

# RiverOpinion



## To tell the truth

**TOM BURGUM**

Contributing Columnist  
burgum@manateerivernews.com

Sen. Joe Biden did it again. He was winging it at a fundraiser last Saturday, and he committed the ultimate campaign sin — he told the truth. The Barack Obama/Joe Biden team has made a great fuss over America's alleged loss of prestige and moral authority in international affairs. Biden is obviously worried that promises to immediately restore America to its presumed former position of being universally loved and admired may be a bit of a stretch. So, he was engaged in a bit of what might be called damping down expectations.

"Mark my words," he advised the assembled throng, "watch, we're gonna have an international crisis, a generated crisis, to test the mettle of this guy (Obama). There are gonna be a lot of you (Obama supporters) who want to go, 'Whoa, wait a minute, yo, whoa, whoa, I don't know about that decision. Because if you think the decision is sound when they're made, which I believe you will when they're made, they're not likely to be as popular as they are sound. Because if they're popular, they're probably not sound.'"

Aside from sounding a bit like George Bush trying to explain the decision to invade Iraq, Biden is on solid ground. Obama will be tested. He will be tested very hard because the leaders of China, North Korea, Iran, Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda and even the European Union will be anxious to discover how the new president will react to a serious international crisis.

Biden is on to something — just imagine if the candidates leveled with us. It isn't going to happen, but I know what I would like to hear.

I wish one of the candidates would tell us that his administration would not care one damn bit about whether anyone in the world loved us, or whether

we had any moral authority. At sometime in the past decade, we have become obsessed with the idea we are no longer loved as in days of yore. Aside from a question of just how much we were loved in the good-old days, we must somehow get over the idea that international relations are nothing more than a worldwide Miss Congeniality contest.

I wish one of our prospective leaders would recall the wisdom of Niccolo Machiavelli who wrote in the Prince, "Since it is difficult to join them together, it is safer to be feared than to be loved when one of the two must be lacking."

We might recall that when Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq, Minyar al-Gaddafi of Libya suddenly agreed to drop his attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. No serious person can believe his sudden agreeability was based on America's moral authority. His sudden "come to god moment" came because America and George Bush scared the hell out of him.

Both Sen. McCain and Sen. Obama support a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system. It would be helpful if one, or even both, of them leveled with us about the costs of such a system. People in the 25 states that get most of their electric power from coal will pay a disproportionate share of the increased cost of energy. Rustbelt manufacturing states like Ohio and Pennsylvania will be particularly hard hit.

It would help if someone would level about the five million new green jobs. The wind machines, transmission towers and solar panels will not be manufactured in the United States. American corporations are facing increased taxes, burgeoning labor costs and a carbon tax on emissions. All this will raise the cost of manufacturing, and it simply means that if you want to buy a



windmill or solar panel directly from the factory, learn Chinese.

Maybe one of our would be leaders could explain to us average voters why the United States should engage in a program of reducing carbon emissions by 80 percent when China, India and Russia have declined to even consider any reduction in carbon emissions or in their economic activity. It would help if someone would explain to us why the European Union, a proud signer of the Kyoto Protocols, reported a 3.2 percent increase in emissions in 2006 while the United States, long pillared for not signing the Protocol, was the only nation to report a slight decrease in carbon emissions.

A little truth telling about health care would be good for all of us. Candidates for national office like to tell us they have a plan to provide complete health care services for more people at reduced cost without any loss of quality. Now, anyone with any sense knows that is not possible. California tried that very trick, and health care for all was so potentially expensive, so financially unrealistic that even the brain-dead California legislature couldn't swallow the idea.

Instead of being told that the government inspired health care would actually improve our health care services we might be advised that "free" health care might involve higher taxes, some denial of services and long waits for treatment. The Telegraph, a London based newspaper, recently reported that in England, the National Health Care Service provided private treatment for their own employees because the waiting lines for the very government health care they administer are too long.

Maybe all this proposed truth telling would be a bit dangerous. As an Episcopalian priest informed Rumpole of the Bailey, "Truth is very dangerous and must be used judiciously." Dangerous or not, truth is certainly used judiciously in political campaigns.

## Never, ever, take 'no' for answer

*'Customer care' is contradiction; here are tips to get through to the bank*

**JEFF BERLINICKE**

Staff Writer  
jeff@manateerivernews.com

In a previous life, I worked in "customer service" for a major bank. I hated it, because I had to wear a tie and long pants, but I was working my way through school at the time and it paid pretty well. I'd go to school all day, work until 9 p.m., then head to the campus library.

I worked in "customer service," which became "customer assistance," which became "customer care," which bred mutant telemarketers who to this day make "courtesy calls" to their customers at inconvenient hours.

I did all of those things, and then I became a "customer service manager." I was good at that, and by the time I was ready to leave for the world of sportswriting, I had made it to "client relations officer."

Now I am about to explain to you, the account holder, how to beat the system.

Banks are always telling you how much they care for you. You hear that during the 15 minutes you spend on hold, waiting for a "customer care" rep to assist you. Now that the holiday season is knocking on the door, you may be calling your bank asking for credit line increases or asking why your line has been cut.

Start out by dialing the number. Having a few drinks next to you might help, because it will be forever until you get a human being, but don't, no matter how much the recording begs, hit anything but the zero digit. Wait to get a voice. Then you have the corporation in the

palm of your hands.

Before I give you the secret to success, picture the Customer Service Department. I have been there. It's a bunch of disgruntled people checking off stroke sheets, reading off scripts, looking up at an electronic board that shows the entire office how many calls are on hold and worrying about talk times. It's more stressful than State Road 70 at rush hour. Have you ever seen television commercials that show happy and beautiful people wearing headsets and smiling, telling you how happy they are to have been of service — nothing could be further from the truth.

So, you explain your problem to the first representative, the one that is sitting there with a supervisor looking over his or her shoulders. You explain you need a credit line increase. Immediately, the first rep says "no." Forget that first person. Totally useless, has to follow the script and is constantly concerned that he or she is the one being monitored at the time.

Immediately ask for the supervisor. That, too, is a useless tact. The "supervisor" is little more than a frustrated "rep" whose hard work as a "rep" earned a little more money and the job description of only handling the complainers. You won't get far there.

OK, now you are 20 minutes into the call, but it's



going to pay off. Ask the supervisor to speak to the manager. The manager has some clout, but not that much. The manager's job is to go to meetings and to wear higher brands of ties or dresses, not necessarily at the same time. The manager has no interest in your problem and usually will ask the supervisor what to do and the supervisor, who is in the middle of another complaint call, will just shake his head no.

Here's where I lead you to the promised land. Don't let the manager off the hook. Ask for the presidential unit. Seriously, every major banking corporation has one. That's where the complaints go when someone wants the president of the company. I have actually worked for two of those types of organizations, and they both have a presidential unit. They will give you everything you ask for within reason.

When my credit line was cut last year for being one day late, it took me 45 minutes, but I got to the presidential unit and they couldn't have apologized more. I was about ready to ask the guy to come over and wash my car, and I don't think he would have said no. He also asked me if I was interested in a credit line increase, no strings attached.

Don't take no for an answer from "customer care" or whatever it is they are calling it today. Most of the people on the front line are just answering phones, and the supervisors are just eyeing the manager's job. Go for the top, document everything and have a happy holiday.

Order classifieds online @ [www.ManateeRiverNews.com](http://www.ManateeRiverNews.com)