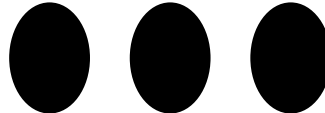




Of Witches, Wrestlers, and Weasels: Disappointing Debates in Key Senate Races

Debates between candidates for Senate are providing plenty of programming for C-SPAN in these days leading up to the November elections. The dramatis personae are familiar to anyone with even passing interest in the electoral show that comes to the stage in several states in late October.



This year, a few of the races have drawn more than just the attention of local political junkies and campaign geeks. It is of historical noteworthiness that most of the media attention has focused on key races in a couple of small and sparsely populated states, just the kind the Founders had in mind when giving all the states equal voting power in the Senate. In particular, the race in Delaware to fill Vice President Joe Biden's seat and the remarkable challenge mounted by Sharron Angle to oust Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid from the post he's held for over 23 years.

In a finely written piece published earlier in *The New American*, Jack Kenny described the first debate between the Republican candidate, Christine O'Donnell and her Democratic rival, Chris Coons. O'Donnell, with the endorsement of several Tea Party organizations, splashed onto the surface of American consciousness after her upset defeat of nine-term Congressman and former Governor Mike Castle.

Since making her unexpected entrance, O'Donnell has been dogged by the near-hourly rerun of a clip of television appearances she made over a decade ago where she mentioned dabbling in witchcraft. So ubiquitous were the references to O'Donnell's comments about college activities (I didn't join a coven in this generation I didn't inhale) that in a new campaign ad the candidate herself reassures voters that she is not a witch. Sadly, that was the ad's sole Monty Python reference.

The exchanges at the debate between political novice O'Donnell and Coons, a Yale-educated lawyer, were at times difficult to watch. O'Donnell tried to paint Coons as an out-of-touch insider, while Coons described his opponent as an extremist without the experience necessary to make a difference in the Senate.

During the debate, most of the candidates' responses to the various topics presented to them were predictable and seemed to be read off the script provided by major party image consultants. This toeing of the party line can't have escaped the notice of supporters of O'Donnell who have hoped that the former marketing consultant would take advantage of the national stage to promote the cause of



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constitutionalism. For the most part, those hopes were dashed by O'Donnell, whose rhetoric sounded too much like the, to them, discordant tune sung for decades by mainstream Republicans and their neocon manipulators.

Of particular note were O'Donnell's praise for the success experienced in the war on terror and the absolute absence of any overt and unapologetic reference to the Constitution. Even when sounding the right note with regard to the repeal of ObamaCare, O'Donnell couched her criticism in language inconsistent with someone genuinely committed to enshrining constitutional principles.

The performance must have been disheartening to those friends of freedom who are relying on O'Donnell and other Tea Party-sponsored candidates to depart from the standard GOP talking points and turn the spotlight of national broadcast television on the worrisome condition of constitutional restraints on power and the incremental increase of tyranny.

From witches to wrestlers. Another key race was the scene of a contentious debate this week. In Connecticut, Republican Linda McMahon faced off against Democrat Richard Blumenthal. This campaign has garnered national media coverage chiefly because of McMahon's career she is the former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment, a company she managed with her husband, Vince McMahon.

The WWE was an easy target for Blumenthal who informed viewers, There have been seven dead wrestlers since she [McMahon] started this campaign. McMahon responded defensively, insisting that professional wrestlers were adults and were aware of the dangers inherent in the sport. Besides, she added, they only work three days a week and are paid over \$500,000 a year.

Blumenthal kept hammering at the WWE all night. He attacked McMahon for tacitly sponsoring WWE's controversial, often racy, programming. Blumenthal described the matches' scantily-clad females as degrading to women. McMahon responded that she was very proud of her company and that the slate of programs produced by the WWE has reduced the amount of skin and in fact now earns a TV-PG rating, down from the TV-14 rating it used to receive.

After withstanding her rivals pummeling of her former career, McMahon landed a few solid punches of her own, reminding the audience of her opponents false claim to have served in the Vietnam War. There was nothing new in the attack, however, as the McMahon campaign made Blumenthal's false statement the central message of a television campaign ad. McMahon insisted that voters could not trust a man that would lie about military service.

All in all, the debate was little more than a soporific pantomime of predictable poses struck by two candidates with very little substantive difference between them, other than the capital letter after their name on the ballot.

Finally, there was the debate Thursday night in Nevada between another Tea Party favorite, Sharron Angle, and Obama water carrier, the incumbent Harry Reid.

Although Angle has received endorsements of several conservative individuals and organizations, including the Club for Growth, the Tea Party Express, and Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum, strictly speaking she is not the Tea Party candidate. That distinction goes to Scott Ashjian, who despite being on the ballot, was not invited to participate in Thursday nights debate.

In an interview with local Las Vegas media, Ashjian asserted that he could beat Reid and Angle. He also released a recording of a conversation with Angle, in which she encouraged him to drop out of the U.S. Senate race. On the tape, Angle admitted to Ashjian that she was afraid she could not defeat Harry Reid



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if Ashjian remained on the ballot. Ashjian demurred, telling Angle he would stay in the race in order to highlight the shortcomings of both major parties.

In a lamentable performance similar to that of fellow Tea Party darling Christine O'Donnell, Sharron Angle certainly disappointed those constitutionalists counting on her to at least talk the talk. Sadly, on Thursday night, she didnt. Angle backed down from her earlier position favoring the abolition of the Department of Education.

All of Angles answers, as O'Donnell's, were carefully dipped in the safety coating of mass appeal. While this may make Angle and O'Donnell more palatable to a wider swath of voters, it no doubt gave indigestion to constitutionalists who are finding out the hard way just exactly what so many conservative candidates are so anxious to conserve the status quo.



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