

Joe the Plumber's vision a stark contrast to Obama



JONAH GOLDBERG maintains that millions of Americans don't share Barack Obama's worldview that we need to "spread the wealth around."

At a John McCain rally in Virginia on Saturday, Tito Munoz had come to face the enemy: the news media, which had declared war on Joe Wurzelbacher.

"Why the hell are you going after Joe the Plumber?" Munoz yelled at a group of reporters, including my National Review colleague Byron York. "Joe the Plumber has an idea. He has a future. He wants to be something else. Why is that wrong? Everything is possible in America. I made it. Joe the Plumber could make it even better than me. ... I was born in Colombia, but I was made in the U.S.A."

Who knows what it will do for McCain in the end, but the Joe the Plumber phenomenon is real. At the rally, supporters carried handmade signs reading "Phil the Bricklayer" and "Rose the Teacher." Wurzelbacher symbolizes an optimistic, individualistic vision of America sorely lacking — until recently — in McCain's rhetoric.

Barack Obama, in contrast, has offered the most rhetorically eloquent defense of collectivism since Franklin D. Roosevelt. In his biographical video at the Democratic convention, he proclaimed that in America, "one person's struggle is all of our struggles." In his acceptance speech, he artfully replaced the idea of the American dream with the century-old progressive nostrum of "America's promise."

But the two visions are in opposition: the former individualistic, the latter collectivist. We each have our own idea of the American dream. Joe the Plumber's is to own a small plumbing company; yours might be something else entirely. In America, that's fine, because the pursuit of happiness is an individual, not a collective, right.

Obama's "America's promise," meanwhile, harkens back a century to the writings of such progressives as Herbert Croly (author of *The Promise of American Life*), who demonized individualism while sanctifying collective action overseen by the state. Obama often articulates a vision of government inspired by the biblical injunction to be our brother's keeper. Few would dispute the moral message, but many disagree that such religious imperatives are best translated into tax or economic policy. (Where are the separation-of-church-and-state fetishists when you need them?) But individualists haven't had much of a voice in McCain, at least not until last week.

So we've listened to Joe Biden question the patriotism — and, at times, piety — of those who don't share Obama's economic vision. We've listened to Michelle Obama promise that her husband will make Americans "work" in his effort to fix our "broken souls." We've heard the candidate himself say that we should agree to higher taxes in the name of "neighborliness," and that he'd raise the capital gains tax — even if it demonstrably lowered revenues — "for the purposes of fairness."

In short, Obama's explanation to Joe the Plumber that we need to "spread the wealth around" is a sincere and significant expression of his worldview, with roots stretching back to his church and his days as a community organizer.

Millions of Americans don't share this vision. They don't see the economy as a pie, whereby your slice can only get bigger if someone else's gets smaller. They don't begrudge the wealthy their wealth; they only ask to be given the same opportunities. They look at countries such as France and, rather than envy its socialized medicine and short workweeks, they fear its joblessness and tax policies that punish entrepreneurialism. People like Tito Munoz look at America and see an open path to their own American dream.

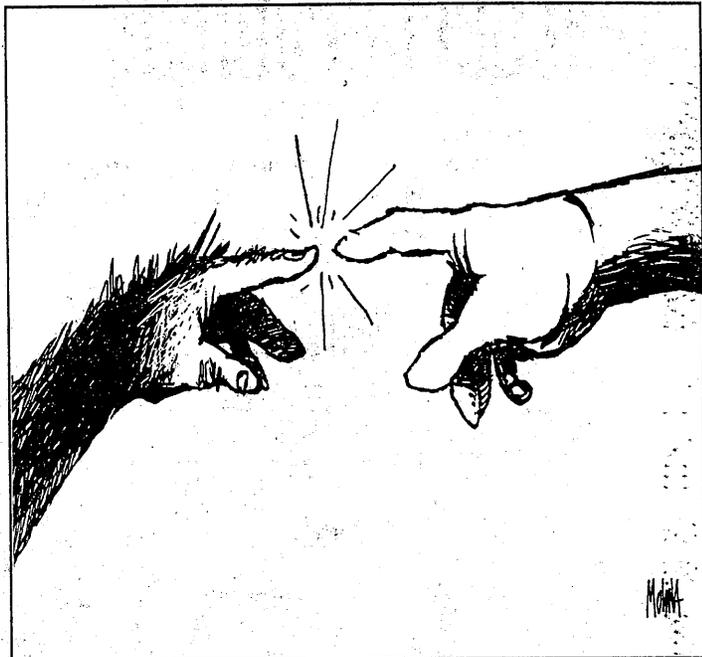
It would be nice if the media at least tried to understand this point.

Instead, they attacked and belittled a citizen who asked a candidate a question. They think he's stupid or a liar for not understanding that a promised check from a President Obama is more valuable than some pipe dream about future success.

It's funny. When PBS's Gwen Ifill had a straightforward conflict of interest — her forthcoming book hinges on an Obama presidency — that should have prevented her from moderating the VP debate, she and her fellow journalists tittered at the critics. All that matters, Ifill and company insisted, are the answers, not the questioner.

That's apparently the standard for people like Gwen the Journalist. But if Joe the Plumber gets revealing but embarrassing answers out of the media's preferred candidate, suddenly the questioner matters more than the answer. And he must be punished.

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Board's actions could put students at a disadvantage

■ **Anti-evolution push may hurt efforts to teach science**

By **ALAN I. LESHNER**

TEXAS has earned a reputation as an innovation powerhouse in fields ranging from agriculture and life sciences to high technology and space exploration.

But in a report issued this summer, a panel of Texas business, education and government leaders warned that without "critical changes" in state schools — especially in science-related instruction — the state will lose its global competitive edge.

It appears, however, that some members of the State Board of Education are working on a different agenda. Last week, they appointed three anti-evolution activists, including a leader of the "intelligent design" religious campaign, to a six-member panel that will review proposed new science curriculum standards.

The new standards will shape how science education is taught in Texas for the next decade, and it would be a terrible mistake to water down the teaching of evolution in any way.

Given the concerns about the state's future work force, the appointments are a troubling signal. At a time when most educators are working to prepare students for 21st century jobs, the board members' action threatens to confuse students, divide communities and tarnish Texas' reputation as an international science and technology center.

Intelligent design advocates on the state board have been maneuvering for months to undermine the teaching of evolution in science classes. They say that students need to hear about the strengths and weaknesses of evolution, which of course is true. But then they argue that the universe is so complex that it required an intelligent designer and that should be taught in science classes as an alternative to evolution. This is a religious belief, not a scientific argument. There is no science base to the notion of an intelligent designer.

In addition, there is no scientific controversy. Mainstream science and medical organizations in the United States and worldwide, representing

tens of millions of scientists, accept evolution as the best explanation for how life developed on Earth.

Yes, the anti-evolution campaign has lined up a small number of scientist supporters, but most have no expertise in biology or evolution. U.S. courts have seen through their arguments, repeatedly ruling that creationism and intelligent design are religious ideas that should not be taught as science in public schools.

Does that mean that science and religion are inherently in conflict? Not at all. They ask different questions and are separate realms of knowledge.

Science uses experiments and repeatable observations to build understanding of the natural world; it has nothing to say about the supernatural or spiritual realm. What experiment can test for the working of an intelligent creator? What hard evidence can prove it, or disprove it? This isn't a scientific issue. It's a matter of faith.

Certainly many scientists feel that their work presents no conflict with their faith. And nearly 12,000 Christian religious leaders, more than 500 of them in Texas, have signed the Clergy Letter Project, which supports evolution and opposes intelligent design in science class.

That consensus doesn't make headlines, but it shows us some constructive common ground.

Bringing nonscientific ideas into biology classes creates unacceptable risks. It will confuse young students and teach them to distrust well-established scientific facts. Classrooms could become religious battlegrounds. Lawsuits over policy could drain local school districts. And employers everywhere would worry about the quality of Texas' students.

To maintain the state's strength as an engine of U.S. research and innovation, Texas education leaders should stick to the basics. Students need a solid science foundation to thrive in the 21st century. We don't want our children to be stragglers in an age when clear understanding of science and technology are crucial to the economy and to so many issues of modern life.

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