

FORT MYERS
FLORIDA WEEKLY
YOUR NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

Publisher

Pason Gaddis
pgaddis@floridaweekly.com

Executive Editor

Jeffrey Cull
jcull@floridaweekly.com

Creative Director

Jim Dickerson
jdickerson@floridaweekly.com

Reporters & Columnists

Roger Williams
Nancy Stetson
Karen Feldman
Betsy Clayton
Michelle Start
Evan Williams
Artis Henderson
Carol Simontacchi
Barbara Boxleitner
Jim McCracken
Tanya Amador-Daigle

Photographers

Amanda Hartman
Carol Orr Hartman

Contributing Photographer

Jim McLaughlin

Copy Editor

Cathy Cottrill

Production

Alex Perez
Amanda Hartman
Kim Boone
Jon Colvin

Circulation Manager

Penny Kennedy
pkennedy@floridaweekly.com

Circulation

John Noe
Paul Neumann
Rod Irvin
Francie Moser
Sherry Neumann

Account Executives

Shelley Lund
slund@floridaweekly.com
Doug Rosburg
drosburg@floridaweekly.com
Allison Spencer
aspencer@floridaweekly.com
Michelle Harrison
mharrison@floridaweekly.com

Business Office Manager

Kelli Carico

Street Address:
Florida Weekly

4300 Ford Street, Suite 106
Fort Myers, Florida 33916
Phone 239.333.2135
Fax: 239.333.2140



INLAND PRESS

Subscriptions:

One year mailed subscriptions
are available for \$29.95.

Call 239.333.2135
or visit us on the web at
www.floridaweekly.com
and click on subscribe today.

FORT MYERS
FLORIDA WEEKLY
YOUR NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

Copyright: The contents of the Florida Weekly
are copyright 2007 by Florida Media Group, LLC.
No portion may be reproduced without the express
written consent of Florida Media Group, LLC.

OPINION

Political death match

tanyaAMADOR-DAIGLE

politics@floridaweekly.com



— *Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle is reporting for Florida Weekly on the presidential election. 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.*

In contrast to the presidential debate, which was a yawn, Thursday nights' vice presidential debate was spun as a sequel to MTV's Celebrity Death Match. All day, leading up to what turned out to be the main event in this election season, I kept hearing from people that they were going home to make popcorn. Some said we were going to see Gov. Sarah Palin, "get thrown to the ground" by Sen. Joe Biden. Yep, you said it; you know who you are.

Others disagreed and said Biden would come off looking like a bully if he attacked Palin. He may have the ability to chew her up and spit her out, but he will refrain, they said.

Strong Palin supporters maintained that all she had to do was just be her charming self and she would do just fine. Depending on your perspective, all of these things probably happened in some shape or form. After a record-breaking night in Nielsen ratings, both camps predictably wasted no time in publicly claiming that their contender had won.

My observation was that Palin was

somewhat convincing on energy, at least on oil, and Biden was well versed on foreign policy, no big surprise. Both of them were splitting hairs when debating the issue of sitting down and negotiating with despots. Amusingly, both kept stating that the other party's facts were wrong. Huh? If either was lying, couldn't we check the facts?

It was obvious who had more experience and Biden sure made a show of it. He kept giving Palin a little smile and a chuckle as if to say "Awe, isn't she a cute little girl trying to play with the big boys?" His habit of saying, "Let me say this again," and then repeating it incessantly for drama, grated on my nerves, as well as Palin's overuse of the word "maverick."

Biden seemed confident and nimble. When the debate turned to foreign policy, he had the upper hand. To his credit, he was gentlemanly about it. He had to be. To do otherwise would have done him harm.

There were frequent examples of Palin's lack of knowledge throughout the debate that I believe caused her to miss opportunities. For instance, with regards to where responsibility lies on the bailout issue, I think there is plenty of blame to go around. However, when Biden said Obama was the one to wave the warning flag a couple of years ago, I was wondering why Palin didn't mention one of Obama's speeches he gave in 2005. It was a speech in which he appeared alongside Fannie Mae CEO Daniel Mudd in front of the Congressional Black Caucus bragging about how they were giving more sub-prime mortgages than ever before. Do I even need to point out that loose lending practices for too many people who couldn't afford them is one of the biggest reasons we are in this economic mess?

Another illustration of Palin's lack of knowledge is her clever trick of talking in circles. When she didn't know the answer, she would simply change the question and then answer it. She seems very adept at doing this. Some may not view this as a negative. If you look at it from the perspective that she is taking control of a situation, it can be viewed as a strength.

As I've said before, Biden undoubtedly has more experience. But what we as voters have to decide is this: What kind of experience? In all of his years in Washington, were all of his decisions sound? Perhaps voters will question his character as well. How does one buy that Biden believes in Obama after he said during the primaries that he wasn't ready to lead — after he said John McCain was more qualified to lead? Are we just supposed to forget he said those things? Is that the "change we can believe in?" Biden kept saying how much he loved and respected McCain, as he twisted the knife. What do those actions say about his character?

Despite the fact that Palin may be a little wet behind the ears, as her critics like to point out, one thing that keeps coming back to me is this truth: Hasn't it been said that the thing that is worse than people talking about you, is them NOT talking about you? In my humble opinion, it seems Palin may be a genuine threat to the Democratic Party. Why else would they seek to destroy her? ■

Purple States

Purple States citizen journalists have joined forces with the Washington Post to cover the issues that matter most to Americans leading up to election day. New videos will be aired at www.washingtonpost.com on Thursdays. Purple States also has daily video and interaction with American voters at www.purplestates.tv

GUEST OPINION

Has the political press abdicated its role?

danRATHER

Special to Florida Weekly



Most of this week's talk about the presidential race concerned the vice-presidential debate, but your reporter was still chewing on something he heard over and over in the coverage following the first McCain-Obama matchup — the complaint that, when pressed by moderator Jim Lehrer, neither candidate offered any specifics about what he would give up, in terms of the priorities that you would bring as president of the United States, as a result of having to pay for the financial rescue plan.

First, it's not even strictly accurate that neither candidate offered cuts to his respective agenda. Barack Obama offered that he might have to sacrifice individual components of his alternative-energy investment plan. And John McCain, in an answer that didn't receive nearly enough attention, proposed "a spending freeze on everything but defense, veteran affairs and entitlement programs."

But more to the point, as the press and punditry wring their hands over a political environment in which neither candidate is "willing to level" with the

American people about the hard choices facing the next president, perhaps these media actors could take a moment to consider what they have done to create this environment.

Because I'm willing to bet the trailer money that, had either McCain or Obama sacrificed a major pillar of his domestic or foreign-policy agenda on the altar of budgetary restraint, the press would have pounced. Would the headlines have read: "In Laudatory Moment of Campaign Candidor, McCain/Obama Levels With Taxpayers"? Perhaps. But I'm guessing they would more closely resemble something along the lines of, for McCain: "Straight Talk Express in Ditch: McCain Admits U.S. Can No Longer Afford Iraq Occupation." Or, for Obama: "Short Changed: Obama Confesses He'll Drop Health Care Reform, Rationale for Campaign."

Or worse, the current fashion for process-obsessed campaign reporting would yield breathless commentary and instant analysis about how one or the other's admission was "bound to hurt him" — and how the opposite party's candidate was "sure to pounce" on the admission. Conspicuously absent, of course, would be any sense that such a line of attack would constitute an unfair punishment for having told the truth. And if such an attack came, the candidate on the receiving end could probably forget about any

impartial defense coming from the press, which long ago abdicated any role for itself as an independent arbiter of the truth in favor of the much safer "he said/she said" model.

We've heard a lot lately about "gotcha" journalism, mostly in response to Sarah Palin's shaky answers to interview questions about everything from the Bush Doctrine to the Supreme Court to her choice of reading material. To my mind, though, the real gotcha journalism is that which, when it comes to truth-telling on hard choices, offers a choice of damned if you don't, damned more if you do.

American voters are often criticized for what some describe as the expectation that they can get something from the government without having to give something else up. Call it a free ride or something-for-nothing mentality. Taxes remain the classic example, as everyone wants them to be lower while few are willing to sacrifice their own pet programs in the name of budgetary responsibility. Our politicians, too, come under fire for enabling this attitude. There is surely merit to both criticisms, and the electoral evidence to back them up. But before members of the American political press go pointing fingers, we might also consider what we have done to foster an attitude that invites bad faith and corrodes our democratic processes. ■