

Opinion: Pettiness and mudslinging bring down GOP candidates

By Thomas Sowell

The only good news for the Republicans coming out of the seemingly endless presidential candidate “debates” is that some Republican leaders are now belatedly thinking about how they can avoid a repetition of this debacle in future elections.

What could they possibly have been thinking about, in the first place, when they agreed to a format based on short sound bites for dealing with major complex issues, and with media journalists – 90 percent of them Democrats – picking the topics?



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The conduct of the candidates made things worse. In a world with a record-breaking national debt and Iran moving toward creating nuclear weapons, they bickered over earmarks and condoms. I am against earmarks, but earmarks don't rank among the first hundred most serious problems facing this country.

Mud-slinging has replaced rational discussions of differences on serious issues – not only during the debates themselves, where the moderators sic the candidates on each other, but

even more so in the massive television character assassination ads in which Romney supporters seem to specialize.

Groups supporting Mitt Romney have turned character assassination almost into a science. You take something that most people, outside of politics, do not understand and twist it to sound terrible to those who are unaware of the facts.

Blanketing Florida with misleading ads attacking Newt Gingrich won that state for Romney, after Gingrich scored an upset victory in South Carolina. The ads made a big deal out of charges that the former Speaker broke tax laws – charges that the Internal Revenue Service exonerated him of, after a long investigation.

When Rick Santorum suddenly surged after his upset victories in Minnesota, Missouri and Colorado, the Romney character assassination machine attacked him for having voted in the Senate for various things that conservatives don't like.

But, when it comes to voting in Congress, seldom do you get a pure bill that you can agree with in all its parts. If you never voted for bills containing anything you didn't like, you might get very little voting done.

But, if it is a bill to provide American soldiers with the equipment they need to fight a war, and somebody has put into it an earmark for a federal boondoggle in his district, are you going to vote against that bill and let American soldiers go into battle without all the equipment and supplies they need?

Taking advantage of the public's lack of knowledge is something that Barack Obama already does very effectively in his political propaganda. But is that something the Republicans want to imitate?

It has worked during the primary season, when the media are perfectly happy to see Republicans destroying each other. But

it will not work in the general election campaign, when even truthful criticisms of the president will have a hard time getting out through the media, which hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil when it comes to Obama.

The pettiness and mud-slinging during the Republican primary campaigns is especially irresponsible during a time when there are very serious problems, at home and abroad, that need to be addressed in a serious way.

Discussions of particular issues, one by one, often miss the larger point that goes beyond the issue at hand – namely, this administration's steady movement toward arbitrary government that circumvents the restrictions of the Constitution.

Nothing demonstrates this more starkly than the president's arbitrary power to waive the requirement that employers have to provide ObamaCare coverage for their workers. That can be the difference between paying, or not paying, millions of dollars. What does that mean for anybody's other rights?

What does freedom of speech mean if criticizing the administration can mean you get no exemption, while your competitor who keeps quiet, or who praises the administration, gets a waiver? The Constitution requires "equal protection of the laws" for a reason.

And what about nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran, the world's leading sponsor of international terrorism? Is that not worth discussing in something other than sound bites?

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