

Heartbeat away Community Comment: October 11, 2012 Mike Goldsby

The Vice Presidential debate will be held this evening. This particular debate is generating a lot of attention because the stakes seem to be so high. Romney's campaign seemed to be steadily going downhill until the first presidential debate. Romney came out swinging. Obama was reserved. Romney is declared the winner. And like magic, one event turns the polls around. Commentators who told us for months to ignore the polls now have a renewed respect for their accuracy.

Vice Presidential debates do not have a very long tradition. The first one was only 36 years ago, Mondale versus Dole. That debate demonstrated the impact that a few poorly chosen words could make. Dole blamed Democrats for starting World War Two, plus Viet Nam and Korea. Mondale jumped on that and was by some declared a winner. It is difficult to know what impact that had on Carter's victory. But it didn't hurt.

Dan Quayle forever cemented his image by comparing himself to President Kennedy. He got elected but has not held an elected position since.

Apparently, both Biden and Ryan have been practicing for weeks; Participating in mock interviews, watching tapes of their opponents, like football teams watching films of their opponents.

Biden says some stupid things off the cuff sometimes but he is an experienced debater. He has been in 23 important debates, 14 of those in 2008. He went up against Sarah Palin in the lone VP debate of that election. Biden will likely try to hammer Ryan on Medicare and point out that Romney has been vague where Ryan is more specific.

Ryan is a pretty smart guy. He is knowledgeable and well read. He doesn't seem to make big mistakes. He will certainly point out the huge deficit and economic failures of the Obama Administration.

The Vice president has only two official duties; To be the presiding officer over the Senate and to take over if the President can't serve. That heartbeat-away-from-the-presidency fact needs to be taken seriously. Thirteen Vice Presidents have gone on to become President. Eight took over upon the death of the president. One after a resignation and five used the vice presidency to launch their own successful Presidential campaigns. Ryan very likely has his eyes on the 2016 campaign.

But the Vice President has some informal roles to play as well. VPs act as attack dogs or lightning rods, saying the things that the president can't or taking the heat for the president. Dick Cheney was really good at that. He frightened me and a lot of other people. I was always glad that George W. spent so much time mountain biking and staying fit.

So tonight's debate may yield some substance or it may yield a major gaffe or embarrassing moment. One month from now, half of us will be really happy. The other half will be really angry. It waits to be seen what impact tonight's debate will have on that outcome.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment