florida Weekly on the national primaries until the presidential candidates are chosen this summer. She has a unique perspective on the primaries and the process for choosing a candidate, having traveled the country reporting on primaries and caucuses for the Purple States project. To learn more about Purple States go to www.purplestates.tv.*

Last week I said I might have left someone out when musing over who Sen. John McCain might choose for his running mate. Apparently I did. On Friday, when McCain finally revealed his choice, I was completely flabbergasted. Even the New York Times had to admit that the announcement effectively "muffled" the news coverage of Obama's closing speech at the DNC. (Their words, not mine.)

What happened to Mitt Romney or Joe Lieberman? It was all so cloak and dagger that no one ever saw it coming. Thankfully, I'm not a gambler.

Most non-political junkies have never even heard of Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska. I knew who she was only because I had read about her when researching drilling in ANWR. So I went back and did some more digging. Though I'm not sure if the facts I found make her the right choice (only time will tell), what I found out about her really impressed me.

After serving as the mayor of the small town of Wasilla and then as the head of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, Palin beat incumbent Republican

Gov. Frank Murkowski in 2006. During her short time in office she has vetoed countless special interest bills, earning the praise of Alaskans and the press. She has taken on Big Oil corruption in her state and is ruthless when it comes to rooting out political ethical violations, earning her the nickname "Sarah Barracuda."

All of these accomplishments have earned her an approval rating in her state somewhere in the neighborhood of 70-90 percent, depending on which media outlet you listen to. Palin has said that she wants her state to be self-reliant and she doesn't want oil companies to sit on their energy reserves or environmental groups to block growth of the state's resources.

Again, I'm not saying that she's the best person for the VP job, nor am I denying that she may have been chosen simply because she is a woman. I'm no hater, but could the 44-year-old Palin really step into the Oval Office if McCain should happen to depart this world during his presidency?

I admit she's no Hillary Clinton and I'm not on board with all of her social principles. However, what I like about Sarah Palin is what she has accomplished in her state so far and the guts she has shown along the way. Anyone who works to end government corruption and pet projects, cut spending and offer accountability is a hero in my book. In my "hierarchy of needs" those values far outweigh whether or not she shares my social values.

Will she be able to successfully debate Joe Biden and propel herself into the White House? It would be quite a feat if she does.

In the meantime, Sen. Barack Obama's DNC speech was historical and well received, as was Biden's. With Obama's speech fresh in the minds and hearts of his supporters, Palin's addition to the GOP ticket is being dismissed by Dems as a desperate attempt by McCain to earn Hillary votes.

If McCain's motivation was to get the

female vote he may find he's made a grave error. Palin is the polar (pardon the Alaska pun) opposite of Hillary Clinton. The women who value Clinton are not the same women who value Republican principles like pro-life and the issue of banning gay marriage. On social issues, Palin is a Republican in every sense of the word and Democratic feminists may not be able to relate to her.

Speaking of feminists, Hillary Clinton painfully did her duty. With Bill lovingly applauding her and tears in his eyes, she formally endorsed Obama at the Democratic Convention. Clinton took one for the team and now the Democrats can move on.

In contrast to the pride on Bill Clinton's face, Michelle Obama's exterior facial expressions, while hard to read, seemed strained. I'm no body language expert, but Michelle Obama's smile seemed forced. It appeared to me that several times during Hillary's speech she was not happy with what was coming out of her mouth.

I can't say that I blame Michelle Obama. Clinton's impressive discourse focused mainly on herself and her accomplishments. While she endorsed the man, she carefully avoided endorsing his leadership qualities. Several times I held my breath because I almost expected her to launch a surprise attack on Obama. To the disappointment of some of her fans, she didn't do that, but Clinton made one thing clear: she isn't backing Obama as much as she's backing her party.

It seems to me that the playing field is level now. The two tickets seem to mirror each other. Both sides have mature men with many years of experience in Washington and each side has a younger woman or an African-American with less experience than their counterparts. The differences lie in their policies and principles. It remains to be seen who has the edge. ■

GUEST OPINION

A Call For Change ... The Seven Percent Solution

BY FRANK HOWE

Estero

For the first time in our history, there is every indication that the next generation may not be better off than the previous. Adding to today's economic crisis will be a deficit of \$482 billion and a national debt more than \$8 trillion left to future generations. We hear the call for change, but are cautious and reluctant to answer that call. Those who have seen the American dream slip away have the opportunity to objectively evaluate the past and demand a commitment to major international and domestic policy change.

These past few years have been especially trying times for Americans. We have been tested on our values beliefs and questioned on our patriotism. This country is divided as never before. Not surprisingly, nearly 80 percent of the American people believe that we are on the wrong track. With our future at stake, it is incumbent upon us to insist on sound international diplomacy and leadership; to reverse the course of events and reclaim our respect and influence in a rapidly changing world. Domestically, we must strengthen our economy and revitalize the middle class. We must embrace comprehensive policy dealing with primary issues such as energy, health care, social security, Medicare, and education. Politically driven issues such as oil drilling and environmen-

tal prohibitions must be replaced by overall strategic policies on energy and climate change. As a nation, we must meet these issues head on with progressive ideas of self-rule and follow the course of our forefathers who refused to defer to the challenges of their day.

The latest polls identify Florida as a crucial swing state in the upcoming presidential election. Numbers show a statistical tie with 7 percent undecided, many of which are independents. We are challenged to respond to fundamental differences between the presidential candidates and parties. One, a relative newcomer, brings a degree of uncertainty to the office, as did others before him. In his public appearances, at home and abroad, he is positively received as a rational alternative to the past. He projects hope and unity, and a view to the future. The other is an experienced politician, a comfortable choice for many, but out of touch with working class Americans. He is representative of the failed policies of the past. Supported by a 90 percent or more voting record on those policies and a 30-year record in Congress, he may be more part of the problem than the solution.

We are asked to take sides in a highly complex set of issues: A major choice between change and more of the same. Opportunities were squandered and we are now being asked to reward failure. In today's

world, we do not have the luxury of accepting unsuccessful policies and the status quo as viable options to these larger issues. Experience as a substitute for good judgment has led to ill-advised decisions and will have long-lasting adverse affects, both at home and abroad. That experience and lack of accountability have resulted in this call to change. The search is on for common sense, working knowledge, foresight, diplomatic and communication skills, and the ability to achieve realistic goals and create the change essential to all Americans.

The global economy and emergence of nations have presented a new challenge; the way we respond will determine our future. The American people deserve thoughtful debate and the necessary change within our political system. As much as 20 percent still believe that we are on the right track, and may be unwilling to pursue any progressive change. The vast majority, however, yearns for change, a return to a strong middle class, and less influence by special interests. Regardless of personal or political persuasion, concerned citizens, including the undecided group, should be on a mission to identify and alter the policies that have eroded the American dream over the past several years. It is now our turn to step up, and meet the challenges of our day. We must strive to redefine our place in society, and create a better future for the next generation. It is time for change. ■