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Skip debate dance; offer detailed plans

My lip usually curls when I get press releases from candidates challenging each other to debates, as we've seen recently from two of the Republicans running for governor.

The candidate debate challenge is a shopworn campaign tactic that serves no other purpose than to get a little publicity for the increasingly desperate underdog in a race.

Last week, Bob Vander Plaats challenged his GOP rivals, Terry Branstad and Rod Roberts, to a series of four debates to be held across the state. Not to be outdone, Roberts this week proposed two more debates, to be held in rural Iowa. Democrat Bob Krause, who is running for U.S. Senate, also has called for debates with his primary opponents.

Gov. Chet Culver was asked this week whether he would debate his new primary opponent, Jonathan Narcisse. Culver,

ON POLITICS



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wisely, said he'd wait to see who actually manages to qualify to be on the ballot before he talks about debates. Narcisse told the Cedar Rapids Gazette that if Culver's advisers allowed the governor to debate him, they should be sued for political malpractice.

Debates and forums are an important part of the campaign process. They are generally the only opportunities for voters to watch the candidates side by side, answering similar questions and challenging each other's positions directly instead

of through the media. It's a chance to evaluate candidates under pressure, answering questions they might not expect.

Media outlets around the state, including the Register, are planning debates. In most cases, candidates will agree to participate in at least one. That has nothing to do with the debate challenges that candidates issue to each other.

In a race with a clear front-runner or incumbent, the challengers crave the opportunity to share the stage. Debates tend to level the playing field and elevate dark-horse candidates' status. They're free media bonanzas for those who can't raise enough money to buy much advertising. There's always a chance the leading candidate will commit a gaffe.

There's no down side for lesser-known candidates to call for debates. A refused or ignored invitation is grounds for

another round of press releases, accusing rivals of arrogance, overconfidence or maybe even fear of debating. Occasionally, that strategy even works.

In 2008, Democrat Ed Fallon attracted media attention for debating an empty podium over Rep. Leonard Boswell turned down invitations for 10 different forums — including one from the Register and KCCL. Boswell attracted some criticism from his supporters for refusing to debate.

Incumbents and front-runners want to limit exposure to lesser-known rivals, especially in the primary. The rewards for debating are relatively small compared to the risks. They'd have to be crazy to appear at a debate organized by a rival candidate. Even so, most experienced politicians know that voters expect at least one debate in high-profile races.

Instead of issuing gimmicky

debate challenges, candidates would be better off offering detailed plans for fixing the economy, creating jobs and balancing the state and federal budgets.

Part of me thinks it would be nice if the candidates took care of managing debates themselves. They could arrange the media sponsors, determine the format, invite the candidates, come up with the questions, write the scripts, work out the timing, deal with the other campaigns, invite guests, build a set, distribute audience tickets, credential the press, etc.

I know just how much time and Tylenol it takes to pull off a successful debate. Candidates wouldn't really want to do it.

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Register Exclusive

Restore America Get government under control

At no other point in recent decades has the political climate presented us with so great an opportunity to return our nation to prosperity and to reclaim the freedoms big government has stripped away from us.

Thanks to the tremendous growth of the Internet, as well as the unprecedented interest in the message of individual liberty kindled by such vast access to information, millions of Americans are now organizing and taking action.

In the last few years, I have had the opportunity to travel extensively throughout the country, and the unique people of each area I have visited have only deepened my conviction that no other idea can unify, excite and mobilize Americans as powerfully as the message of peace, prosperity and freedom.

It is encouraging to see so much outrage finally being directed toward the proper recipient — an out-of-control federal government — but if the Republican Party wants to capitalize on its current momentum, it needs to permanently reject the policies that led to its devastating defeat in 2008.

In 1994, a similar populist revolt, under the banner of "the Contract with America," swept Republicans into power across the country and gave them majority control of the U.S. House for the first time in 40 years. It was this new attention to limited government beliefs that encouraged me to set aside my private medical practice and return to Congress.

Throughout the years, however, I watched Republican optimism and principled convictions surrender to political posturing to retain power.

A promise to cut waste and empower parents by eliminating the U.S. Department of Education became a tenure that more than doubled it.

A repudiation of nation-building



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morphed into a trillion-dollar foreign policy that steadfastly guards the borders of other nations while neglecting our own veterans here at home.

A resolve to promote individual responsibility gave way to a bill containing the largest expansion of Medicare since the program's creation.

President Obama is correct on one point: The time for change is now.

There is no limit to what can be accomplished if those who espouse a limited government message on the campaign trail will implement its principles upon entering Congress.

Rising generations know that America's current course cannot be sustained, and they are ready to change direction. When I speak on college campuses across the country, the topic that consistently gets the loudest applause is stopping our system of endlessly printing money out of thin air by ending the Federal Reserve and returning to sound money.

The economic crisis has inflicted

considerable pain, leading to common-sense questions about how we got to this point and how we can recover. We have to be ready to provide answers — answers that do more than just pay lip service to cutting taxes and freeing small businesses from red tape, but answers that proceed from a firm, consistent conviction that a free people, unencumbered by the burdens of omnipresent government, have the ability to create, stimulate and innovate their way to success far more than a crowded room of bureaucrats thousands of miles away can ever hope to equal.

True change will object to any unbalanced budget, instead of merely trimming around the edges.

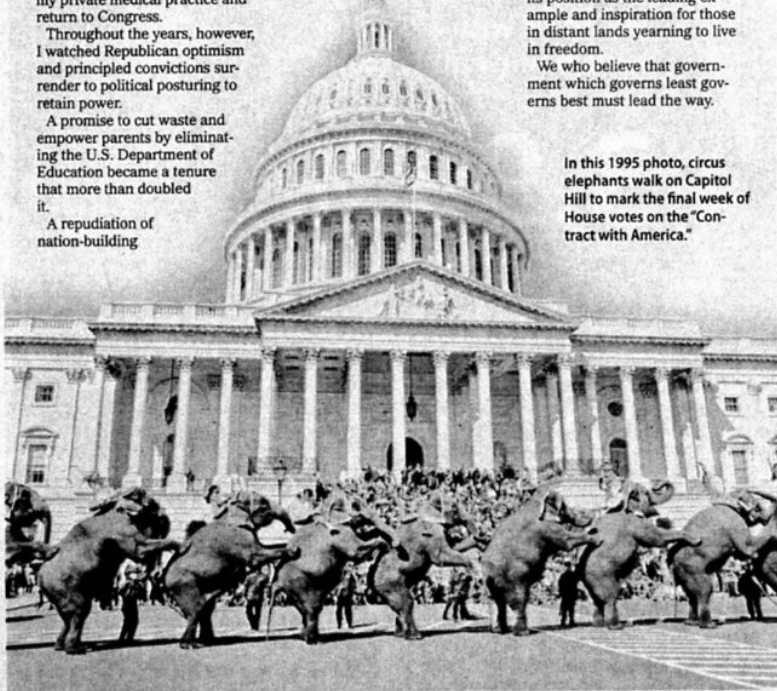
True change will remove barriers to competition in health care and offer Americans tax credits and tax deductions for their medical expenses, allowing them to pursue the plans that fit them best.

True change will stop punishing productivity by eliminating the immoral income tax and estate tax, returning to taxpayers the money that they — not the government — work hard to earn.

Ultimately, this return to core principles is about much more than winning elections. It is about protecting future generations and guaranteeing them the same promise of liberty our forefathers entrusted to us. And it is about returning America to its position as the leading example and inspiration for those in distant lands yearning to live in freedom.

We who believe that government which governs least governs best must lead the way.

In this 1995 photo, circus elephants walk on Capitol Hill to mark the final week of House votes on the "Contract with America."



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

Iowa View

Still a believer in biodiesel despite loss of Iowa plant

I've been to auctions before, but it will be a long time until I can face another one. In January, I watched our biodiesel plant, Tri-City Energy in Keokuk, sell on the auction block. The \$5 million plant that once churned out a green, domestically produced fuel sold for \$55,000. That's an obscene price to be paid; a mere 1 percent of its value.

Although the auction price is devastating to those of us who invested in, built, worked at and believed in the biodiesel plant, it may not be the worst part. The real tragedy is that our biodiesel plant fell into the hands of equipment brokers who are considering dismantling it and selling it overseas to India. I personally have received two calls directly from India requesting details on the plant. As if foreign oil isn't bad enough, now we may one day import biodiesel from India, from a plant built out of the pockets of Iowans.

The people of Tri-City Energy are not alone in this crisis. America's biodiesel plants are failing at a devastating rate. We're going backward in national energy security as we close the door on the only advanced biofuels commercially available. Made from renewable agricultural coproducts and byproducts, like soybean oil or animal fat, biodiesel blends work in regular diesel engines and fit in with our existing petroleum infrastructure.

Our government leaders must reverse the travesty happening to our energy supply, by committing to domestic energy production, green jobs and greenhouse gas reduction.

You may be thinking that it's a free market, and it's not your problem if biodiesel can't compete. The truth is energy dependency is everyone's problem, and biodiesel was once a promising part of the solution. Don't we want green industries that can actually help solve the problem? It's unrealistic to think that, without strong government policies, our initial endeavors to produce green fuel can compete with petroleum. Petroleum products have enjoyed decades of subsidies and virtually no competition in the energy market.

Recognizing the many benefits to society and the environment, biodiesel once had the federal government's backing. Strong federal policy spurred the growth of 173 biodiesel plants, with the capacity to make 2.69 billion gallons of domestic biodiesel a year. We were off to a great start, only to be abandoned by the very government that nurtured that growth.

The latest blow came from Congress, which failed to renew a vital tax credit for biodiesel. While Sen. Chuck Grassley fought to get it in the latest federal jobs bill, Sen. Harry Reid took it out. That's 29,000 green jobs lost nationwide, and another 23,000 green jobs now in immediate jeopardy. Iowa has already lost 2,500 permanent jobs stemming from biodiesel, and another 2,900 are on the line. Meanwhile, the talk in Washington for green jobs and renewable energy, including advanced biofuels like biodiesel, lingers on and on.

It's too late for our Tri-City Energy employees, including me. I am now one of the millions of Americans looking for work. But it might not be too late for biodiesel. I'm telling this story because despite the hardship for my family, the investors, my town and the former employees, I still believe in biodiesel. I'm hoping that Iowa legislators and congressional leaders step up and do the right thing for Iowa and our country.

The Iowa House has before it a bill that would ensure Iowa's diesel fuel contains 5 percent biodiesel — a measure that would create demand for at least 45 million gallons of biodiesel. This state legislation would lead to investments in the industry that would reinstate Iowa as the national hub for biodiesel.

My plant is gone, but we don't have to auction off our entire biodiesel industry.

Going once, going twice — green industry, economic prosperity and energy security.



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