

A Tale of Two Debates

Tonight, I watched the GOP Presidential debate from Mesa, Arizona. Last night, I attended a Congressional debate here in the San Fernando Valley. There was a world of difference between them. The biggest difference is that I got a big kick out of last night's event, even though the candidate I'll be voting for hasn't got the slightest chance of winning. His name is Mark Reed, and he's a bright, attractive, well-spoken fellow. In many parts of the country, even in many parts of California, he'd be a shoo-in. He suffers from only one drawback; Reed happens to be a Republican.

Last night, he had to enter the lion's den. Not only did he have to contend with two U.S. congressmen, Howard Berman and Brad Sherman, but the event took place in a synagogue, so nearly everyone in the overflowing audience was a Jewish liberal. To be fair, nobody booed Mr. Reed, but that was mainly because the rabbi reminded everyone to be on their good behavior, and because the audience knew that Reed was essentially irrelevant.

What made the evening so entertaining for me is that one liberal was, for the first time in his political life, being forced to tell the truth about another liberal. It was sheer heaven listening to these guys insult each other. There was none of that phony "With all due respect to my distinguished colleague" blather. These guys wanted to bludgeon each other to death with their microphones.

The reason behind this mortal combat was that California's congressional lines were redrawn after the last census and what had previously been safe liberal districts for Sherman and Berman had been turned into a single district that will be covered in blood before the primary vote in June determines which of them goes back to the House and which one goes back home.

Honesty compels me to confess that I have been friends with Howard since our days at UCLA. But as he knows, I will be voting for Mark Reed. At present, Brad Sherman is my congressman. If I had to choose between them, I would vote for Berman, not only because he's an old chum, but because so far as it is possible for a liberal to be a man of principle, I believe he is one. For one thing, he backed the invasion of Iraq. Whether you agree with that decision or not, a great many Democrats opposed it for no other reason than to make political hay at George Bush's expense.

For another thing, Brad Sherman joined the likes of Henry Waxman and Maxine Waters in voting to continue funding ACORN with taxpayer dollars. And that was even after we had all seen the videos of ACORN employees trying to help someone they believed was a pimp finance a proposed brothel to be filled with underage girls from Central America.

That brings us to tonight's GOP debate. As usual, I found Ron Paul alternately amusing and alarming. One minute, you find yourself being charmed by his apparent good nature; the next minute, you're asking yourself "Did he really say the world has nothing to fear from a nuclear Iran? Or did he mean that someone has invented a new, clear iron?"

Rick Santorum still strikes me as a guy born to be a college cheerleader, although it appears that this lengthy campaign has taken a toll on his hairline. It seems to be receding at the speed of light. I recall that during the 1961 baseball season, as he pursued Babe Ruth's home run record, the pressure became so great on Roger Maris that his hair began falling out in clumps. I fear that if the primary race lasts into June, Santorum could wind up as bald as I am.

As usual, I was impressed with Mitt Romney. I know that some people resent his looks, his height, his hair and his money. By "some people," I mean others besides myself. But just because someone looks and sounds presidential, I don't really

think that should be a liability for someone who deserves to be the President.

That brings us to Newt Gingrich. Although I have sat through all of the debates so far, which adds up to about 498 hours I'll never get back, I finally focused like a laser on what Gingrich was actually saying, as opposed to the glib way he has of saying things.

I don't know why after all this time it finally hit me. After all, it has been his constant mantra throughout the campaign that he's the guy who reformed welfare, balanced the federal budget and, through his Contract with America, gained control of the House for the GOP.

That being the case, it seems to me that the most sensible solution is for Romney to be the President and Gingrich to run for Congress and once again become the Speaker.

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