Attacking hope?

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

Critics of Barack Obama, in both parties, feel they have to attack him to halt his momentum toward the Democratic presidential nomination. But attacking hope and inspiration makes little sense.

They should be talking about his policies and just how wrong Obama can be on some issues. On Iraq, he promises a quick retreat and won't acknowledge that, in the view of many experts, the surge is working to reduce the sectarian violence in Iraq. On immigration, he bought into the bumper-sticker solution to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. On trade, he rails against North American Free Trade Agreement and other trade deals and wants to shield blue-collar workers from a global market that is increasingly competitive. On education, he attacks the No Child Left Behind Act and fails to see that holding teachers accountable for the performance of their pupils helps minority students most of all. And on spending, he promises a list of giveaways that we can't possibly afford, such as the absurd notion of setting up a $10 billion home foreclosure prevention fund.

We could go on, but space is limited. The point is that there are plenty of areas where it could be argued that Obama would be a bad fit for America, his deep reservoir of personal gifts notwithstanding.

But, we must admit, there is one area where the 46-year-old fits perfectly with America.

This is, after all, a nation of long shots and second chances where people come from all over the world with nothing but dreams and the willingness to work hard to make them come true. That sort of thing does not happen without hope and optimism. So it's not surprising that, throughout our history, Americans have always turned toward the light and shunned the darkness. We have no use for politicians or demagogues who peddle doom and gloom, and we're forever falling in love with those at the other end of the spectrum - whether they come from the right or the left - who offer hope and optimism along with the promise that tomorrow will be a brighter day.

Ideally, all candidates for president should talk this way. But you'd be surprised. In this election, no one has embraced these themes more clearly than Obama. And do you know what his opponents in both parties are doing about it? They're making fun of him for it.

Hillary Clinton talks about how the Democratic race is really a battle of "speeches vs. solutions" and implies that her opponent doesn't offer more than "rhetorical flourishes." Republican John McCain is drawing from the same well. And you hear conservatives such as radio gabfly Rush Limbaugh portraying Obama as an empty suit for talking about hope and the future.

Whatever you think of Obama, and we have our differences with him, this line of attack isn't smart strategy. Imagine coming out against hope or dismissing inspirational oratory as "rhetorical flourishes" - and imagine attracting anyone with such a dour message.

Not in this election. Not at this time. Not in this country.

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