

Kuhl's decision should damage him politically

THE ISSUE | Debates between U.S. Rep. John R. "Randy" Kuhl Jr. and his opponent Eric Massa.

OUR OPINION | Kuhl's decision not to appear in front of audiences will, and should, damage him politically.

In today's electronic age, voters have very few chances to interact with their elected officials. Politicians can communicate their message through press releases, e-mails, interviews and commercials without ever shaking a constituent's hand or kissing a resident's baby. And the higher up the political food chain you go, the less chance the public has of ever seeing a politician face to face.

That's why debates play an important role in American politics. They give the public the opportunity to see their elected officials in a rare unscripted environment.

Unfortunately, the opportunities for residents of the 29th Congressional District are scarce this year. U.S. Rep. John R. "Randy" Kuhl Jr. has decided not to participate in a debate with his opponent, Democrat Eric Massa, sponsored by *The Leader* and WETM Channel 18.

Kuhl cited a conflict over tickets. More specifically, what should be done with the tickets left over after each campaign gets an equal amount to distribute.

Kuhl's campaign wanted the empty seats, all 150 of them, to stay empty.

WETM officials rejected that proposal, effectively killing any chance for a debate in front of a live

audience.

Of the six currently scheduled joint appearances by Kuhl and Massa, the four debates will be held in either a television or radio studio.

It's understandable that Kuhl would want a human-being free environment for his debates. In 2006, Kuhl was laughed at when he cited reaction to Hurricane Katrina as an example of Congress working quickly to solve a problem.

This visibly rattled Kuhl and momentarily took him off message.

It's moments like this that Kuhl would like to avoid.

The question that has to be asked is, if Kuhl is shaken by a few laughing audience members, how would he react in a true crisis?

It also appears as if Kuhl is afraid to face questions he hasn't prepared for ahead of time.

Of course, Massa gave Kuhl the perfect excuse for backing out of public events earlier this year when he crashed a press conference Kuhl was holding in Corning.

Massa supporters also interfered with a press conference Kuhl held in October, 2006.

So, when Massa blasts Kuhl in the future about not answering questions in front of constituents, he should keep in mind this is a problem partially of his own creation.

NATIONAL VIEW | NEWSDAY

Species need protection

On its way out the door, the Bush administration is trying to endanger the Endangered Species Act, legislation that has the support of more than 80 percent of Americans. This is a parting gift to the administration's friends in the timber and other extraction industries. It has to be stopped.

The law has worked, reviving species that were in danger. Take the bald eagle: In 1963, before the act, there were about 400 nesting pairs left. Now there are nearly 10,000. Still, industry officials argue that complying with the act costs them money. And they have a friend in the Oval Office who'd like to help them out.

Now, federal agencies — before they act themselves or

approve industry initiatives that may endanger species — must consult with biologists at the Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service. Under the proposed new Department of the Interior rule, the agencies wouldn't have to consult but could decide on their own.

Allowing agencies to police themselves, especially if they lack relevant scientific expertise, is just another form of Bush's fox-guarding-the-chicken-coop environmental policy. In recent days the department has extended the comment period on the proposed rule by 30 days. But even after an extra month it will still be a bad idea. It's not likely to survive a lawsuit. So why do it?

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ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | WILLIAM MCKENZIE

Campaigning isn't governing

The campaign trail seemed a universe away from Southern Methodist University's John Tower Center last week, where Andy Card and Mack McLarty held forth for more than an hour about the realities of running a government.

They know something about that. Card was George W. Bush's first White House chief of staff; McLarty held that post under Bill Clinton. Those grueling tenures showed them what it's like to manage a president's day, hire and manage Type-A staffers, keep an agenda rolling and deal with Capitol Hill.

The longer they talked the other night, the more being president sounded as disconnected from what John McCain and Barack Obama are doing on the stump these days as pitcher-and-catcher camps are from the realities of a marathon baseball season.

Here are some pointers that John McCain and Barack Obama might want to keep in mind:

FORGET ABOUT THE LOVE

Candidates, as Card aptly put it, have to be "love magnets." Their primary job right now is to get voters to swoon over them. Hence, the baby kissing, pancake flipping and crowd pleasing.

For the winner, the dating ritual ends when he becomes president. His job shifts radically, starting during the transition period between election and inauguration. Card offered the best description I've heard of the ultimate calling: "A president must find the courage to be lonely."

Obama especially should consider that point. He has been campaigning for a year before worshipful supporters.

If he wins, he will have

to disappoint some of that throng if he's going to be a great leader. A president, after all, has to make calls in the national interest, not just in the interest of devoted supporters.

GO AHEAD, CALL TRENT

McLarty told about arriving in Washington with a Democratic president-elect and telling someone he was going to call Trent Lott, a conservative GOP legislator from Mississippi.

"You can't do that," a Washington bigwig objected.

Taken aback, McLarty said he had known Lott for 20 years, had done business in Mississippi and had his telephone number.

Fortunately, he resisted the advice and called his friend, Lott, who offered constructive ideas about how the Clinton administration could begin on good footing.

We'll see how quickly the next president-elect gets this point. Who does he call? As candidates, they are on the stump telling voters that the opposing party is no good. Will the victor pivot and work with those demons?

THERE IS NO SCRIPT

Both chiefs of staff talked about meeting actors from "The West Wing," the popular television drama. Hollywood's White House, of course, was fictional and followed a script; Washington's reality show has none.

In other words, the smarty-pants in the McCain and Obama campaigns had better get ready. Some parts of running a White House are common sense, like meeting with foreign leaders. But this leaves out what McLarty calls UFOs: the unforeseen occurrences that fly in all the time.

How presidents respond to them shape their legacies more than what they say at a campaign rally in Scranton. Bush rallied

America after Sept. 11, but he also personalized that terrible day in a way that led to bad calls. Notably, his devotion to protecting the country led him to support torturing suspected terrorists.

McCain and Obama are distancing themselves from Bush but can't avoid their own UFOs. How will they respond?

THE HIGHS WILL BE HIGHS

We know presidencies have low moments — does Monica Lewinsky ring a bell? — but they also experience highs that remind presidents why they do what they do.

Card remembered Sept. 14, 2001, when Bush touched a nation's grief-sick soul with his National Cathedral address and several hours later grabbed a bullhorn on Wall Street and let the terrorists know this country wouldn't back down.

McLarty recalled a woman stopping Clinton on a rope line and thanking him for reforming welfare. When she was on assistance, she told him, she couldn't tell her child's friends what she did. Now that she had a job, she could say the words with pride.

Those are the moments when governing and campaigning come together. If you make the tough calls, like going against your party on welfare, people will appreciate you. But you can't become Abraham Lincoln if you only want to be loved.

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NATIONAL VIEW | MIAMI HERALD

Closing the door on scrutiny

The abrupt expulsion of two respected human-rights monitors from Venezuela last week is the latest evidence that President Hugo Chavez is determined to muzzle dissenting views. Jose Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch, and deputy director Daniel Wilkinson were seized at their hotel and forcibly expelled "as if we were common criminals," Vivanco said later.

The organization had just issued a 230-page report detailing the accelerating loss of political freedom under Chavez during his almost 10 years in office, including actions intended to intimidate the media and undermine freedom of expression. Nothing could have proved the point so aptly as expelling representatives of an organization dedicated to promoting and expanding human rights throughout the hemisphere.

Chavez never misses an opportunity to rail against the United States, but his real enemies are those who dare to take issue with his politics. His anti-democratic agenda has restricted legitimate political activity by his opponents for years, and his arbitrary behavior is getting worse.

As Americas Watch noted, he often denounces critics as "anti-democratic conspirators and coup-mongers." His supine Supreme Court last month upheld a measure that prohibits more than 250 people, mostly Chavez critics, from running for office while the government investigates them for corruption. Foiled by a popular vote that refused to widen his executive authority, Chavez the democrat became Chavez the dictator and issued 26 decrees last month tightening his grip on power.

One such "law" allows him to name regional political leaders funded by the central government who would compete with elected officials in exercising power. This will bedevil Chavez opponents who have been elected to office.

The Americas Watch report tells an alarming story about the way in which Chavez has undermined if not destroyed Venezuela's democratic institutions, from the courts to the news media. Castro-style "insult" laws and toughened penalties for ill-defined "incitement" provisions have been used to intimidate independent news outlets. Meanwhile, state control of broadcasting outlets has expanded.

The Human Rights representatives were expelled, the government said, for "illegal meddling in the internal affairs" of Venezuela.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dumb commercial degrading to Kuhl

TO THE EDITOR | I thought I had seen the dumbest political maneuver ever when Eric Massa recently confronted Randy Kuhl at Randy's press conference in City Hall. I was wrong. Massa has outdone himself by approving a commercial which shows Randy Kuhl muttering something like what a sick frog might utter. If that is an example of the tactics Massa wishes to employ to try to get elected then this Democrat will definitely cast his vote for the more honorable candidate, Randy Kuhl.

Can intelligent people seriously approve such a dumb, degrading commercial? If you feel, as I do, that this stupid commercial is undignified, how can you agree with someone who approves it? Come on responsible voters; remember that those

who throw mud are usually themselves already covered with more mud.

Herbert Leon MacDonell
Corning

Send Big Oil and gas CEOs to jail

TO THE EDITOR | The "oil lobby" has successfully given the poor working man the shaft. Creation of the compressed natural gas industry or liquefied natural gas industry can save the poor working man from paying a higher price for butane and propane heat at \$12 per million BTU-LNG and CNG cost. The gas companies are guilty, too.

Our politicians should wake up and send Big Oil and gas CEOs to jail.

Richard H. Tomb
Corning

Massa should prevail over Kuhl

TO THE EDITOR | The G.O.P. convention left me gasping in disbelief. Romney roared. Rudy raved. Sarah Palin played Mary Poppins, but her spoons full of sugar did not make the mendacity go down. John S. (for Superpatriot) McMaverick portrayed himself as the poster boy of Love of Country, Service Above Self and adversity, blessed nobility. He droned on indulging in glittering generalities, accusations, flag waving, and promises of change and reform ala the Obama genre.

The great white hope of Republicanism was spreading his wings in an attempt to rise up out of the ashes of Bushdom like the legendary Phoenix of the fable, but he looked more like a different kind of bird picking at a carcass stripped of most of its

leavings. If I ever had any doubts as to how I should vote, they were dispelled by this spectacle of sublime silliness.

Running a close second to this sorry scenario is the TV campaign of Congressman John R. Kuhl Jr., aka Randy. He's running on a platform of drilling for oil on public land reserves before tapping into the 33,000 acres already open for drilling, neither of which would be productive for a decade — hardly a relief from our present overpriced dependency problem. You might say this solution is crudely unproductive. Eric Massa, Randy's opponent, understands this and he should prevail for many more reasons than Kuhl's pandering to Exxon-Mobil, et al.

Lorraine Moreland
Horseheads