

# The Tax Argument Still Works

Obama's plans are giving voters pause.

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WALL STREET JOURNAL, OCTOBER 23, 2008

No campaign moves in a straight line. Every race experiences turns toward one side or the other, driven by events, the determined efforts of one candidate, or even a bored media hoping for a new story line.

This campaign's most recent turn started Sept. 15 with the credit markets shutting down and the economy at the brink of disaster. Before then, John McCain was 2.1 points ahead in the RealClearPolitics average, his first lead since late March. Two weeks later, RealClearPolitics had Barack Obama ahead by 4.6 points, rising to an 8.2-point lead on Oct. 14.

Is there one more turn in the contest and, if so, will it be toward Mr. McCain?

The race has tightened slightly in recent days to an average Obama lead of 6.8 points yesterday. And there are a few things bending toward Mr. McCain. The emergence of "Joe the Plumber" and the likelihood of an agreement with Iraq on a continued U.S. troop presence are two of them. Both are opportunities for Mr. McCain to contrast himself against Mr. Obama.

Mr. Obama's troublesome friendships with Bill Ayers, Tony Rezko and (especially) Rev. Jeremiah Wright are important. But only 12 days

remain. These relationships should have been highlighted by the McCain campaign in the spring and summer.

But Mr. McCain complicated things by unilaterally declaring Rev. Wright off limits. Now, Mr. Obama will benefit from the noise the media will generate if Mr. McCain attempts to make Obama's Four Amigos this election's closing act.

On the other hand, Mr. McCain might gain by arguing that in this time of consequence for America's economy and security he has been right and Mr. Obama demonstrably wrong on the biggest issues facing the country.

Mr. McCain's economic argument is simple: Raising taxes on small businesses in the face of recession will deepen and prolong the downturn. Taxing Joe the Plumber and other entrepreneurs to pay for what the National Taxpayers Union says are Mr. Obama's \$293 billion-a-year new spending plans is an expense the nation cannot afford. Mr. Obama's tax-and-spend prescription will cause the economic fever to spike, not recede.

On national security, America is close to a bilateral agreement with Iraq that will continue sending U.S. troops home based on success -- the result of the surge that Mr. McCain strongly advocated and Mr. Obama fiercely opposed. Should we elect someone so wrong about a strategy vital for success in what Osama bin Laden calls the central front in the war on terror?

Beyond that, Mr. McCain should also use vivid imagery to highlight concerns about the freshman Illinois senator. There are plenty of warning signs about Mr. Obama we ignore at our peril. Mr. McCain needs to explain what they are.

America's economy got into trouble when people didn't heed warning signs. Three years ago, Mr. McCain called for stricter oversight of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, warning their risky practices threatened our economy and could cost taxpayers billions. He tried to prevent or at least reduce the breadth of the crisis we're in now. Mr. Obama and congressional Democrats ignored these signs and opposed reform.

There's more. Wanting to raise taxes -- anyone's taxes -- in a slowdown is a warning sign of a misguided economic philosophy. Mr. Obama's proposal to redistribute wealth is a warning of indifference or hostility to enterprise. Mr. Obama's health-care plan is a warning that government will have more, not less, to say about your health care if he has his way. Mr. Obama's dismissal of offshore drilling and opposition to nuclear power are warning signs for an economy whose growth depends on affordable energy. Mr. Obama's commitment to withdraw our troops from Iraq without regard to conditions on the ground is a warning sign that Mr. Obama is dangerously wrong-headed and ideological on national security.

There's more: The absence of a single significant instance in which Mr. Obama cooperated in a bipartisan manner in the Senate is a warning sign. So is his failure to dirty his hands by working hard on any major legislative challenge since entering Congress. And so is his refusal to break with his party or its interest groups on any issue of substance.

Mr. McCain has only one hope: to drive home doubts about Mr. Obama based on his record, and share as much as he can about his own values and vision to reassure voters.

Even if he does, Mr. McCain's task won't be easy: Mr. Obama is using his considerable talents as a community organizer. Evidence from early voting in Florida, North Carolina, New Mexico and Nevada shows that Democrats are flocking to cast ballots. We don't know yet whether they're cannibalizing their Election Day turnout by getting reliable voters to cast ballots early, or creating an electoral tsunami by targeting people who wouldn't otherwise bother to turn out. If it's the former, Mr. McCain still has a (long) shot. If it's the latter, he and other Republican candidates are about to be dealt a punishing electoral blow.

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