

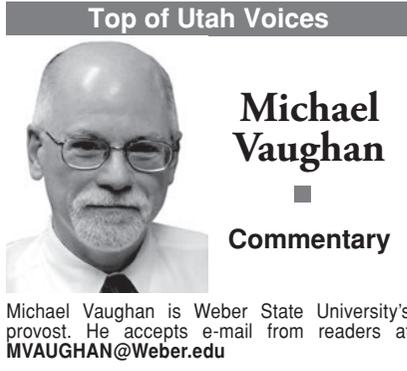
# Viewpoints

## We should focus on a candidate's knowledge and ability

I was born during the Eisenhower administration. The first president I remember with any clarity was John F. Kennedy. I remember the things that everyone remembers about Kennedy. He was good looking. He was charismatic. It seemed that everyone liked Kennedy, Jackie and their family.

I also remember that Kennedy was a Catholic president. This fact is imprinted on my memory because I was a Catholic kid in a small Arkansas town. Our community was filled with Free Will Baptists, Pentecostals and other fundamentalists. The few Catholic kids in town were known as the ones who worshipped statues, carried beads, read a funny Bible and couldn't eat hamburgers on Friday.

For me, Kennedy's election was a mental elixir. When I went to Sunday mass I knew that President Kennedy was doing the same; I saw him



Top of Utah Voices

**Michael Vaughan**

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Commentary

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doing so on television. When I ate tuna noodle casserole on Friday, I was confident that the Kennedy family was sitting down to the same dinner.

I was self-satisfied to have someone just like me running the country. I won't apologize for these notions. After all, I was only 7 years old. Yet, if you believe the political commentators, many voters are motivated by the same sentiments I felt as a small child.

Time magazine wrote, "There is little doubt that John

McCain's unexpected choice of 44-year old Sarah Palin as his vice presidential nominee is aimed squarely at female voters." A few weeks ago, I listened as Sean Hannity pressed an African American listener to admit that the only reason the listener supported Obama was because of his race. Before Mitt Romney abandoned his campaign for the

Republican nomination he was forced to give a speech explaining his religious beliefs.

Are we living in a time when a candidate's race, religion and gender are more important than their knowledge, experience and

perspective? Are voters motivated by the same sentiments I felt as a 7-year-old? Do voters simply want their candidates to be a mirror image of themselves?

H.L. Mencken recognized this possibility. In 1920, writing for the Baltimore Evening Sun, Mencken wrote, "As democracy is perfected, the office of president represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron."

Candidates have long recognized the fact that many voters believe candidates who look like them must think like

them. Candidates with Ivy League degrees make sure they retain their Southern drawl or Texas twang. Wealthy candidates do their best to downplay their net worth. In a 1984 book, the author Edward Pessen has dubbed this phenomena "The Log Cabin Myth." In the current campaign, Republicans have tagged Obama as an elitist because of his Columbia and Harvard education, and his eloquence as a speaker. Democrats contend that McCain is out of touch with the economic problems of the common voter because he can't recall how many houses he owns.

Given the importance of this year's election, we can hope that voters are able to

ignore personal biases and focus upon a candidate's knowledge and ability. The presidential election of 1932 could serve as a good example.

At the depths of the Great Depression with almost a quarter of the nation's workforce unemployed, the nation elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a wealthy man surrounded by "old money" and the privileges associated with wealth.

On a personal level, Roosevelt was very different from the average voter who cast a ballot during the Great Depression. Yet, voters considered the issues and determined that Roosevelt was their preferred candidate.

We can learn from their example.

