

American Notes

BY PJ HESLIN



Photo: Cigge Skidmore



Former Vice-President Dan Quayle, above, throws his support behind Romney at a rally in Arizona.

Above right, Jennie Dallery has taken over from Burton Gintell as president of the American Club of the Riviera.

The Race is over

Now that Romney is the presumptive Republican nominee it's time to reminisce on how enjoyable the race was. Maybe my memory is short but it seems to me that this last primary was the most entertaining GOP or Democratic primary ever. There was serial infidelity (amongst more than one), God telling some of the candidates to run for President and who to marry, Mormonism and Newt Gingrich. The things they were saying and doing were usually reserved for fringe candidates who you hope and expect will be constitutionally crazy.

I couldn't help but think, how is it that the Republican Party could become so unhinged? I think the answer is family values. Since 1992, when Dan Quayle went after Murphy Brown for being a single Mom (it didn't matter that she wasn't a real person), the Republican Party has hoisted the banner of family values. After 9/11, family values took a backseat to security but in the last six years or so it's back in the driver's seat.

In 1992 family values stood for the traditional family unit, and, according to some, their absence caused the breakdown of "urban" families. Now when family values are discussed what they're really talking about is gay marriage or abortion. Bush (the younger one)

ran with this and who took the standard from him with a vengeance? Sarah Palin.

Palin is the bridge that brings us to the present. Palin wrapped herself up in the rhetoric of many things but especially family values with her talk of God, country and snowmobiles. She also brought with it a dash of "crazy", or as she likes to call it, "rogue". Before Palin, a political candidate like her would have been a flash in the pan but instead of falling back into obscurity she became a celebrity. I believe this is where GOP hopefuls took note. Family values was a useful tool to talk about God guiding your vision for America and it didn't matter if you won or lost an election you could still have a career. Even though Palin's political career has peaked, she still makes a healthy salary as a political reality star.

So, this last fleet of Republican Presidential hopefuls all tried to out family value each other with talk of God and protecting zygotes and making sure Americans don't end up marrying animals. And it didn't matter how "crazy" they seemed because the more they would try and out family value one another, the more press they'd get. Would it lead to the Republican nomination? Who cares? All that attention would certainly lead to increased personal appearance fees, book

deals or Fox political commenting jobs long after the Presidential election is over.

The French version of family values is immigration. In this past election, it seems to me the common thread of all the candidates is keeping France for the French, which means placing limits on immigration. And the person who best takes it to this extreme is Marine Le Pen. Personally, I find her the candidate with the most political charisma but then she starts to speak and it's all ruined for me.

Voting

The second round of the French Presidential election saw a turnout of 81%, which is astonishingly high when compared to that of the 64% who voted for the 2008 American Presidential election, an election that involved issues such as the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, involvement in a few wars across the globe and the first African American Presidential candidate; one wonders what it would take to inspire Americans to get out and vote.

Some political scientists and sociologists point a finger at Nixon for creating voter apathy. They argue that the Watergate cover-up created a loss in faith for American leadership. Others say that voter registration is too difficult or that most voters feel disenfranchised

A reminder to those who have not filed 2011 taxes, George Donnelly (see Reporter website) is an American tax consultant registered in France who can help.

because they perceive the American political system as being controlled by a small, wealthy, elite. It might be a practical issue since American elections are held on a Tuesday whereas the French elections take place on a Sunday.

With this in mind, I contacted William Beachner from Democrats Abroad, to see how American expats can vote in the upcoming election. Beachner explains that, first of all, voters need to register. The easiest way for American expats to do so is to go to votefromabroad.org and follow the step-by-step instructions there. And he reminds us, due to “changes in the Federal law in recent years, all Americans, even if they have been registered before and have voted in previous elections, must register again for each election cycle. Everyone must register this year if they want their vote to be counted in the November 2012 elections.”

Founded in 2011 in order to empower American voters abroad, the Union of Overseas Voters offers training for volunteers and help for overseas voters. Tony Paschall, Union Chair of the organization stresses how important the expat vote is. “Although absentee ballots have made the difference in some US federal elections, almost one-third of overseas ballots were never mailed back to US election officials for counting in 2010 and we intend to change that.”

Organizations like Democrats Abroad also offer American expats the opportunity to help with the registration process abroad. Says Beachner: “Americans joining our organization can assist us with our two major activities: organizing events of interest and value to Americans in our region and encouraging and assisting Americans to register and vote by absentee ballot.”

See page 46 for William Beachner’s contact details or visit democratsabroad.org/group/france-riviera. For those

interested in what the GOP is up to overseas visit republicansabroad.org or if you want some non-partisan voting information visit wevote.fr

The American Club’s new face

Not only do the Republicans have a new leader but also the American Club of the Riviera (ACR) recently selected a new President. Jennie Dallery has been living in France on and off over the past decade and is pleased to take on the role as the head of the 50-year-old institution. Although she returned to America and lived in Amsterdam during the past ten years Jennie describes herself as having an elastic band attached to her when it comes to France. “No matter what, I have to return here.”

Jennie describes herself as a reluctant President of the ACR. “Frankly, in the past I was not interested in seeking fellowship with other Americans abroad but rather, integrating and letting the cards fall where they may. Yet after a very positive experience in Amsterdam with the American women’s club I started to recognize the advantages of an affiliation with an organization of compatriots. The expat experience is at once unique for each person and collective at the same time. Our cultural imprint is stronger than the influences of our chosen country of residence. That said, a club should not be a crutch. People who move abroad have an obligation to speak the native language and adapt to the norms.”

Last November, ACR hosted the annual Conference of Presidents of American Clubs in Cap d’Ail, which saw representatives from 15 European countries. The club is open to “Americans and friends of America” and in the next two years Dallery hopes to broaden the demographic of the club and diversify their activities. See page 40 for ACR events. ■

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