

The Bottom of the Republican barrel

With the selection of Sarah Palin as his running mate John McCain believed that he had secured the Republican base. He may well have secured much more than that. With Ms. Palin's introduction to the political discourse the more extreme elements of the GOP have been stirred up from the bottom to show their ugly heads with phrases such as, "he is a Muslim", "his name is Hussein", "he hangs out with terrorists", and "he doesn't respect our flag". These have become the slogans with which the McCain campaign presumably expected to rally the faithful. From my experience as an Obama campaign volunteer in Western Virginia I can report that it was not working as intended. Many moderate and old-time Republicans shared their disgust. Among them the number that expressed a vote for Obama was roughly equal to the number that would not vote at all. One has to wonder what it is that got McCain in this position. By his own admission he plays to win and, again by his own admission, he is sometimes blinded by that ambition. If that is the case here than it is a small step to surmise that he either, A. approved of or, worse, initiated the venom, or, B. had lost control of the campaign. The forces he unleashed now lead a life of their own and will be very difficult to reign in. By equating Obama with terrorism he has given the Timothy McVeigh's at the bottom of the barrel license to conduct their despicable acts. Are they the patriots that he called to save the nation from the terrible threats of socialism, another wild accusation?

John McCain's task of uniting the GOP around him was an impossible one. He was the accidental candidate. On the core emotional issues he was not the party's ideal representative. He survived the primary process because he stood out as the elderly statesman in a field of mediocrity. In a desperate attempt to appeal to the party base he dug too deep and came up with a running mate who was a non-intellectual radical that appealed to those who wear their ignorance as a badge of honor. No wonder intellectuals such as George Will, Colin Powell, Paul Volker, David Brooks, and Chuck Hagel were not impressed, and have, to different degrees, expressed a preference for Barack Obama.

In contrast the Obama campaign was low-key but high-exposure. Large numbers of volunteers went door to door for a neighborly chat, about issues. There was no pressure – the voters were

doing most of the talking. And, sometimes to their surprise, many found them-selves leaning in Obama's direction. We never brought up the subject of John McCain or Sarah Palin. We asked which issues were important and, if invited, would clarify a point or two about taxes or health insurance. We regarded every voter as an intelligent human being and we respected their positions, also when they disagreed and declared themselves for McCain. We didn't argue. And, we were, occasionally, at the receiving end of rather abusive language. It often included the list of words listed above and was always delivered in a highly emotional tone of voice.

This election was no longer a choice between Obama and McCain. This election had become about how the Republic serves its voters, whether "The People" were allowed to make their choices based on their interests rather than their emotions, and whether we would be governed by the most able rather than the most belligerent.

by Mau VanDuren author of the upcoming book "Taxation, Representation and Inalienable Rights,"