

# Grins and Groans

**THE ISSUE** | Grins and groans from the news of the week.  
**OUR OPINION** | Groan to the McCain/Palin campaign. Grin to Eric Massa and Randy Kuhl.

## Groan

Republican presidential nominee John McCain threw the world a curve ball a couple weeks ago when he named Alaska Governor Sarah Palin his vice presidential candidate.

Palin is a rising star in Alaska politics, but isn't a household name in the lower 48.

The media's knowledge pool about Palin was pretty shallow, so they had to play some catch-up. Palin stories filled both the print and the electronic media.

McCain, Palin and the Republican party complained that the "liberal" media were piling on Palin. Some even said the coverage of Palin was sexist.

It's a good strategy for the Republicans. Unfortunately for them, it's just not true.

The media has a responsibility to find out as much as possible about Palin's records and her philosophy. After all, this woman would be next in line for the presidency. Voters deserve to know who they're voting for.

Since Palin's breakthrough speech last week, she's captured the national consciousness. Is it so surprising that journalists are actually writing about something that people are interested in?

Have there been some stories that have crossed the line of decency and descended into either character assassination or tabloid journalism? Absolutely.

But the bulk of the reporting has been fair, if excessive in volume. Most of the inappropriate reporting has been done by fringe blogs, not mainstream media.

Here's hoping the media continues to do its job regarding not only Palin, but also McCain, Obama and Biden as November approaches.

## Grin

Eric Massa, Democratic challenger for the 29th

Congressional District, grabbed what is commonly known as the third rail

of American politics: Social Security.

Massa released his plan this week for saving Social Security.

U.S. Rep. John R. "Randy" Kuhl was quick to respond, reminding voters of Kuhl's own efforts to overhaul the Social Security system.

Kuhl and Massa deserve praise not for their prospective plans, the merits of which are up to voters to decide, but for talking about the topic at all.

With a country entrenched in a five-year old war abroad and economic woes at home, it would be easy for politicians to ignore this volatile topic. This year it's certainly not a subject at the fore of most voters' minds.

It is, however, a problem that needs to be addressed soon. Predictions differ on exactly when the Social Security system will go bankrupt, but most experts agree the system can not sustain itself in its current form much longer.

Massa said there are 135,000 residents of the 29th Congressional District who receive Social Security benefits. It's incumbent on our elected officials to make sure the program they paid into is there for them when they need it.

create competition for public schools, empower parents with choice, reward good teachers – "and help bad teachers find another line of work."

Obama needs to be pressed on education reform throughout this campaign.

McCain stole a page from the Democrats, speaking at length about the economic pains of many Americans. And, refreshingly, he didn't blame Democrats alone for the nation's ills. He blamed everybody in power. Leave it to others to point out that Congress under the other party's leadership has an approval rating wallowing at 18 percent.

He didn't question the patriotism of Democrats or their desire to defend this country. He made a firm case that he is prepared to do so. And he repeated his well-known pledge of allegiance – that he would rather lose an election than see his country lose a war.

Both McCain and Obama are running against Washington. Their speeches, though, distinguish the remedies they prescribe. Obama sees Washington as unresponsive: He suggests that under his White House, the federal government would take on the many problems he chronicled at length in his speech, including addiction to oil, failing schools and health care. He would spend more, but his Washington would resolve those problems.

McCain portrayed today's Washington as me-first-ism incarnate, a place where too many politicians ask what their country can do for them and their pet constituencies. McCain wants a leaner Washington that invites citizens to ask what they can do for their country – a government that can "stand at your side and not in your way."

## ARTIST'S VIEW



## COMMENTARY | KEVIN FERRIS

# GOP really, really likes Palin

One of the first e-mails that hit the inbox last Friday made reference to how much Sarah Palin looked like a young Sally Field, star of the overwrought TV show "Brothers & Sisters." You remember last Friday, when the world awoke to rumors of Sarah, and collectively said, Barack Who? (OK, maybe that was just me.)

So it is fitting that one week later, we mangle an overused quote from the overwrought philosopher/actress to describe the GOP delegates' attitude toward the Alaska governor: They like her. They really, really like her.

They like her level of experience for a VP candidate – being No. 2 in an administration led by a man with decades of government, military and political experience. She would break tie votes in the Senate, which the world hopes will include Obama and Joe Biden next year. (OK, maybe that's just me.)

They like her record of reforming government, cutting taxes, and holding politicians accountable as both governor and mayor of Wasilla. That's the town, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee said Wednesday night, where she earned more votes as a mayoral

candidate than Biden received in his run for president.

They like her good-looking, all-American family. The handsome dad. The son in the Army who heads for Iraq next week. The daughters (yes, even that one, maybe especially that one). The baby. The world's most famous groom to be.

They like that she's run a business. That she's comfortable in the outdoors, around hunting, fishing or snow-machine racing. That she can talk knowledgeably about firearms with her Secret Service agents. That she played basketball then; that she coaches it now. That she won a beauty pageant then, and probably still could now. (OK, maybe that last one is just me.)

They like that she's been on the PTA. That she's a hockey mom. That she made hockey moms cool with one ad lib on pit bulls and lipstick. That she seems more like them than any other national-ticket contender in memory.

They like having a pro-life candidate who walks the walk.

They like the enthusiasm that Palin has generated among the party faithful. The increased numbers of calls from potential volunteers and donors.

They like her acceptance speech. Well, they love her acceptance speech. It

showed that she could be tough yet good-humored, whether on offense against her political opponents or in defense of herself and her family. They like her love of the people in small-town America.

They like that she showed her strengths in some policy areas, such as reform and energy, and that she's ready to tackle others, including foreign policy. That she made it plain there's a place in Washington for someone from outside the Beltway – especially someone way, way outside the Beltway.

They like the phrase she uses to describe how elected officials should approach their jobs: with a servant's heart. And they were moved to tears by her promise to be an advocate in the White House for families with special-needs children.

They even like the media. Maybe that's going too far. How about, they appreciate the irony of one question they've heard nonstop this week: Is this person qualified to be president?

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# Hail to Corning City Council

Hail to the Corning City Council for raising the senior citizen's tax exemption level. For many elderly people on fixed incomes, tax breaks

like those provided by the council mean the difference between keeping – or losing – their homes. Of course, Gov. David Paterson's

proposed 4 percent cap on any local tax increase would help even more, if only the state Legislature would realize it.

To have such a proposal bottled up in Albany is a disgrace, because it would apply to all governmental entities which levy local property taxes. And particularly, it would rein in school spending where, in many areas, the increases in that spending category are astronomical.

But the education lobby, backed up by its allies in the health business, have managed to quash the plan for now.

That's just another case of a well-heeled lobby buying the votes it needs to stop a proposal it does not like.

Too bad the taxpayer ranks so low when that type of legislation is being discussed.

Got an interesting e-mail from Jared Smith, spokesman for the Eric Massa congressional campaign.

We see, day after day, Randy Kuhl's TV ad proclaiming he's the only person in Washington who wants to drill for new oil – and do it now.

The fact that it will take a decade for that new oil to make it to your gas pump is something Randy conveniently neglects to mention and he wants House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to recall Congress to deal with his campaign.

Sorry, old friend, but Article 2, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution specifies that the only person who can recall Congress is the president.

So the next time you're getting orders from George Bush and John McCain, you might ask him about the recall.

Jared also tells me Kuhl has voted against investing in renewable energy nine times in the past four years.

Note, by the way, that when Randy took office, gas was going for \$1.96 per gallon. Compare that to the chunk a gallon now takes out of your wallet.

Further, he says oil, gas and energy companies have given our congressman more than \$65,000 since he's been in the office. Kuhl, in turn, has voted for \$14.5 billion in tax giveaways for Big Oil.

I'm not suggesting that there's evidence of any deal here. Merely pointing out numbers that are extremely interesting.

Especially if you're all interested in reforming Washington.

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## NATIONAL VIEW | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

# Scoring McCain's speech

Imagine the pressure: John McCain approached the podium Thursday night knowing that he risked looking like a serious drag on Sarah Palin's ticket. She was that good when she spoke the night before.

In his own address, McCain showed that, as an orator, he's no Barack Obama. He's no Sarah Palin. But in a heartfelt address he did re-establish his cred: This man can serve capably as president, as commander in chief.

McCain proved anew in his address to the Republican National Convention that he's more a formidable presence than a gifted speaker.

His unadorned appeals to duty, service and honor sliced through the over-strategized artifices of modern campaigning. None of us has to agree with or even like McCain. But few of us can doubt that he means what he says when he talks to America. "I will reach out my hand to anyone to help me get this country moving again," he said Thursday night. "I have that record and the scars to prove it. Senator Obama does not."

One outstanding thing we heard from McCain and not from Obama: candor about his own party's failings. McCain told Republicans that they have contributed to Washington's malaise. "We were elected to change Washington, and we let Washington change us. We lost the trust of the American people when some Republicans gave in to the temptations of corruption. ... We lost their trust when we valued our power over our principles. We're going to change that."

He also said something that was music to our ears: "Education is the civil rights issue of this century." He explained, in very specific terms, how he will shake up failed school bureaucracies,

## NATIONAL VIEW | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

# New rule a triple-bogey blunder

In 10 years on the U.S. women's professional golf tour, South Korean Se Ri Pak has won 20 tournaments and more than \$10 million. Her English isn't nearly as good as her tee shot, but you'd think her athletic performance would speak for itself. Not in the LPGA.

Last month, the LPGA Tour told its players to brush up on their English or risk suspension, beginning in 2009. Language barriers hamper players' ability to interact with fans, reporters and especially sponsors, LPGA officials say. That makes it hard for the LPGA to market its tournaments and its players.

Some people suspect darker motives. The South Korean news agency Yonhap said the action "raises suspicions that it is targeting Korean players," since 45 of the LPGA's 121 international players are South Korean. The rule was decried as xenophobic, discriminatory, nativist and just plain snobby. In fact, it was nothing more than a boneheaded public relations move.

True, the ranks of professional sports are filled with players who speak other

languages, and no other league has seen a need to insist on English proficiency. Unlike those who play baseball, basketball or tennis for a living, though, professional golfers are obliged to help promote their sport by playing pro-am events with potential sponsors. The hope is that a corporate big shot with a 12 handicap might be moved to write a big check after playing a round alongside a charming professional. But getting your butt kicked by a woman who barely speaks for 18 holes can be a real buzz kill.

The LPGA surely didn't set out to alienate the foreign players who are key to its future. Only two of the top 20 women's players are Americans; seven are Korean. The No. 1 player, Lorena Ochoa, is from Mexico. Asian players have won seven of 24 tour events this year, and 27 of the last 32 majors have been won by foreigners. Most of them, by the way, speak English, and not because the LPGA told them to. They know that speaking English is key to getting individual sponsors or endorsement deals. They also understand that the

LPGA is hurting for fans and sponsors. So they didn't mind being told to learn English so much as they minded being told to hurry up about it or else.

You can't blame them for that, or for feeling there's something of a double standard at work. The LPGA holds events in Mexico and France, and next year will play in Singapore, China, Korea, Thailand and Japan, but nobody has suggested the English-speaking players might benefit from a rudimentary command of any other language. And Korean TV is the LPGA's biggest single source of income, according to Golf International.

Many fans insist indignantly that golf is about the score, period. But professional golf is also a business – something the players seem to get, despite the LPGA's clumsy handling of the situation. Noting that the South Korean players have taken home an awful lot of prize money lately, Pak – who has won five majors – allowed that it's polite to thank the sponsor in the native tongue.

"When you win," she says, "you should give your speech in English."

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