

I.O.U.S.A. film depicts debt addiction

First, there was Al Gore warning us about environmental calamities coming our way. Now, there's Warren Buffett and Pete Peterson waving us away from an avalanching national debt.

The latest of the citizen-prophets are taking to the silver screen to remind us of the magnitude of the \$9.6 trillion national debt. Financiers Buffett and Peterson are sponsoring the film "I.O.U.S.A." at studios around the nation.

The movie tells the story of what's coming – and has been for a while. Going back to the republic's beginning, we've run up debts. Except we used to try to pay them off. Now, we don't.

For example, the nation has run deficits 35 of the last 40 years. They've helped drill us into this hole, which is actually closer to \$53 trillion, when you factor in how much Social Security,

Medicaid and Medicare are under-funded for the next few decades.

We can't just grow or tax our way out of this dilemma. We also need to screw up the courage to change how much we receive in benefits for programs like Medicare.

Odd as it may sound, given that it has so many numbers stirred into it, "I.O.U.S.A." speaks to the heart. After being informed how we are living beyond our means, one young boy pauses and says into the camera, "It shouldn't be that way."

So, take a night off from watching the Olympics. Go to a theater where "I.O.U.S.A.'s" playing. And then demand that every congressional candidate explain how to deal with this fiscal crisis. Write the Obama and McCain campaigns and get answers from them, too.

That boy's right. Things shouldn't be this way.

Going to church: Inner compass

It's understandable that proponents of a clear separation of religion and government were upset that John McCain and Barack Obama dared to participate in a pre-election event held in a California church.

But some of the critics' objections blindly ignore the immense value that could be provided to all voters from the type of discussion the two presidential candidates had.

"I don't see what good it will do for the American people to again hear the candidates spout pious platitudes about their favorite Bible verses or how devout they are," complained the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Perhaps the reverend should follow his own Good Book's advice (Matthew 7:5) to "remove the beam from your own eye, and then you will see clearly."

Americans who watched the telecast Saturday night from pastor and author Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in Orange County, Calif., got to hear each candidate discuss the internal compass that guides him on matters, big and small.

Call it faith, or beliefs; it's important. Though each man confessed Christianity, had either been an atheist it would have been just as worthwhile for voters to learn more about the internal guideposts he would use to make presidential decisions.

It was revealing beyond the labels of "pro-life" and "pro-choice" to hear McCain say life begins at conception; not every Christian is so sure. For Obama to say it was beyond his "pay grade" to decide when life exists also provided

greater insight into how he thinks. Both men want to place limits on abortion.

Also insightful was hearing each candidate discuss the nature of "evil" and how they would confront it. McCain seemed to take it for granted that evil is something that others (al-Qaida, for example) want to do to the United States. Obama, though, pointed out that "just because we think our intentions are good doesn't always mean that we're going to be doing good."

Obama said the wisest people he knew were his wife and grandmother. McCain said it was Iraq commander Gen. David Petraeus. Who's rich? McCain joked that it takes \$5 million. Obama said families making more than \$250,000 should be taxed at a higher rate. Both men admitted moral lapses: Obama said it was his drug use as a young man; McCain cited his failed first marriage.

These answers may not mean much now to the 70 percent of white evangelical Christian voters who say they will stick with the Republican candidate. But Obama's remarks about his faith could become more meaningful to them if McCain chooses a pro-choice proponent, such as former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, to be his running mate. That would take away the key distinction for many evangelicals between the Republican and the Democrat.

The value of the Saddleback event, though, goes beyond its discussion of abortion or any single issue. Learning more about the character of the presidential candidates is important. But next time, the setting doesn't have to be a church.

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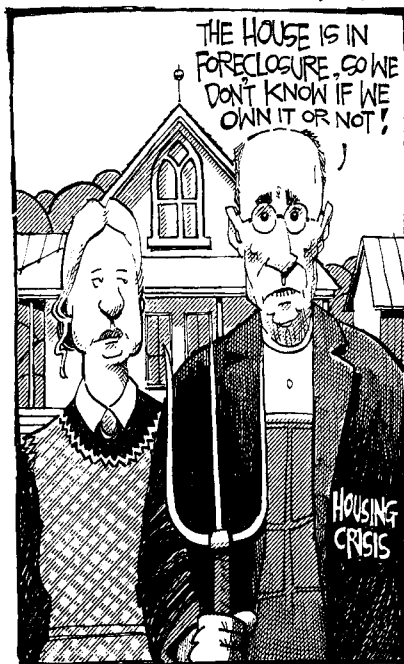
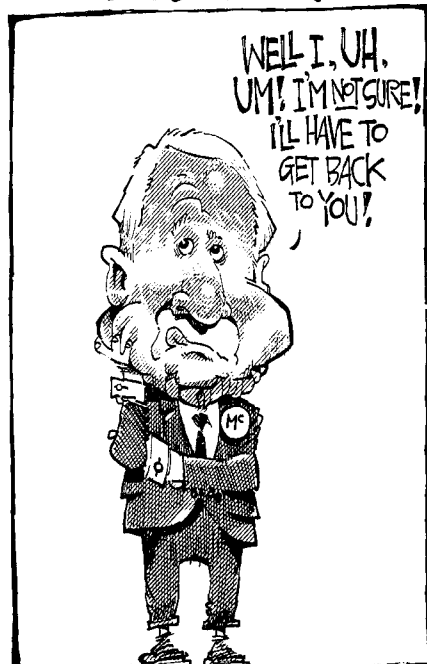
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ARTIST'S VIEW

HOW MANY HOMES DO YOU OWN?
IT'S A SIMPLE QUESTION... BUT THE ANSWER COULD BE ELLIOTT!



COMMENTARY | JAMES KLURFELD

Will political drama outstrip Olympics

Like a lot of you, I've spent most of my evenings the last two weeks, late into the night, watching the summer Olympics from China.

So what should I do next week when the Olympics are over? Watch the political conventions?

It won't be the same. What makes the Olympics riveting television is the unpredictable nature of the events. There was no guarantee that Michael Phelps would win those eight gold medals. The 400-meter freestyle relay-team win and his triumph in the 100-meter butterfly were decided by almost immeasurably close margins. Not to mention the excitement of the gymnasts, hurdlers, sprinters, volleyball players and the rest.

There will be no such drama in Denver or St. Paul.

I'm not saying that the conventions are unimportant. But the reality is that political conventions ain't what they used to be – and haven't been for many years. They are carefully scripted, down-to-the-minute, television shows meant to kick off the fall campaign season. There's nothing spontaneous or unpredictable about them.

They aren't run by politicians so much as by television producers. The arena isn't a convention hall as much as it's a studio. And I've often felt that we in the press are nothing but props or bit actors.

If you want to make an analogy to the Olympics, the almost six-month primary

season would be a fair comparison. Now those were races – especially for the Democrats – right up there with Phelps and company. They had all the agony and ecstasy of spills over a hurdle and finger-tip triumphs.

Just the fact that the two parties have moved the conventions to the last week in August and the first in September is an example of how the role of the conventions has changed. They used to be scheduled much earlier in the summer because, once upon a time, the conventions actually decided who the party's standard-bearer would be. It was only after them that the candidates would organize for the fall campaign.

In contrast, Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain have been preparing for the fall for months now. The conventions are an important part, but not a separate aspect, of the campaign.

That McCain and Obama are both trying to draw their selections of running mates out into multiple-day dramas only highlights how scripted the conventions themselves will be. The Obama camp hinted his decision might be revealed yesterday or maybe today or tomorrow. And the press helps build the suspense because there's nothing else unpredictable to write about. It's all part of the show.

Not that things can't go wrong at the conventions – they can. In 1992, President George H.W. Bush lost control of the production in Houston when Pat Buchanan and his right-wing

supporters stomped over his desire for a more moderate message. That helped propel Bill Clinton and Al Gore into the White House. Even in 1980, the split between the supporters of President Jimmy Carter and Sen. Ted Kennedy hurt the Democrats coming out of that convention, held in New York. But, then again, Carter was already damaged by his management of the economy and the Iran hostage crisis.

I hope there will be some magic moments in the next two weeks, like Gov. Mario Cuomo's keynote in 1984 in San Francisco, or Obama's speech just four years ago in Boston – or, for that matter, Buchanan's stepping all over Bush's message in 1992. I'm anxious to hear what our New York senator, Hillary Clinton, has to say and just how nasty to the Democrats former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani will be when he gives the GOP keynote. And then there are the culminating acceptance speeches – the real purpose of the conventions these days.

Look at it this way: The Olympics are sports, fun and games. They are riveting, but they don't really matter. Which is fine. We needed a summer break. Who will govern this country is a question that matters, and that race resumes Monday in Denver. I'll be watching.

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BLOG TALK

Blog Talk returns this week after several postings on *The Leader's* Web site commenting on a confrontation in Corning City Hall Thursday morning between U.S. Rep. John R. "Randy" Kuhl Jr. and his opponent, Democrat Eric Massa.

Jack Black wrote:

"Wow, talk about acts of desperation...is Massa insane? It takes more than the local playground bully to be an effective Representative. Pull the curtain on this bully and get him off the stage...Massa is an embarrassment!"

FYI commented:

"Just another show boat politician trying to get media time off the back of another. Massa must be running out of money for negative campaign adds. I think this was also a ploy to take the focus off of what Randy was really there to do. Massa you should go back in the Navy! Maybe they have a dingy or a rowboat you can command or some other position like special ed advisor to Afghanistan or Guam, something important like that."

real reader wrote:

"I am embarrassed for Mr Massa. He did not do himself any good by showing his lack of manners by confronting Mr Kuhl in this way. I had not chosen which candidate to support - until now. Good grief. I can not support someone who is so confrontational especially in such an aggressive manner."

maz responded:

"Someday Mr. Kuhl is going to have to admit his total ineffectiveness at serving the citizens of his district. People are engaging Mr. Kuhl at his offices and in public places because they have had it. Call it what you will – confrontational, bad manners, aggressive- is what people are doing, within their constitutional rights, to get their congressional district back."

MagPie posted:

"Hopefully Massa realizes how embarrassing that public display was. I don't think we should send someone to Washington that acts like he did at City Hall yesterday. What an embarrassment to the citizens of this district. Can he say 'Sorry'?"

Gallant wrote:

"The real Eric Massa is now coming out. He is out of control. His only supporter in the article was Dan Kane? Isn't this the alderman that messed up the skate park and had a junk car on his lawn? ... Then again if Frankie's velvet ropes were up at City Hall they would have 'protected' Randy from Eric's attack. Randy isn't the best politician but at least he is not nuts!"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An apology is in order, Mr. Kuhl

TO THE EDITOR |

Congressman Randy Kuhl owes my wife a personal apology. This week my son, congressional candidate Eric Massa of Corning, attended Congressman Kuhl's publicity tour at the City Council Chambers in Corning. After Congressman Kuhl finished with his presentation, my son handed him an invitation from the president of Corning Community College to join in a debate. Representative Kuhl has yet to respond to this offer.

My son addressed the congressman with respect and dignity as his mother and I taught him to. However, Mr. Kuhl decided to use this opportunity to make an out of line and inappropriate personal attack. Here's a direct quote from WETM-TV in Elmira from the congressman:

"That's not the way I was raised," said Kuhl of Massa's

behavior. "Unfortunately, there are people who didn't have the luxury of having wonderful parents like I did who taught about parental respect."

Mr. Kuhl is completely out of line to be making an attack on myself and my wife of 57 years. Attacking a 79-year-old woman on her parenting skills is so inappropriate that I almost can't find the words.

It's obvious that Rep. Kuhl is only making a personal attack against us because he doesn't want to talk about his voting record. His actions are reprehensible, unforgivable, and clearly illustrate all that is wrong with politics today. This is what has turned me, an 80-year-old lifelong Conservative Republican, into an active supporter of my son, Eric.

I have never been in politics before, but Mr. Kuhl has put us there now and I demand an immediate apology for my wife on the same television station

where he made his callous assault. Nobody expects politics to always be pretty, but there is a line between what's fair game and what's inappropriate.

Representative Kuhl has crossed the line.

Emiddio Massa
Captain, U.S. Navy (ret.)

Time for change: Choose Massa

TO THE EDITOR | When your party and your country have been hijacked and their core principles taken hostage and violated, do you just lie back and take it? I think not.

Your choice is to be a wimp or a whip. I've taken the whip. I'm hopping mad. I didn't spend the best 60 years of my life giving sustenance to my Grand Old Party (GOP) just to "let that all go down the drain" without a fight.

There's some real action I take and I'm taking it. I'm volunteering for the Eric

Massa campaign. He's running for Congress because his opponent (our current Congressman Randy Kuhl) has been catering to special interests, benefiting from their political slush fund largesse and rolling over for every piece of failed Bush policy/legislation for the past seven years.

It's time for a change. It's time for bold and competent leadership. America and this congressional district cannot go into the second decade of the 21st century with the same old, same old politics as usual.

It's time for an American Renaissance. Let's start it right here and now in Chemung and Steuben counties and let it spread across the land. Let it sweep away the old and usher in the new with Eric Massa.

Sherman Moreland
Horseheads

Letters for the Sept. 9 primary must be received by Sept. 1 to be considered for publication.