

Questions for Laura Schwartz, CBS host

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Student Life reporter Scott Fabricant talked to Laura Schwartz, who hosts CBS's "Trail Mix," a segment of The Early Show covering what most of the media doesn't cover for this election cycle.

Student Life: So what do you think about Washington University so far?

Laura Schwartz: It's great. [The students] are involved, and not just involved for one candidate or the other, but [because of] the issues. I think that is so important for students to get involved. You don't have to be red, you don't have to be blue, you can be independent and just focus strictly on the issues.

SL: Okay, let's get down to politics. Palin and Biden: What are their biggest weaknesses and their biggest strengths?

LS: Palin's biggest strength is that she comes across as very likable. She presents herself as just down-home Sarah. She could be your neighbor.

Her biggest weakness is what I call "the Ramble." As we've seen in the Katie Couric interview last week for example, when she's uncertain of an answer or when she's trying fit too much into an answer, she rambles. But tonight, if she could keep her answers to one or two specific examples, she can keep command of those answers and that's very important because she's got some work to do.

Now, Joe Biden's biggest downfall is exaggeration. But I think that he recognizes that downfall and has worked on it and I expect him to be very crisp in his responses and I think he will go on the attack on John McCain. He's not attacking Palin, he's attacking the issues and telling the audience why they're important to him. And his biggest strength is knowing those issues. He's lived them, he knows them, and the voters have no doubt in their mind that he's familiar with them.

SL: In the wake of Hillary Clinton, do you think Sarah Palin was picked because she's a woman?

LS: I think that absolutely went into it, most observers would say so especially given the lack of a vetting process that we in the media were told about. McCain had met her once before in February at a governor's meeting and he'd spoken to her maybe once or twice on the phone, but that's unclear at this point. They wanted to capitalize. When they announced it, it was the Saturday after the Democratic National Committee [DNC], and the biggest hurdle the DNC had to unity was bringing the Hillary Clinton voters into the fold.

SL: Do vice presidential candidates have a big effect on the outcome of an election?

Unless there's a huge gaffe, it's really about the top of the ticket. You lead from the top; the VP presidential candidates can act as the attack dogs. They can attack the other person on the top of the ticket so the principal candidate can talk about how they can make people's lives better and not be the bad guy. In the case of Sarah Palin, McCain needed a boost, and she gave him one, and that's since disappeared. You've got to go with the long-term effects.

SL: What can Washington University students do to help?

LS: This year, the youth have a chance to prove the critics wrong. Each year, the youth vote has gone up, but it hasn't gone up as much as it goes up in enthusiasm. Youth voters have not turned out in polls in correlation to their grassroots activism. And this year, because they did turn out in the primaries, they've got to keep focus, they've got to do absentee ballots if they're registered somewhere else, they've got to take the free busses from campus to polling places, to prove they are voting and they are a force, and from then on they will be taken in the utmost seriousness. And they should be—they are the future.

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