

UNCONVENTIONAL CONVENTIONS

by Edwin D. Reilly, Jr.
for the Sunday Gazette

“Values are faithfully applied to the facts before us, while ideology overrides whatever facts call them into question.”

—Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*

I begin this piece with the same opening quote that I used in my *Gazette* column of November 26, 2006, in which I was the first area pundit (if I may claim such a title) to endorse Barack Obama for President, two years before he was nominated and elected. (See www.edreilly.info.) I do not regret it. At their convention that concluded 11 days ago, the Republicans outdid themselves in confirming the truthfulness of that quote.

Paul Ryan certainly did. In his Vice-Presidential nomination acceptance speech, one wildly cheered by the mostly Tea Party delegates, he made five misstatements of fact, all of which were roundly pointed out and criticized by an army of the next day's bloggers, columnists, news analysts, and TV-commentators including, believe it or not, Sally Kohn of Fox News! She said there were only three words to describe Ryan's talk: “dazzling, distracting, and deceptive.”

The most blatant falsehood uttered by the Pathological Prevaricator was that the President failed to prevent the foreclosure of a General Motors plant in Ryan's own congressional district. By now you know, and certainly he did, that the plant closed late in 2008 while the President in office was George W. Bush.

The most egregious of the five was Ryan's claim that the \$716 billion reduction to Medicare in the President's deficit reduction plan was identical to the amount in his plan. It most certainly is not; Ryan would reduce benefits to health care recipients, whereas the President proposes a corresponding reduction in recompense to providers.

Romney pollster Neil Newhouse countered with “Fact checkers come to this with their own sets of thoughts and beliefs, and we're not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact checkers.” Translation: “Phooey on the fact-checkers; we have our own facts, we don't need theirs.” (See that opening quote again.)

By now you must have read that, at least through his days at university, Ryan was a big fan of Ayn Rand, the apostle of “objectiveness,” otherwise known as supreme self-interest. He may have wavered a bit lately; perhaps it was only recently that he read her obituary (or Wikipedia profile) and learned that she was a Russian-American anti-war libertarian pro-choice atheist who loved to excoriate the sainted Ronald Reagan.

Ryan's declared theological hero is St. Thomas Aquinas, whose views were antithetical to those of Ayn Rand's unfettered free market capitalism. He considered it a sin to sell something for more than it is worth or to charge interest on a loan. And he extolled the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and the seven corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry; to give drink to the thirsty; to clothe the naked; to harbor the harborless; to visit the sick; to ransom the captive; to bury the dead. Romney believes in all of these and practices them. So does Ryan—provided that government has no role in them. Too bad that he believes in only nine of the Ten Commandments.

The best speeches at the convention were delivered by women, particularly Condi Rice. Ann Romney did well, too, as did Governor Susana Martinez of New Mexico, a Democratic apostate. As most of the speakers were, she was billed as a “rising star,” now a political cliché if ever there was one.

There is one fewer rising star now; New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, the keynote speaker who, just as I expected, crashed and burned. Those of you who have seen him on TV know that he is an uncouth, egotistic Bombastic Bushkin, one who said “I” 37 times and “Mitt Romney” only seven.

The “highlight” of the convention was actually a very low light, Clint Eastwood's debate with an empty chair. When he channeled an absent and invisible Barack Obama supposedly saying that Romney should go do something to himself, Eastwood said “He can't do that!” and the men in the audience roared. Then the camera showed many of them turning to their wives to explain what

Eastwood meant. How the “family values” party could sanction such X-rated aural pornography escapes me. Disgraceful!

The President received a surprising endorsement at the GOP convention. Arizona Governor Jan Brewer told NBC News’ Ron Mott that “I know if President Obama is elected in November, *which I hope he is* [!], he will be able to come together with all of us...” An aide came on the air quickly to say that she misspoke, but I think she was wearing her Freudian slip.

I also loved the front page of *USA Today* of the weekend issue that followed. Right underneath a big photo of R&R, the newly minted Bobbsey twins (as better portrayed on the cover of the *New Yorker* of September 3), the oversize headline read “We Can Do Better!”

Well, the Republicans could have done better only if their primary voters had had the good sense to support Jon Huntsman, the only moderate in the strange bunch who chose to compete. Like Willard “Mitt” Romney (and Senator Harry Reid), he is a Mormon, and no one should be rejected for the presidency solely because of his or her personal religious faith or lack thereof. Mormons are kind and gentle people. And I love their choir.

Some 122 years ago, not really all that long ago (compared to 2,000 or 5,000 years), the highest Mormon potentate brought the religion into synch with the 2012 Republican platform plank that “Marriage is a union between a man and a woman.” This replaced the founder’s edict that marriage is a union between a man and a woman and a woman and a woman and a woman... und so weiter.

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Postscript of 1/23/2013: Rejected, I may no longer write about a national issue that has no apparent local connection.