

Opinions

POLITICS:

Media focused too much on scandals, not enough on substantive issues

Walk through a cluster of street peddlers, carts set up, and endure their exasperated offers, their accolades for their own wares and the haughty condemnation of the competition. Perhaps you'll succumb to one offer, perhaps one particularly shiny item dangling off the display's side draws your attention.



Morgan Little
Columnist

The moment you show interest, the vendor leaps out from behind his products and takes you by the shoulder, forcefully showing you everything else vaguely connected to your brief interest. Congratulations, you've just gone through the presidential race, which has finally begun with Sen. Hillary Clinton's withdrawal.

In a bizarre twist, the two candidates, both of whom have rather strong personalities (one driven by charisma and the other by a mix of self-depreciation and rage) haven't actually been leading their own campaigns. Instead, all momentum and every development has originated from that newfangled Internet thing or shockingly, old-school media.

So far, it's come out that Sen. Barack Obama sends secret terrorist hand signals to his followers, his wife is a "baby mama," if he wins, the White House will have to be aptly renamed and he still hates America (all of this courtesy of FOXNews, the Texas Republican Convention and every Republican respectively).

As for Sen. John McCain, he once called his wife - who at one time was a drug addict who stole painkillers from her own charity - the "C" word in front of reporters and he's backpedaled on nearly every major issue with a grace that brings tears to John Kerry's eyes (and all of this is courtesy of either McCain or his wife).

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intelligent or likeable, a double-take is in order, which leaves us desensitized to issues that should be raised higher in the public consciousness.

The noise from the street peddlers has reached the point of white noise, a raucous, belligerent whine that plays over everything significant. They promise us videos of Michelle Obama slandering 'whitey' that don't exist or documentation of McCain's senior moments, which if the Internet is to be believed, are so common that videos of McCain correctly naming world leaders should be shocking news.

The semi-scandal that holds the strongest implication is the issue of McCain's complete lack of understanding of the information revolution. During the Republican primary, McCain freely admitted that he doesn't know how to work a computer, chuckling while he said that Cindy McCain takes care of such things. At first glance, it doesn't seem so bad. Old guy can't use a computer - it's like a tired joke in a family sitcom, nothing major.

But thinking in such a manner undermines the massive changes that have taken place thanks to the computer age.

It's not merely an issue of knowing gigabytes from megabytes, it's a matter of philosophy. The way the American mind works and the way the mind receives information has been altered, and without first-hand experience, McCain can't hope to understand what's going on around him.

Already, his lack of understanding in this field has nearly crippled two important elements of his campaign: his fundraising and the straight-talk express. As Obama proved during his own fundraising, the Internet is full of people willing to toss their money at candidates (remember how much money Ron Paul raised?) and it was because of his massive Internet infrastructure that he was swimming in cash while Hillary, who relied on tried-and-true fundraising methods early in her campaign, was around \$30 million in debt. McCain, despite his Republican ties, is having ridiculous difficulty raising money, in part due to his lack of

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understanding of the importance of Internet donors.

The derailing of the straight-talk express ties back into that maddening street marketplace. For years, McCain has wooed the media through carefully constructed admissions that were safe enough to make reporters happy and fill their notepads, leaving them with no want to dig further into McCain's bone yard and closet.

But with traditional media increasingly in the backseat of election coverage, online sources who aren't won over by McCain's sly public confessions or his readiness to befriend and assist reporters in order to placate them, are relentlessly exposing his dirty dealings. The difference between television coverage of McCain and Internet coverage is dramatic, with the Internet becoming increasingly critical of his every move, while the networks are still swooning over the 'maverick' who was robbed of his chance in 2000.

Call it a changing of the guard, a battle between the baby boomers and those perpetually connected youngsters, what have you. Like it or not, this election will be defined not by press conferences and photo-ops with carefully chosen 'average Americans.' Instead, the hard-nosed and sometimes extremist Internet news junkies will dictate its course. For better or for worse, that crowded and irritating market is what we have to look forward to come November.

POLITICS:

Trust Obama? Recent decision suggests nominee makes empty promise

I was sitting down at the dinner table, talking about politics with my family when my mother told me that I needed to be more "open-minded." Most of the time, my mother's advice is reasonable, but in this case I took offense. As a liberal, I consider myself to be the definition of "open-mindedness."

After excusing myself from the table, I started to think about it.

My ardent, outspoken support of Hillary Clinton may have clouded my judgment and objectivity.

So, I decided it was only fair to take another look at Barack Obama. And here's what I found:

On Thursday, June 19, Obama formally announced that he would not accept public financing for his general campaign in the fall.

That decision was newsworthy, but that's not even the whole story.

Ever since the primary season started, Obama has said that he would accept public financing if the Republican nominee did the same, and repeated that pledge on a number of occasions.

John McCain has accepted public financing, true to his word.

Obama did nothing of the sort.

Instead, his campaign went into spin-mode, and he released an unconvincing video on his Web site where he attempted to rationalize his decision to forgo public financing - a flip-flop of epic proportions.

Obama's reasoning? The "public financing of presidential elections... is broken," or so he says. Now, whether that's true is debatable.

Regardless, the public financing system didn't break over night. If

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Derek Kiszely
Columnist

It's about trust.

Now this election is about many things, but I think trust is one of the most important issues.

What worries me is that Obama has made many promises that we - perhaps naively? - trust him to keep. His commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq upon taking office comes to mind.

This hesitation about Obama's ability to keep his promises ought to be a red flag for his supporters. It requires a little bit of blind faith to support Obama, a move that I've come to respect in some of my Democratic friends for their steadfastness, even if I've chided them for their willingness to gamble with our future so nonchalantly.

Obama really believed it to be broken all this time, why pledge to stand by it from the beginning?

Why make promises if you're going to break them?

But this isn't about public financing.

The American people don't have the kind of familiarity with Obama that they've had with Clinton or McCain. And while McCain benefits from a long-established reputation as a maverick who says what he believes, many voters are still wary of Obama.

By opting out of the public financing system that he supported in the beginning of his campaign, Obama risks permanent damage to a brand he hasn't fully established with the American electorate.

The fact that he displays himself as someone who cannot be trusted to keep his word erodes any benefit of the doubt that I had half-heartedly given him and his campaign after Clinton's concession.

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Rather than being honest and upfront with the American people about his reasoning, Obama came up with the lame excuse that "forgoing more than \$80 million in public funds" somehow makes him a martyr. He came to the conclusion that his was a noble cause with a noble decision that would "declare independence

from a broken system" and bring about a better democracy. What Obama conveniently forgot to mention in his video is that he intends to raise and spend upward of \$200 million!

Do not be deluded. I'm confident that he did it out of greed, not for the high-minded ideals he claimed to cherish as he threw them under the bus.

It says a lot about the man Obama really is. Just like most politicians in America, Obama will say and do anything it takes to get elected, true to the dirty politics of Chicago - where he rose to political power. And Chicago politics makes Washington politics look like a tennis match between old ladies.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with being an old school politician, unless of course you've tried to make yourself out to be a candidate of change. Then it makes you look like a hypocrite.

If the American people are willing to accept, without raising a fuss, a politician who breaks his promise so easily on such a petty issue, then we're opening the door for him to renege on other issues of more importance.

As for me, I haven't made up my mind just yet as to whom I will support in the general election. Maybe I need to be more open-minded. Or maybe it's the people who support Obama who need to be open to the possibility that their candidate might not be the "agent of change" he made himself out to be.

We asked for "hope" and "change"... now let's hope that Obama won't change his position on any more important issues.