

Shameless in, shameless out: Presidential race 2016

**SIMON
SAYS**



‘**W**e live at a time of great events and little men.’ No, this was not said after the last Republican presidential debate.

It was said more than two centuries ago by Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau, a leader in the early days of the French Revolution. The quotation appears in Hilary Mantel’s historical novel “A Place of Greater Safety,” which means we are not 100 percent sure it was said, but it certainly should have been.

It doesn’t take any great leap of imagination to look upon our current presidential campaign and say Mirabeau was correct. Great events swirl around us — we are mired in crises both foreign and domestic — and yet what little people we have to lead us.

People are being barrel-bombed and forced from their homes by the millions in Syria. North Korea, which is led by an absolute dictator of questionable sanity, brags it has just developed a hydrogen bomb. The United States faces an economic outlook this year that runs the gamut from bleak

to catastrophic.

And what do I see at the very moment I type these words? I see Donald Trump standing in front of a mannequin of John Wayne in Winterset, Iowa, where Wayne was born and spent the first seven years of his life.

Tuesday, Wayne’s daughter endorsed Trump for the presidency. This is live cable network news.

A reporter asks Trump the importance of this endorsement.

“I think endorsements are, depending who makes them, valuable,” Trump says. “Some don’t make a difference. But I think having a John Wayne and John Wayne family endorsement means a lot.”

But wait. There is a far more important endorsement at hand aside from that of an actor who has been dead for 36 years. Sarah Palin would endorse Trump later this day.

Palin was one of the least qualified candidates in the history of the vice presidency, which is saying something considering the job has virtually no duties. Yet Republican nominee John McCain sacrificed what was left of his credibility by claiming that Palin was ready to become commander in chief should something incapacitate McCain.

This is what running for

president does to you. If you were not shameless going in, you will almost certainly be shameless going out.

Before bidding farewell to The Duke, The Donald is asked by a reporter about the toxic tap water in Flint, Michigan.

“I shouldn’t be commenting on Flint,” Trump said.

As Charles Krauthammer said on Fox News in July 2015: “This is the strongest field of Republican candidates in 35 years. You could pick a dozen of them at random and have the strongest Cabinet America has had in our lifetime.”

As Fred Barnes said in the Weekly Standard in April of last year: “Here are three propositions about the 2016 presidential race. ... One, the Republican field of candidates (and potential candidates) is far superior to the field of Republican candidates four years ago.

“Two, the GOP candidates are fresher, livelier, and less touched by scandal than the Democratic front-runner, Hillary Clinton.

“And three, the Republicans have more credible rationales for seeking the presidency than does Clinton.”

The Republican candidates, themselves, put it a little more simplistically.

As Jeb Bush said at a forum in

December 2015: “Who has the right stuff? We need a person with a brain, a person with a heart and a person with a backbone.”

How about a pair of ruby slippers, too? After listening to him, I really wonder whether Jeb realizes that “The Wizard of Oz” was a movie and not an instructional campaign video.

And if he is waiting for a house to land on Trump’s head, Jeb may be disappointed.

But how about Mike Huckabee, who came in first in the Iowa caucus and second in the delegate count in 2008?

Last October, while watching a Democratic debate, Huckabee tweeted: “I trust @BernieSanders with my tax dollars like I trust a North Korean chef with my labrador!”

Some people objected to what they saw as the racism or at least the cultural insensitivity of this remark. The Huckabee campaign sneered.

“Poor liberals, no sense of humor and no sense of reality,” the campaign said in an email.

“Facts: North Koreans eat dog and Bernie Sanders wants to spend 18 trillion dollars of your money. What’s so hard to understand?”

Ted Cruz is running because he wants Christians to take the nation back. (Back from whom,

I do not know. According to an ABC poll taken last year, “Eighty-three percent of Americans identify themselves as Christians.”)

Yet, under the headline “Ted Cruz Tells Brody File: Time For Christians To Rise Up And Take America Back,” Cruz says in an interview that “far too many Christians have ceded the public arena to people that aren’t believers.”

“Do you believe you were put in this position for such a time as this?” David Brody of the Christian Broadcasting Network asked him.

“I hope and pray that I was,” Cruz replied, oozing humility.

In times past, candidates said running for president was meaningful, win or lose. That’s because they got to meet real Americans up close and experience their lives and hear about their hopes and dreams.

Not anymore.

Last month, in a gymnasium at the Pennichuck Middle School in Nashua, New Hampshire, Trump said, “Honestly, unless I win, it doesn’t mean a damn thing to me.”

Big problems and little candidates. They seem to go hand in hand.

Roger Simon is POLITICO’s chief political columnist.

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