

After Obama's week abroad, voters assess trip's impact

By SHARON SCHMICKLE

Sen. Barack Obama met acclaim in Europe this week, won key allies in Baghdad, scored some diplomatic talk in the Middle East and argued for stepping up force in Afghanistan.

Now it is up to American voters to decide what, if any, value there was in this ambitious foreign tour by the presumed Democratic presidential nominee.

Obama told reporters en route to Germany that the world is "hungry for a sense of where America is going." Americans may very well share that hunger — and, taking it further, wonder where Obama's foreign policy would go if he won the election.

Europe: Time to make up with old friends

Obama's choice of Berlin for his major foreign policy speech is telling in itself. It signaled an interest in making up with old friends in Europe after a nasty fallout during this decade.

In Berlin on Thursday, Obama introduced himself to a massive crowd as "a proud citizen of the United States and a fellow citizen of the world," CNN reported. And he declared that "there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one."

It was a different note from the one former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld sounded in 2003, when he dismissed France and Germany as "Old Europe," after they opposed the invasion of Iraq. "Old Europe" came under ridicule from conservative commentators and activists. Remember "Freedom Fries"?

Other slurs included "the axis of weasel" and "cheese-eating surrender monkeys."

The last Democratic presidential nominee, Sen. John Kerry, drew jeers during his 2004 campaign because he spoke fluent French and actually gave interviews in French with European reporters.

Europe gave back as bad as it got, expressing utter contempt for President Bush and his policies. Even as France and Germany chose more conservative leaders than those who had adamantly opposed the invasion of Iraq, it was common for Americans walking the streets of Berlin, Paris and London to hear anti-Bush rants.

Now many American voters are deeply troubled by disdain for their country, not only from old European friends but from around the world, too, said Barbara Crosby, a professor at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute whose specialty is leadership in a trans-national context.

"I don't think people worried about it so much in 2004 as today," Crosby said. "Americans like to be liked. We don't like to think that when we travel abroad people are seeing us as the stereotypical 'ugly American.' We want to be respected."

Poll findings reported in June by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press support her observation. Seven in 10 of the Americans polled said that the United States is less respected by other countries these days. And for the first time since Pew began asking the question in 2004, a majority saw the loss of international respect as a major problem — 56 percent this year, compared

with 43 percent in 2005.

A fascinating finding was that the greatest shift on the issue had occurred among Republicans. Forty-three percent of them said the loss of global respect represents a major problem, up from just 26 percent two years ago.

Given his warm reception abroad, Obama's tour showed that he has a chance of turning foreign policy in a positive direction, Crosby said. Part of his appeal, especially to young people, she said, is that he strikes voters as "somebody who wants to open a new chapter in the way we are in the world, the way we deal with various policy issues."

Obama impact still a puzzle

To Europeans, Obama symbolizes a reinvigoration of support for multilateral institutions, a change of direction in Iraq, and a greater commitment to addressing such problems as climate change, said Jane Gingrich, a political science professor at the University of Minnesota who specializes in European politics.

Even before the trip, Obama's victory in this year's primaries "gives Europeans hope that America's foreign policy stance may be undergoing more fundamental change," Gingrich said.

"Many Europeans, including European leaders, though, are likely still trying to figure out what Obama would mean in more precise terms on NATO, Afghanistan, Iraq," and other pressing issues, she said.

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Full course: Wine flights and jazz on the menu at Cue



**PAMELA
ESPELAND**

Only at Cue can you hear Maud Hixson sing “Star Dust” and enjoy a wine flight chosen to complement her music — three “smooth, elegant and alluring whites.” Or, if you prefer, three “classic, soft and sultry reds.”

Pairing wine with food is done all the time, but wine with jazz? That’s attention to detail, and also a flight (pardon the pun) of imagination on the part of Cue manager Jeffrey Fisher.

Such pairings are part of the total experience he offers people who visit his restaurant: Fine food made with fresh local ingredients, served in a glamorous space with world-class wines accompanied by high-quality entertainment.

Fisher wants to engage all of your senses, filling your ears with music as tasteful as the food.

Located on the ground floor of the new Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, under the cobalt curve at the north end, Cue began featuring live jazz last summer and continued through New Year’s Eve. It resumed in mid-June with an ambitious calendar of music every Friday and Saturday through September.

Plans are under way for October through December and, if Fisher gets his wish, into 2009.

Rather than present a different act every weekend, Fisher chose a half-dozen singers and groups, then scheduled them in rotation. Hixson and singer Arne Fogel anchor the calendar; she’s booked for eight nights, he for seven. Others include singer/pianist Alicia Wiley, the Dean Brewington Quartet, singer Charmin Michelle and the R&B/soul/jazz/funk group BKS Vine.

All have their own wine flights chosen by Cue sommelier Jessica Neilson.



Courtesy of Cue at the Guthrie

Cue is on the ground floor of the Guthrie Theater.

Synergies

Why jazz? “Our venue is stylistically great with jazz,” Fisher says. “People say our place feels sexy. Jazz is very synergistic with our architecture, lighting and décor.”

Cue is a sexy place, unless your idea of sexy is a room at the FantaSuite. Ceilings are high, tables well-spaced, appointments elegant, lights twinkly, surfaces luxe. The predominant color is blue. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the outdoors, pricey condos, and the giant head of playwright Arthur Miller on one of the building’s outside panels.

The music is presented like a meal, with courses. The first course, scheduled for the earlier hours of the evening, is lighter, more subdued — music to dine by, chat by and enjoy as background, like the view. The second course, which begins after the dining room closes and once the lounge area begins filling up, is livelier and more assertive.

Some jazz fans will be horrified by the idea of music as ambi-

ence, and by a place that expects performers to keep it down for the dinner crowd. But upscale venues and steady gigs for jazz artists are few and far between. More common are places with cramped stages, crappy audio systems, and cranky bartenders. In one local club, the TVs above the bar are left on during live performances.

Hixson and Fogel both love Cue. They enjoy performing there. And they feel respected and appreciated by Fisher and his staff.

“Cue is a classic nightclub experience,” Fogel says. “Almost Hollywood-like in sumptuousness.”

“It’s gorgeous,” Hixson agrees. “I don’t mind at all fitting into what [Fisher and his staff] want us to do and being there for them. ... We are treated as quality performers and considered special.”

Fisher’s willingness to schedule several months out offers singers like Hixson and Fogel the rare luxury of booking their bands in advance. “It’s been years since I’ve been able to pick a crew and work together on a regular basis,”

Hixson says.

Her band includes her husband, pianist Rick Carlson, along with bassist Steve Pikal and Nathan Norman on drums; their repertoire is drawn from the 1930s and ‘40s. You can hear them tonight, July 25. Fogel performs with the Tanner Taylor Trio; their music is drawn from the Great American Songbook. Their next Cue date is Friday, Aug. 1. For future dates, see the calendar on Cue’s website. <http://www.cueatguthrie.com/entertain.html>

Don’t be intimidated by the address or the elegance. “We’re affordable and approachable,” Fisher says. “You can come down, enjoy the music, have a nice glass of wine — it’s a great value. You don’t have to spend a lot of money.”

“When more people know about Cue,” Fogel predicts, “it could rival some of the top music places, because it’s such a nice experience to be in there.”

Upcoming picks

Maud Hixson: Thoughtful, subtle, sophisticated music. Cue at the Guthrie, Friday, July 25, 8 p.m. (no cover).

Debbie Duncan: Fresh from her run in “Blues in the Night” at the Ordway, the magnificent Miss Duncan is back in the clubs. We’ve missed her. The Artists’ Quarter, Friday, July 25-Saturday, July 26, 9 p.m. (\$10).

Rossum Electric Company: Personally, I can’t wait to hear the sounds Kelly Rossum makes with his “electrumpet.” Read a preview here. Late Night at the Dakota, Saturday, July 26, 11:30 p.m. (\$5).

Favre flirtation enlivens the summer, but 'legacy' of Vikings No. 4 jersey is safe



PAT BORZI

For many years, Gerry Cosby and Co., a New York-based sporting goods store based out of Penn Plaza and Madison Square Garden, displayed a New York Rangers sweater in its window that reflected a brief, wistful moment at the end of a great career.

In 1980, the Rangers invited Bobby Hull, a future Hockey Hall of Famer but vastly over the hill at that point, to training camp, hoping he might have enough left to pop in a goal from time to time. But after 23 seasons in the NHL and World Hockey Association, Hull was done, and the Rangers cut him.

Cosby's had been the Rangers' primary outfitter for decades, and a Hull No. 9 sweater found a prominent place in a display. You couldn't look up at it without wondering how the Golden Jet might have skated in his prime as a Broadway Blueshirt, speeding down left wing, unloading that big slap shot.

That memory flashed back with all the commotion over Brett Favre perhaps coming to the Vikings, something that now

appears to have as much chance as the Twins winning another regular-season game at the present Yankee Stadium. (That would be zero, if you're scoring at home.)

Presuming he claimed his familiar No. 4 from rookie John David Booty, Favre would have been the most notable player in Vikings history to don that number the moment he pulled it over his head. No blasphemy here; the Vikings haven't had many No. 4s in their history, at least according to the alumni list at Vikings.com. Almost all have been kickers or punters, and a few have been beauts.

Doug Brien (2002) missed two extra points in an eventual overtime loss to Buffalo, annoying Coach Mike Tice to the point he called the postgame radio show on his drive home to rip him. Tice cut Brien soon after.

In 2003, the number fell to punter Eddie Johnson, a one-season wonder best known for pulling into training camp with the oldest, ugliest car in the lot — a 1972 Chevy El Camino he bought for \$1,500 from a guy in California when he was 15. The car was in such shaky condition that Johnson paid

\$700 to have it shipped from Pocatello, Idaho, to Mankato on a flatbed. Not everyone found this quirky or funny; crusty defensive tackle Chris Hovan said Johnson made enough money to drive a real car.

The best-known No. 4: Quarterback Archie Manning, father of Peyton and Eli, who played here in 1983 and '84. Booty is believed to be the first non-kicker to wear it since.

Judging by talk radio and message boards, some Vikings fans would rather chug green bile or push their propane grills over a cliff than accept Favre in purple and white. That's silly. That the Vikings seriously considered this (and of course they did, no matter how the tampering charges play out) shows they understand their roster, their standing, and their narrow window of opportunity.

Adding Jared Allen gave the defense what it lacked, a Lawrence Taylor-type disrupter that offensive coordinators must compensate for. But Pat Williams, Darren Sharper and Antoine Winfield, the veteran playmakers, are all in their 30s. This might be the last prime season for all three.

The 2000-01 Baltimore

Ravens demonstrated a team can win a Super Bowl with a dominant defense, a good running game and an average quarterback. The pursuit of Favre suggests some internal doubt about the readiness of Tavaris Jackson, and Jackson must dispel that notion as camp progresses and the regular season starts. Favre might not be a Pro Bowler, but he could handle the job competently when competence is all that's required. Year Three of the Brad Childress era might be the last if the Vikings don't make the playoffs this time.

If nothing else, the Favre talk put the Vikings near the top of the sports discussion at a time when nothing much besides baseball is happening here. Plus, the Vikings desperately need to create momentum for a new stadium that few, outside the team and the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission, appear interested in building. Favre provided a provocative distraction that, in a few days, will run its course, leaving the legacy of the Vikings' No. 4 to Mr. Booty.

Judging by talk radio and message boards, some Vikings fans would rather chug green bile or push their propane grills over a cliff than accept Favre in purple and white.

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Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

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One rub was apparent even as Obama arrived in Germany. He wants more support for fighting terrorists in Afghanistan. Germany has resisted deeper involvement in hostilities there.

While Europe greeted Obama as a veritable rock star, the press there is trying to tamp down sky-high expectations, Gingrich said, warning that Obama may "not deliver a dramatic change in foreign policy."

First, of course, Obama would need to win the election. And his popularity in Europe is not likely to sway many votes here, said Steven Schier, political science professor at Carleton College.

"The people who are impressed by European public opinion have already decided Obama is their candidate," Schier said.

Even within that group, too much courting of European favor could backfire, Schier said, "if he is perceived as campaigning overseas and trying to win American votes through European endorsement."

Voters who have yet to make up their minds in Minnesota are paying scant attention to presidential politics at this point, Schier said. Given that reality, the overseas trip best serves Obama and his foreign policy agenda as part of a gradual effort, not as a signal of any dramatic shift in America's dealings around the world.

Iraq: Good timing for Obama

Obama declared in advance that this would be a listening trip, not a policy-shaping one. But a major policy shift rocked his stop in Baghdad.

After Obama met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Malaki, an Iraqi spokesman announced that the government wants to see foreign combat troops withdraw at the end of 2010, only eight months after Obama's withdrawal target. Obama's Republican rival, Sen. John McCain, has consistently opposed setting timelines for drawing down the troops.

Call it luck. Or call it good timing. Whatever it is, Obama arrived in Baghdad at precisely the time

when Iraqis decided to openly assert their desire for the day when foreign boots will leave their soil.

Still, Obama's plan faces a critical test: Can the Iraqi government hold onto its fragile stability and pull together the factions that threaten to plunge the country back into bloodshed?

Abbas Mehdi says it can. The St. Cloud State University professor was born in Iraq, and he returned to his homeland in spring 2006 to work for 16 months as a strategy and policy adviser to the Iraqi government. Before he left in 2007, he went on to work as chairman of the board of the Iraq National Investment Commission, a cabinet-level position in al-Malaki's office.

Even while many Iraqis are grateful for liberation from their former dictator, they are immensely weary of war. And they are fed up over a drip-drip-drip of cultural clashes with the foreign troops that have patrolled the country for five years, said Mehdi, whose family still lives in Iraq.

While headlines focused on major American gaffes, such as abuse of Iraqis held at Abu Ghraib prison, Mehdi said, ordinary Iraqis chafed over relatively smaller insults, like searches of homes with dogs that were offensive to devout Muslims.

So intense is Iraqis' desire to be free of foreign troops that it is a unifying force for competing factions in the country, he said.

"Almost every tribal, community, religious and political leader would like to see the foreign forces out of the country," he said.

And while the Bush administration emphasized that Iraq has its own sovereign government, the reality in government offices where Mehdi worked was that American officials often were calling the shots, he said.

"There is a lot of frustration over this," he said. "Sometimes Iraqi officials sitting in their offices would hear from the TV that some person was arrested or some town was attacked, and they hadn't known anything about it. ... It happened while I was there, and it's happening now."

Obama's trip, in and of itself, added almost nothing of substance,

Mehdi said. Instead, it reinforced a policy Obama has touted all along: It's time for the Iraqis to run their own affairs.

"That's what the Iraqi government wants, and that's what Obama has been saying for a long time," Mehdi said.

Iran: Cryptic stands still unclarified

Looming over Obama's stops in Iraq and all of the Middle East are questions about he would handle tension with Iran.

In Israel, Obama told the Jerusalem Post that he would do "everything in my power" to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Obama has said he would engage in discussions with Iran; however, he also reminded the Post, "I would not take any options off the table, including military."

Professor William Beeman wishes he knew how Obama's tough campaign talk would translate into policy if the Democrat took office. Beeman chairs the Anthropology Department at the University of Minnesota. He has worked extensively in Iran. His latest book about the country is "The 'Great Satan' vs. the 'Mad Mullahs': How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other."

"The plain truth is that any politician in the United States, whether Democrat or Republican, who talks about trying to improve relations with Iran through some kind of relaxation of the really hard line that the United States has taken are setting themselves up as a target for their opponents," Beeman said. "No politician has ever lost a vote by attacking Iran."

So Beeman discounts some of Obama's tough talk.

Recent Bush administration moves to at least open the door to meeting with Iranian officials were hard fought, Beeman said, because they were opposed by hardliners inside and outside government offices.

"Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had to jawbone and fight and cajole over more than a period of a year," he said.

If Obama became president, though, he would be in position to take the talks much further, "be-

cause diplomacy is made in the White House," Beeman said.

While Obama has consistently advocated a more open dialog, he has been cryptic about how far he would go in any direction on the politically treacherous issue. And his trip didn't clarify his intentions.

Pakistan: Perhaps the most urgent issue

Also unclear, Beeman said, is how Obama would deal with Pakistan. Arguably, that is the most urgent issue facing the next administration because the Taliban and al-Qaida have moved to regroup in Pakistan's rugged mountain regions.

Everywhere he stopped on the trip, Obama called for stepping up military efforts in neighboring Afghanistan. And he leaned hard on Europe to do its part in that NATO-led effort.

But much of the problem is in Pakistan where the government has been in turmoil all year.

"It is very clear that the United States needs to have a complete re-evaluation of our relationships with the government of Pakistan," Beeman said. "Right now there is no incentive for the Pakistani government to aid the United States in trying to curtail the Taliban or al Qaida."

The havens for those groups are in Pakistan's remote and rugged regions, "where the urbanized and educated Pakistanis don't ever go and they don't care much about," Beeman said.

So there is little internal political pressure to confront the menacing groups. Meanwhile, as long as the groups remain a problem, the United States channels money to the Pakistani government. So there is no real economic incentive either.

Beeman worries that Obama "is very thin on the ground" in terms of foreign policy advisers regarding Pakistan as well as Iran. And he saw nothing in Obama's trip to reassure him on that count.

"I'm really quite worried about this, because I think he is not particularly well informed," Beeman said. "And this is potentially his biggest trouble in the long run."

The Daily Glean: A bad day for the Valleyfair race-baiters

By DAVID BRAUER

Oh, the forces of racial division are going to hate this: turns out the victim, not just the alleged perps in the Valleyfair beating, were black. Police released the detail because so many were braying for the six suspects to be charged with a hate crime, the Strib's Jim Adams reports. The victim's wife wonders why so many people thought her husband was white. Jason Lewis and KQRS are obliquely blamed for the race-baiting; were they contacted for comment?

The St. Paul Ford plant's extended life, to 2011, catches some as bittersweet. The Strib notes 1,600 workers took buyouts expecting a sooner shuttering; KSTP talks to some. Beyond that half-empty note, one DFLer says there's more time to design next-gen-plant subsidies. The Ranger truck's relative gas miserliness saved the day; the PiPress says the four-cylinder option is booming, even as sales ticked down a comparatively small 4 percent. Workers are paid \$14.20-\$30 an hour.

More Ford: The plant's tooling was paid for years ago, but to survive beyond 2011, retooling is needed, squandering that advantage. However, MPR's Annie Baxter says an imported-truck tariff works in the plant's favor. However, the Strib says the St. Paul plant is still a ways from Ford's supply chain and the real estate is still prime. St. Paul officials like the breathing room to study redevelopment.

A new poll showing Barack Obama with a surprisingly narrow 2-point lead over John McCain fronts the Strib but only rates page B5 in the PiPress. While the Strib headline breathlessly translates the single sur-

vey into "McCain pulls even," reporter Bob von Sternberg accurately contextualizes the Quinnipiac survey as an outlier (for now) and nicely contrasts a vastly different Rasmussen survey showing a double-digit Obama lead and a narrow Norm Coleman margin (that last is an outlier, too.)

The PiPress's Frederick Melo catalogs a litany of failures at Ramsey County's new 911 center: calls lost during a 90-minute period, others sent into the ether, etc. The center's director is considering legal action against a software vendor; he adds that technicians are chewing through the problems that he believes aren't overwhelming. However, with the Republican convention on the way, some are worried.

The U.S. House passed Minnesota Congressman Jim Oberstar's \$1 billion bridge reconstruction plan. The Strib's Kevin Diaz says Minnesota officials are mad the bill mandates certain bridges be fixed. Every Minnesota representative voted aye, but Senate prospects remain "unclear." One bit of context needed: How many bridges conceivably get fixed for \$1 bil?

Complicating a partisan narrative, now it's a GOP Congressional candidate with tax problems. Dr. Brian Davis, the 1st District endorsee, was delinquent on his property taxes 10 consecutive times over five years, the Strib's Kevin Duchschere reports. Davis calls it an "unfortunate oversight" and says he has no excuse.

Minnesota Independent's Paul Demko takes an in-depth look at where the money-besotted 3rd District campaign contributions are coming

from; DFL nominee Ashwin Madia is getting money from unions, national Democrats, the netroots and Americans of Indian heritage; the GOP's Erik Paulsen has raised almost all his dough in-state. MPR's Curtis Gilbert goes into more detail about Madia's India-American fundraising connections.

Today's RNC protest update: GOP organizers helpfully scheduled an opening-day afternoon meeting. That means marchers may be able to shout at real humans, not just the Xcel Center's glittery walls. The Monday session starts at 2:30 p.m.; protesters have to be out a half-hour later, the Strib's Randy Furst reports.

The Strib's Emily Johns localizes a national survey showing girls do as well as boys on 2nd-to-11th-grade math tests: Minnesota high school junior girls have slightly lower scores than boys. About 36 percent of 11th-grade boys were proficient on a state assessment, compared to 33 percent of girls.

The Strib editorial page defaults to "more discussion needed" in the wake of an \$853 million Vikings stadium concept, but badgers the Vikings and Sports Facilities Commission for a financing plan so it can take a stand.

Finance & Commerce's Arundhati Parmar notes that 3M will lay off 300 optical workers, mostly in the U.S. The layoffs could come from among Wisconsin and Alabama film plants and the Maplewood headquarters. Meanwhile, the company's international sales are rising.

Another suburban business is moving to downtown Minneapolis, reports the Strib's Susan Feyder. This time it's DLR

Group, a 64-person architect/engineering firm formerly in Eden Prairie. Not Best Buy, for sure, but it's man-bites-dog, and Feyder lists three other firms that have recently relocated. DLR execs specifically mention transit options, but they get a special incentive: they're redesigning the Nicollet Mall building they'll only occupy two floors of. Just wondering: How many downtown businesses have fled for the 'burbs recently?

Excellent stupid criminal story from the always-reliable PiPress: man steals surveillance cameras, caught on tape. After surveying the visuals, police found a dozen cameras at the home of Daniel John Shetka, Mara Gottfried reports. He claims they weren't stolen from St. Paul's Arlington Hills library, and has been released pending further investigation. Still, a police spokesman quips, "They're not smart — that's why they're criminals."

The Strib's Paul Walsh notes Jessica Lange dumping on Stillwater as she tries again to sell her house there: what once "felt like a real place" is now "all gift shops and those terrible condominiums." Way to talk up the value, Jess. The asking price has slid from \$3.3 million in 2004 to \$1.95 mil now. Some reader-commenters agree with Lange, by the way.

Nort spews: a much-needed Twins off-day. The Lynx get back to .500 with an 84-80 overtime win versus Indiana; the team ranks next-to-last in WNBA attendance, the Strib's Roman Augustoviz reports.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Reader Roundup: Stadiums, grammar, silos prompt prose and poetry

Old topics (stadiums and smoking bans) and new ones (light pollution and good grammar) sparked lively comments from Minnpost readers recently. And don't miss the poetry inspired by North Dakota missile silos.

Tony Wagner was among those commenting on Jay Weiner's July 17 post, "Vikings stadium debate takes a decidedly new turn":

I still don't see how a retractable roof is necessary - there will be two brand-new open-air stadiums within two miles of the Dome. Virtually all of the extra events that it is argued this stadium would bring in (conventions, NCAA basketball, a Super Bowl, etc.) would want to be indoors anyway. The retractable roof cost alone was \$200 million in the previous plan, and this new plan would seem a lot more palatable with a fixed roof at \$653 million. ...

Given what we know about the retractable roof cost, I would not be surprised if such a plan still came in at about 50 percent of the proposed new construction cost, around \$425 million now. That would be reasonably close to the Twins and Gophers stadium costs, and it could sneak through the legislature within a few years with financial help from the Vikings and the NFL. Otherwise, it seems the primary argument for new construction is the Vikings' desire for that "new car smell," but I just can't see any other entity willing to pony up \$600+ million to help the Vikings achieve that.

Ben Reichelt chimed in:

What makes anyone think that the final cost will be the proposed cost? When's the last time a large construction project has been on time and on budget? Once they get underway there won't be any turning back, so they just need to get the work started and they're home free.

I hope they get a new stadium, because I think it will help the downtown area, but it will just serve to price out more people, making going to a Vikings game something that rich people get to do.

John Olson summed it up:

Two words: Good luck.

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John E. Iacono had this to say about Eric Black's July 18 post, "Electoral College snapshot II":

I can't remember for sure, but it seems the Dems were the ones arguing for changing the electoral system last time - to a simple majority of total votes cast or something like that.

Looks like those arguments are not likely to surface this year, unless from the other side.

Eric Ferguson responded:

I won't go into details here about why I hate the Electoral College. ... For now, I just want to refute John E. Iacono's point that the Democrats won't argue for changing the Electoral College this year. Even though I like the predicted result, I still hate how we're getting there. I suspect the national polls are a better reflection of public preferences, though we still can't tell from that because pollsters ask

likely voters or registered voters, and the fact only a few states really get to decide the election means most voters lack an incentive to register and vote. If we had a direct popular vote, we would have a very different campaign and the polls would be different too.

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Sally Rolczynski weighed in on Eric Black's July 18 story, "Blogging and talking about mainstream media":

I am a loyal reader of the Star Tribune newspaper. I also enjoy reading MinnPost. And I am a big fan of Don Shelby.

I fear the decline of newspapers, local television news and radio. What blogger is going to quit their job and fly themselves to Iraq to give me an impartial view of the situation?

I believe it would be wise for 'old media' to work together to cover the news as cost-efficiently as possible. It seems bloggers are taking advantage of the old media model for now. What are they going to do without it?

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Bernice Vetsch commented on Sharon Schmickle's Monday essay, "Obama's foreign trip offers benefits and risks aplenty":

Do we really want an "experienced" politician who clings to the neocon dream of world domination via intimidation, pre-emptive wars of choice and "regime change" wherever we think a country has not elected a leader sympathetic to our wishes and/or corporate interests?

Or would we prefer a really smart and diplomatic man

who, according to last week's Newsweek, has thought long and deeply about the moral implications of living and of governing and, like Abraham Lincoln, does not hope that God is on our side but that we are on His?

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Mac Riddel liked state Sen. John Marty's Tuesday Community Voices essay, "Cut transit fares to 25 cents":

Brilliant!! The benefit of this would be huge, and as Sen. Marty points out, the cost would be low. The Twin Cities does need a lot more bus routes and if this legislation miraculously goes through, many more routes would be added due to demand. There would be fewer cars on the road, so less accidents, less smog, and the impact of the gas prices will be lessened.

Where it currently fails miserably, Minnesota now has the chance to become a leader in mass transit. Who else can be as bold as the author to make this become a reality?

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Eileen Bock added a suggestion to Christina Capecci's Wednesday post, "Grammar Girl assists Minnesota-nice armchair editors":

Fogarty's book should be mandatory in Minnesota's schools. People will learn that it is improper to say, "I seen a movie yesterday." (Just one of my many grammar pet peeves.)

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.