

John McCain: The Humble Warrior

John McCain's Straight Talk Express rolled into town Thursday, taking the candidate to a fundraiser in Minneapolis and a campaign appearance in St. Paul. The modest and intimate "town hall" setting was a far cry from Barack Obama's packed arena appearances, lending an air of humility to McCain's presidential bid. The stark contrast is surely no accident.

Analysis by G.R. ANDERSON JR.

Not many can boast the presidential bona fides Sen. John McCain carries with him into the final leg of the 2008 campaign. He first had a stint in the U.S. House of Representatives 25 years ago, before moving onto a 20-year career in the U.S. Senate. There, he garnered a reputation for being a free-thinker, sometimes going against the grain of his own Republican Party, and working toward bipartisanship.

This, of course, was after graduating from the Naval Academy and embarking on a 22-year career in the Navy (third generation). That, as we all know, included service in Vietnam, where he endured a horrifying stretch as a prisoner of war. When he returned home, he received such honors as the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

McCain has run for president before, and possesses a wry post-Letterman wit more befitting a 30-something than a septuagenarian. In this age of war and campaigns that thrive on knowing sound bites, McCain could certainly run a campaign with grandiose aspira-



By SHANNON STAPLETON, Reuters

Republican presidential candidate John McCain at a recent town hall meeting in New York.

tions and imagery.

Instead, in what was billed as a "2008 Presidential Town Hall Meeting" Thursday night at the Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul, McCain played the humility card.

Little more than two weeks ago, Sen. Barack Obama came to the Xcel Energy Center in the very same city. More than 35,000 people came to see the rising star finally arrive, as 20,000 packed inside to see Obama claim the nomination to be the Democratic candidate for president. The crowd was buzzing and loud, and if the event didn't quite resemble a rock show, it certainly shared the hype and glitz of a Minnesota Wild playoff game.

McCain's event drew an invite-only audience of about 200. The requisite pop music playing before the senator's show -- "Right

Now" by Van Halen -- was nearly inaudible. The crowd did not break into spontaneous chants. Parking was not an issue.

The vibe was downright somber at times. The event was billed as a gathering of independent voters -- the McCain campaign apparently did some robo-calling, found folks were undecided in the presidential race, and invited them to come on down. (Though a survey of guests afterward found that at least more than a handful were Republicans who got tickets from GOP insiders.) The message was clear: There will be no grandstanding, no partisan sideswipes, just a good look at a presidential candidate and an honest discussion about where he'll take the country, if elected.

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MINNPOST.WORLD

Here come the perp walks again, this time for real estate fraud

By STEVE BERG

Fans of the 1987 movie "Wall Street" remember the perp walk. The feds ambush the young financial hotshot Bud Fox, played by Charlie Sheen, as he enters his office. They cuff him and parade him past his fellow brokers.

A similar scene played out Thursday when federal agents arrested two former Bear Stearns hedge fund managers at their New York area homes, then marched them in handcuffs to their arraignment in Brooklyn federal court.

Later, FBI Director Robert Mueller held a rare press conference to announce that a nationwide sweep had netted more than 400 real estate industry players arrested during the past several weeks. He said the government was pursuing 19 other corporate fraud investigations against major firms with ties to the subprime mortgage debacle. Hundreds of other investigations are under way against local firms and players, including dozens in Minneapolis-St. Paul, described by the FBI as one of the nation's 10-worst cities for mortgage fraud.

"This operation is an example of our united commitment to address this significant crime problem," Mueller said. "The FBI will continue to direct investigative and analytic resources towards mortgage fraud and corporate securities fraud that threaten our nation's economy."

The government's response to the crisis was intended to send a strong message to the lending industry and to help restore the trust of investors and consumers as the economic slump deepens, MSNBC's John Schoen concluded in his analysis. But it's unclear, he said, whether the government's actions will positively affect the economy, or protect future home buyers from similar fraud.

Quicker reforms sought

Meanwhile, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson urged quicker reforms that would give the Federal Reserve more authority to regulate Wall Street.

Referring to the "outdated nature of our financial regulatory system," Paulson said in a speech that the government must "move much more quickly" to restore public confidence in its policing powers, keeping in mind the balance between free markets and needed oversight.

At a hearing on Capitol Hill, regulatory officials told the Senate Banking Committee that they have already stepped up oversight of investment banks.

Before the crisis broke, Paulson had referred to the bundling and marketing of risky mortgages as "innovation." With an election on the horizon it's likely that federal agencies are feeling pressure to cut a higher profile in addressing problems in the financial markets and pursuing cases against fraudulent mortgage dealings.

The former Bear Stearns executives arrested were Ralph Cioffi, 52, and Matthew Tannin, 46. Charged with mail fraud, wire fraud and conspiracy, they were the first top Wall Street figures to face criminal charges in connection with the crisis.

Misleading investors with optimistic assessments

The indictment contends that the hedge fund managers misled investors by offering optimistic assessments while they, themselves, held deep reservations about the health of the funds. Cioffi, also charged with insider trading, moved \$2 million of his personal money out of one mortgage fund while delivering upbeat reports. Both men "deceived" investors and other financial managers by "fraudulently concealing" the funds' true condition, according to the indictment.

In an April 2007 email, sent

two months before the funds imploded, Tannin told Cioffi that the subprime market "looks pretty damn ugly." If the company's internal modeling is accurate "I think we should close the funds now," he wrote. If internal modeling is correct, "then the entire subprime market is toast."

His prediction proved hauntingly accurate.

Of the 406 people arrested in recent weeks, 60 were charged on Wednesday alone, as agents moved in on suspects in Chicago, Houston, Miami and a dozen other cities. Real-estate developers, brokers, agents and appraisers were among those charged, as well as lenders, lawyers and straw buyers, the FBI said.

Federal agents described Minneapolis-St. Paul as a hotbed of illegal activity and one of the nation's 10-worst areas for mortgage fraud. Dozens of criminal investigations are under way in the Twin Cities, the FBI told the Star Tribune's Dan Browning. Included are inquiries into Parish Marketing and Development of Eagan, involving 200 homes in the south metro, and TJ Waconia of Roseville, involving 165 homes in Minneapolis.

While housing markets vary, home prices are down an average of 20 percent from their peak in 2006 and continue to fall rapidly in many areas. Some experts predict an additional 15 percent decline in the coming year. Martin Feldstein, president of the National Bureau of Economic Research and an economics professor at Harvard University, says the danger is that home values could decline even further, pushing the economy into deep recession.

Writing in the Washington Post, Feldstein said that about one-fifth of all homeowners with mortgages, about 10 million Americans, already carry mortgage debt that exceeds the value of their homes.

That number could double if home prices continue to decline,

he said. Mortgage defaults and foreclosures hit a 30-year high in the first quarter of this year. If the gap between value and debt continues to widen, the incentive to default could increase at a pace that would send values into a downward spiral. "It is impossible to know where such a self-reinforcing process would stop," he said.

Feldstein's remedy is for the federal government to create a firewall to prevent precipitous decline. All homeowners could replace a portion of their mortgage with a government loan with a lower rate. Such a loan would remove the foreclosure incentive, he said, pointing out that when housing values fall beneath the value of mortgage debt, walking away from the home becomes the best financial option. It's that option that must be removed, he said, adding that Congress should not hesitate to act.

The movie "Wall Street" isn't about the mortgage industry, but, in explaining the root of corruption, the film and the subprime crisis share a common theme. "Greed is good," declares the swashbuckling CEO Gordon Gekko, played by Michael Douglas.

The hundreds, perhaps thousands, of perpetrators of the subprime crisis may be having second thoughts about that credo. The FBI isn't finished with its sweep. More perp walks lie ahead.

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THE DAILY GLEAN

Pawlenty VP candidate? Not that much straight talk

By DOUG GROW

Sen. John McCain's visit — for a town hall meeting and a fundraiser — was the major story of the day across the media spectrum. In the words of the PiPress, McCain held “an intimate conversation” with about 200 people at St. Paul's Landmark Center. He was, of course, asked whether Gov. Tim Pawlenty would be his choice as a running mate and, as the governor blushed, McCain dodged.

The Landmark Center visit was about getting media attention. Another Twin Cities stop, at the Hilton Hotel, was about cash. The McCain campaign was not saying how much was raised, though certainly he lags behind Barack Obama mightily in fundraising in Minnesota. The Strib published a fascinating Federal Elections Commission map showing, by zipcode, where Obama has raised his \$1.6 million and McCain his \$532,694 in Minnesota.

The Twin Cities has made another of those Top 10 lists that we're usually so proud of. But there won't be much pride about our ranking this time. The Strib's Dan Browning reports that the FBI is rating the Twin Cities in its top 10 hotbeds of mortgage fraud cases. No rea-

son given for why the mortgage crooks have found the region so fruitful, but the feds currently have 40 investigations underway in the region.

Everybody is talking about the weather, but there was an interesting juxtaposition of weather-related chatter on WCCO-TV. University of Minnesota geologist Chris Paola talked to Jason DeRusha about how modifications in the land - replacing wetlands with cornfields, etc. - have worsened flooding. That report was followed by a news story of a White House report Thursday stating that Midwest flooding is linked to human-caused global warming. A few minutes later, WCCO's Mike Fairbourne was on the air. Fairbourne, you may recall, is among flat-earthers who claim that the human touch in global warming is based on “squishy science.” He kept his thoughts to himself during his weather report. By the way, Strib outdoor writer Dennis Anderson had a thoughtful column about how land-use has helped set the stage for flooding.

Four dollar a gallon gasoline - and how to avoid it - remains a major news topic. reported how a solar-powered car that had been traveling across the country was stopped, by red tape, in Stillwater. Police

insisted that the solar-folks get a different escort vehicle before driving on state roads. Meantime, KARE-TV had a report of increasing sales of a Minnesota-built electric vehicle. WCCO-TV reported that Schwan Foods has been delivering its products in propane-fueled trucks since the gas crisis of the 1970s. And the Pi-Press reported that Metro Transit ridership is up 8.6 per cent from a year ago.

On the subject of energy and where to find it, MPR raised questions about whether it was economically and environmentally feasible to harvest biomass for fuel from forests.

Minneapolis and St. Paul, the twins that work so hard at getting along, may have a spat over which city ends up with a Microsoft development office. The Pi Press reports that though the office is small - just 70 employees - it is Microsoft's first software development office in the region. A site in downtown St. Paul and two sites in Northeast Minneapolis are being scouted, with the winner expected to be announced in a few weeks.

In the lost and found department: The Strib's Mary Lynn Smith has a follow-up story about Gaylord's Abby Flantz and Erica Nelson of Las Vegas

and their overnight trip in the Alaskan wilderness that ended up lasting six grueling days. The women survived on Grano-la bar crumbs, rainwater, prayer and the conviction that at any moment they'd find their way. The search for the two women, which ended Wednesday, likely will cost about \$120,000.

You're going to have to pay a hefty price - beyond the entrance fee - to run in Grandma's Marathon along the North Shore tomorrow. The Strib's Paul Levy writes that Duluth hotels are charging as much as \$500 a night this weekend. Just to make sure the gouging really hurts, the hotels are insisting on two nights lodging.

Do the Washington Nationals really have to leave town? The Twins completed a three-game sweep over the squad that has maintained Washington's tradition of really lousy baseball teams with a 9-3 victory Thursday afternoon. Check out the Washington Post view of the game and the Young family reunion. Next up for the Twins, the Arizona Diamondbacks.

MinnPost inPrint

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Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

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Even Gov. Tim Pawlenty, in introducing McCain, exuded the air of a college professor. (The vice presidency did come up, with no proclamations from either Pawlenty of McCain; more on that later.) Pawlenty said he hoped the event would be “informative and instructive,” and that we’d all see that McCain “calls it as he sees it” – a reference not only to the fabled Straight Talk Express, but also a counter to Obama’s arcing oratory.

“He’s going to be a great president,” Pawlenty quietly intoned, “and I present John McCain.”

A low-key stump speech

And with that McCain emerged – gray suit, light gray shirt, orange tie -- to modest applause. The candidate immediately invoked his record on campaign finance reform, then lamented the news that his rival had opted out of public money for the race. He quoted an old news story where Obama said he would stick to public dollars.

“Obviously, I’m very disappointed,” McCain said, that Obama “would go back on his word to the American people.” The effect was to draw McCain as an ordinary guy whose modest means will ensure that he will rely on financing from the people, while Obama has gone all greedy and elite on us.

“My friends,” McCain continued in what has become his campaign verbal tic, “the facts speak for themselves. He ought to renew his commitment not to me, but to the American people.”

Got that? You can’t trust Obama.

Then candidate McCain touched on his “three major themes: reform, prosperity and peace.”

As for the first part, McCain drew his first applause line when he railed against “earmark spending” and vowed as president to veto every earmarked bill.

For the second theme, McCain vaguely spoke of economic turnaround, decrying the state of “Social Security, mortgage payments”

without offering any plans or solutions.

“People need to stay in their own homes, and remain in their house,” he said. “We need to keep people’s taxes lower. I will keep taxes low.”

That drew applause. Who really wants to pay more taxes?

He became excited at the prospect of “becoming independent of foreign oil,” which also drew a cheer, and moved on to one topic that has made him the enemy of many conservatives: climate change. McCain seems sincere in his interest in the topic; he has talked about it throughout his campaign.

“There are three issues that are the nexus,” he said. “Greenhouse gases ... I believe are damaging our planet.” The other two issues related to the environment are “economic recovery” and national security.

On that last front, McCain said that in consuming oil we’re sending money “to countries that don’t like us very much and some of that money ends up in the hands of terrorists.”

It’s a sly shift that is quite likely designed to appeal to moderates who are either nonplussed or somewhat concerned about climate change, while still sticking on the conservative red-meat topic of homeland security and the wars we’ve waged.

Speaking of war – or not, as it were – McCain slid into theme No. 3. Peace.

“Finally, I’d like to talk to you about peace,” he said. “Peace is a precious thing.” He mentioned “two wars” and professed to see good things coming out of both Afghanistan and Iraq, and he stuck to his guns on the issue of higher troop levels on the ground.

“The surge is working and we’re winning in Iraq,” McCain said. “A lot of people don’t want to say that, but we’re winning there.” More applause.

That’s how McCain has played his stance on the war -- despite the “100 years” and “Bomb Iran” gaffes: He was never opposed to invading Iraq, he just knew we had

the wrong strategy going in. It allows him to be distance himself from President Bush while staying on course for a U.S. victory. He said under different circumstances, “I’d say come home immediately,” though it wasn’t clear what those circumstances might be. “If we withdraw like Senator Obama wants to do, there’d be chaos.”

Though somehow the wars became relegated to the back-burner during primary season, McCain clearly thinks he can make hay with it now.

“I am confident we are succeeding,” he said. “My friends, we will come home. We will come home. But we will come home in victory, not in defeat.”

A Q-and-A session

After 20 minutes, the senator opened the session up to q-and-a time. For nearly an hour, McCain took questions from 16 people. He moved about the audience, set up in a square, passed around the microphone himself at times, and thanked everyone for their questions. In short, he did everything in his power to deflate what has become the iconic imagery of the Obama campaign. And, frankly, it’s not a bad bet.

The first question came from a bearded man in a yarmulke, and it was so gushing that one might have wondered out of the gate if the entire thing was scripted.

“I’ve always admired you,” the man said, adding that he was “a little frustrated at all the misinformation on the Internet” and wanted to learn more about both candidates and McCain’s reputation for bipartisanship. “We’re not getting the real John McCain out there.”

What a softball! McCain’s response hardly matters in the face of a “question” like that. He did, however, indicate that people have “asked me to talk more about my past experiences,” presumably meaning his time at the Hanoi Hilton, but McCain, like many veterans, does not dwell on such matters.

(He did crack a joke early on the topic, noting that his wife, Cindy, was absent Thursday night because

she’s in Vietnam volunteering for Operation Smile. “I don’t know if she’ll get a chance to see my old residence,” he said, laughing.)

The second question came from a woman whose son has a “chronic disease” and the family’s health insurance can’t keep up with the bills. McCain, looking positively morose, offered nothing concrete on health care, other than saying to people who want socialized medicine, “I suggest you go to Canada or England.”

Then, strangely, he turned to Pawlenty, and let him take a swing at laying out a health care plan. The best the governor could do was claim that Minnesota “has the lowest rate of uninsured in the country” before mumbling something about the plan we have in Minnesota.

Was that a test or was it planned? Did Pawlenty pass the audition?

More questions came, to varying degrees of difficulty, which is to say they weren’t difficult at all. Energy resources (all for ‘em!), immigrants (for some of ‘em!), taxes (totally against ‘em!) were all touched upon, in a manner that allowed McCain to regurgitate his stump without seeming like he was stumping at all. It’s a smart tactic, putting McCain out there to vaguely answer some general topic questions so that he doesn’t look like he’s lecturing. More importantly, the campaign obviously knows that any attempts to reach the rhetorical heights of Obama would likely fall short.

Last question was from David Story, a 45-year-old insurance agent from Farmington, Minn.

“I think Governor Pawlenty would make an excellent vice president,” he said, to laughter. “What do you think are his chances?”

“This meeting is adjourned,” McCain jokingly retorted, putting Pawlenty in the next generation of leadership for the Republicans, without answering the question. “He has a place in the future of the country as well as the Republican Party. The first is more important.”

Read the complete story at www.minnpost.com.

America needs a new mobility and lifestyle strategy



STEVE BERG

Given the impact of soaring gasoline prices on American life and commerce, it's astonishing that the presidential candidates have had so little of substance to say on the matter.

Yes, there have been clipped verbal exchanges on John McCain's plan for a temporary "gas tax holiday" and on his plea to open the Arctic and other sensitive coastal areas to oil drilling — neither of which would have much impact on supply or price.

But the campaigns have ignored the broader and more important challenge: to scrap our 1950s-era transportation policy — one that encourages and reward maximum driving — and replace it with a new mobility and lifestyle strategy to fit the demands and conditions of a new century.

That is, perhaps, the hardest task we now face as a nation, one that's made more urgent by the dwindling Federal Transportation Trust Fund. You probably don't know it because no one's talking about it, but the fund's highway account will go broke next year. The fund, dependent on federal gasoline-tax revenues, is the lifeblood of transportation investment in the United States. Why will it run dry? The answer should sound familiar to Minnesotans. Federal gas-tax revenues, at their current levels, can't keep up with the demand for new roadways and the cost of repairing the crumbling old ones; the tax has not been raised since 1993.

The good news about the fund going broke is that it should force a new president and Congress to come to terms with harsh reality. Simply raising the tax, even if politically feasible, wouldn't address the fundamental problem: that the world is running out of affordable oil. Especially considering the expansion of Asian economies, the U.S. cannot continue to consume the lion's share of global transportation fuels. Neither our environmental condition nor our foreign policy can afford such heavy reliance on the burning of petroleum, most of which must be imported from unstable countries. A smarter

approach is badly needed — not simply a reauthorization of current practices, but a rethinking of how to sustain the mobility that Americans associate with their basic freedoms.

We are a restless lot. We are accustomed to hopping a plane to Florida or jumping in the car to drive as often and as far as we want. We've arranged our homes, our jobs and our shopping habits in ways that presume a low cost for covering the distances between them by private car. But now, as gas heads toward \$5 a gallon, we will need more travel options and more compact ways of living.

The Brookings Institution published last week an important report that properly frames the question and offers intelligent solutions. "A Bridge to Somewhere: Rethinking American Transportation for the 21st Century" should be high on the reading lists of McCain and Barack Obama.

What follows is a synopsis of that report, peppered with a few comments.

Through our history, transportation investments have determined the shape and condition of our economic success. The Erie Canal and then the railroads spread commerce and prosperity into the frontier and across the continent. A century later, the Interstate Highway System began dictating the spatial patterns in which we now live and work. To imagine an America without the interstates would be to imagine a country almost without fast food, shopping malls, office parks, urban slums, deserted downtowns and all the other features — good and bad — that make up the American landscape.

U.S. ignored warnings of '70s

As a matter of policy, the Interstate act of 1956 formed the first phase of modern transportation investment. Its goals were to enhance commerce and protect the nation from atomic attack. A second phase began in 1991 when a new transportation law broadened the scope to include transit and other modes, but only in a minor way. It's fair to say that U.S. policy generally ignored the warnings of oil-price spikes in 1973 and 1979, and clung

to its 1950s assumption of cheap gas and auto primacy.

Indeed, we didn't learn a thing. By 2000, cars were getting bigger and fuel efficiency had fallen. Americans now burn 61.2 barrels of oil per person per year. France, Japan and the United Kingdom use half that much on a per capita basis.

U.S. policy failed also to recognize the obvious and important connection between transportation and land use. Cheap gas promotes driving and generates sprawl; but energy can be conserved and costs lowered if development is clustered in ways that reduce driving and promote alternative modes of travel. When Portland tried to make land use part of its transportation policy and, thus, work toward reduced driving, the Federal Highway Administration scolded the Oregon city. "The plan should acknowledge that automobiles are the preferred mode of transport," it said.

Indeed, it is federal policy to reward those locales that drive the most. The more you drive, the more you get in federal funds. That, perhaps more than anything, illustrates the nation's need for a third phase of modern transportation policy.

Much has changed since the interstate era began. Household size has dropped dramatically. In 1950, 43 percent of households were couples with kids. Now it's 23 percent. International trade has expanded greatly during that time, making for congested ports. Families have spread themselves farther apart from one another. Just-in-time delivery has greatly increased truck traffic. Poverty has become more concentrated and immutable. Jobs have spread far from downtowns. Cities and towns have been designed to require a car for every trip, even to the corner store — if there is one.

Add to all of that the reality that economic activity has concentrated itself in a relatively few metropolitan areas. The largest 100 metro areas generate 75 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) — and they dominate transportation activity.

Unfortunately, federal transportation policy does not target resources to these larger markets

based on efficiency, but distributes resources to states based on equity. Consequently, too much money goes to rural areas where traffic is light and global competitiveness is relatively unimportant. Congressional "earmarks" for pet projects that may, or may not, be of high priority further corrupt the system.

Taken together, the current transportation policy is obsolete, inefficient and poorly fitted to the nation's economic, environmental and foreign policy needs. Anyone who has traveled in Europe and Japan knows firsthand our transportation shortcomings.

Address sustainability, competitiveness

How to fix things? Brookings proposes a new approach including:

- The nation should clearly state its transportation goals. The object shouldn't be just to distribute the spoils of taxation, but to support the competitiveness and environmental sustainability of the nation.

- More money should go directly to metropolitan areas. Road investments should be subject to the same rigorous cost-effectiveness standards as transit investments.

- Road pricing (tolls) should be part of the mix.

- Regional high-speed rail networks should be expanded beyond the Northeast to augment air travel in busy corridors of 500 miles or less. California, Florida, North Carolina and the Great Lakes region (including the Twin Cities) are top potential markets.

The report is part of a larger Brookings effort to assemble a "Blueprint for American Prosperity." One of the center-left think tank's researchers, Amy Liu, described the project to the Regional Council of Mayors in downtown Minneapolis last week.

The federal government makes a big mistake, she said, by "managing the process but not the outcomes." The United States is "not adapting to big changes in the world," she said.

"This discussion can't just be about the gas tax. That's just pouring more money into a broken system. If that's what we end up doing, everybody loses."

COMMUNITY VOICES

Readers respond: Senate race, Garnett, Carter among topics

The Franken vs. Coleman Senate race continued to prompt a slew of comments from MinnPost readers, along with other recent topics such as a dearth of women in computing, teen smoking, the Magna Carta and, finally, a championship ring for Kevin Garnett. Here's a sampling:

Paul Brandon commented on Eric Black's Monday post, "New KSTP-TV poll finds wider Coleman lead over Franken":

Until the robopolls poll cell phones, they won't mean squat. I suspect that all the polls have this problem to some extent. Younger voters in particular do not use land lines, and are thus transparent to most polling. Unless a poll targets a specific sample of individuals and does whatever is necessary to reach them, it's not going to produce a representative sample.

As far as the race is concerned:

It's early, Coleman is the incumbent, and Franken has just begun to spend his money.

If I were Coleman I'd be worried.

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Aaron Landry was among those weighing in on Tuesday's Community Voices essay, "Franken shouldn't have to apologize for his past satire or 'bad' words," by David Mindeman, a community activist and a blogger for mnpACT:

It has been interesting watching the media be the lapdog for this type of crap. Thanks for

saying what needs to be said more often.

From Mike Keliher:

I was eager to read this column, and while I agree with your main point, your arguments seem silly.

First Amendment right? Of course he has that; I don't think anyone's suggested anything to the opposite.

This is all the work of opposition research? Of course it is. Just like being a satirist used to be Franken's job, digging up dirt and trying to make hay of it is an opposition researcher's job.

You commented about Coleman's past, as well, and how that shouldn't pertain to his quest for this present-day job. I disagree; it should all be considered, and certain things should be weighed more than others.

I would have expected – or wanted to read – a cogent defense along these lines: Franken's Playboy writings or SNL brainstorming contributions shouldn't matter in this election because THEY ARE JOKES. Lighten up, people!

An excerpt from Kevin Judd's comment:

Franken did not have to apologize for his comments. He was not facing prosecution, legal action, loss of income or government strongarms. He apologized because his words have infuriated Democrats, both progressives and moderate.

He apologized not to the Republican opposition researchers, but to the DFL convention delegates. He apologized because his nomination was in danger.

You can take two views of the reaction among Democrats. I think there were those like (progressive) Betty [McCollum] and (moderate) Tim Walz who were genuinely offended by the stuff he'd written, satire or no. The cynical view is that they were mad because they wanted the Senate seat or (as with [McCollum]) they wanted another candidate. I lean toward the first explanation; these two are former teachers and they were genuinely offended and incensed by this writing, particularly the passages relating to youth.

Whichever view you take, though, this was not an attack from the Vast Right Wing Conspiracy (that is yet to come). ...

From Betty Tisel:

Maybe Al does not have to apologize. But if he does not, and does not apologize sincerely, he -- and we -- must accept the consequences. Making a brief apology at the DFL convention is not adequate, in my opinion. Al will get my vote because he is a way better choice than Norm Coleman. But Al has a long way to go if he wants to earn my respect.

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Eric Black's Wednesday analysis, "Coleman vs. Franken race so far: Lots of dust that keeps settling in the same place," also drew comments, including this from

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Karl Bremer commented on Susan Albright's June 10 MinnPost.World essay, "Is Obama the next Carter? McCain seems to think so":

You could do a lot worse than use Jimmy Carter as a model with regard to energy policy. If the energy policy Carter put forth in 1977 had been adopted by this country then, we wouldn't be in the energy mess we're in today. Indeed, with some modifications, Obama could dust it off and use it as a starting point for his own. Now, like then, it will require some sacrifice on the part of most Americans to achieve energy independence. But isn't that better than the sacrifice of tens – or hundreds – of thousands of lives for foreign oil as we've done under Bush-Cheney-Coleman?

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Scott Gibson appreciated Steve Aschburner's Tuesday story, "Update: After 12 years often filled with frustration in Minnesota, KG finally wins his championship ring":

One magnificent piece of writing. It captures this special time for Wolves fans/KG fans very well. Upon seeing the final game and watching KG's post-game, emotion-filled meltdown, you can't help but feel great empathy for his journey. Such genuine feeling. We were fortunate to be able to watch him for so long. I do think most of us were aware of how lucky we were to witness his performances for such a long period of time. We didn't get to be part of the championship, but we do have our memories, too.

Want to add your voice?

If you're interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at salbright@minnpost.com.