

Thoughts While Shaving

By Mel Lavine

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It's not exactly a headline — though the New York Times displayed the news on the front page Tuesday — but Newt Gingrich is set to run for president. The former House speaker is also running the risk of being labeled a hypocrite. He led the infamous charge to impeach President Bill Clinton over infidelity. As we later learned, he was doing the same thing himself.

The onetime, thrice-married congressman from Georgia contends he's now a family man, and has turned to Catholicism and discovered God. His present wife of eleven years, Callista Bisek, and Gingrich began dating while Gingerich was married. She is 44, 22 years younger than her husband.

“Caveat emptor” — let the buyer beware: Callista Gingrich is writing a children’s book, due out just when the primary race should be shaping up.

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Last week’s first Republican presidential debate in Greenville, S.C., was a bust.

David Lightman, of McClatchy Newspapers, wrote, “America’s voters were supposed to be introduced Thursday for the first time to the Republican Party’s 2012 presidential candidates — but they only met five hopefuls” who are far down in the polls: former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, Texas Rep. Ron Paul, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rich Santorum, former New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson and businessman Herman Cain.

The “names” — Mitt Romney, former governor of Massachusetts, Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachman, businessman Donald Trump and Gingrich — wisely stayed away. It was the week when President Obama’s approval rating spiked with the killing of Osama bin Laden. It’s unlikely whoever showed up or whatever they said would be remembered.

But Ron Paul, who ran in ’08, got cheers when he called for bringing the troops home from Afghanistan. When the question was raised, wouldn’t bin Laden be alive today if the U.S. had pulled out earlier, he said, “He wasn’t caught in Afghanistan.”

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You probably heard the one about the old lady protesting, “I want the government to keep their hands off my Medicare” or some such declaration. Well, the G.O.P. has finally heard it, too. The word from Washington is that the Republicans are worried about the reaction, and rethinking their proposal to overhaul Medicare. It was a fool’s errand. The House voted for it as part of the budget but it would never pass the Democratic Senate and were it otherwise the president would surely veto it. As the No. 3 Democrat in the Senate, Charles Schumer of New York, is doing his best to keep the issue boiling for 2012. “The Republicans are slowly realizing their plan to privatize Medicare is a political disaster,” he said. “But until they renounce their vote for it, they are still going to own it.”

Mel Lavine was a television producer for many years with NBC News and CBS News in New York. Contact him at his e-mail address: mellavine@aol.com.