

Keeping It Real in New Jersey

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – November 4, 2012

Natural disasters like the one brutalizing the northeast this week are no time for politics. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie made that abundantly clear Tuesday by praising President Barack Obama for his handling of the federal response to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy.

Lest there be any doubt – and to punctuate the point – Christie refused to let Fox News drag him into an on-air political discussion saying “If you think right now I give a damn about presidential politics, then you don’t know me.”

Good for the Governor. I don’t live in New Jersey, nor do I have family there. But, I have friends and coworkers suffering greatly there. I’m glad to know the guy overseeing their wellbeing cares more about them than politics.

Of course, the airwaves are buzzing over what this means for Tuesday’s election. Fearful Christie’s praise for the President will hurt Mitt Romney’s chances, conservatives are lashing out at the New Jersey Governor.

The never demure Rush Limbaugh called Christie “fat and a fool,” saying the Governor “doesn’t know what he’s talking about.” If that’s true, one wonders why the GOP selected a fat, know-nothing fool to deliver the keynote address at their August convention, but I digress.

One moment doesn’t make a resume. The President’s Sandy response shouldn’t singularly sway opinions of his job performance any more than should have President Bush’s actions in the days following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. And, you didn’t let that happen, did you?

But, here’s the problem. When you campaign against a caricature of your opponent – making the President out to be the height of incompetence – you run the risk reality will rise up to render your cartoon campaign irrelevant and discredited. Signs of competent leadership are a serious blow.

This is not a uniquely Republican flaw. I believe Mitt Romney’s resurgence in national polls after the first debate had less to do with his performance (it was solid) or Obama’s (it was abysmal) and more to do with the fact Romney turned out to be human after all. He was not, as viewers learned, the cold-blooded, woman-hating, trampler of the already downtrodden he was made out to be by Democrats. He didn’t charm anyone’s socks off, but he didn’t have to. He needed only to prove he had a beating heart and a sense of human decency.

So long as we contest elections in make-believe land, where you create a fictional version of your opponent to run against, the real world is a constant threat.

Just how disconnected is the fiction from reality?

Stumping for Romney two weeks ago, Christie said “The President doesn’t know how to lead. He’s like a man wondering around in a dark room, hand up against the wall, clutching for the light switch of leadership, and, he just can’t find it. And, he won’t find it in the next 18 days.”

How’d you like to be the guy who said that and then had to call the White House asking for assistance and a priority response?

To his credit, Christie swallowed his pride and asked for help. And, to his, the President stepped up quickly with aid and personal assistance for his outspoken critic. That’s what leaders do.

Said Christie Wednesday, “The President has been all over this, and he deserves great credit.”

Let’s be clear. Governor Christie has not in any way endorsed President Obama, nor has he indicated any lessening in his strong support for Mitt Romney.

A Republican, Former Secretary of State and Retired General Colin Powell, did recently endorse Obama (again). This week, New York Mayor, the Independent Michael Bloomberg also came out supporting a second Obama term.

Each man looked at both candidates and made his decision. For Powell, it was ultimately a belief that Obama is making progress on the economy and that Romney’s foreign positions have been too inconsistent and unclear. For Bloomberg, Hurricane Sandy was the tide turner, as he asked himself which candidate would take seriously the likely role of climate change as a factor in the increasingly volatile weather than has twice assaulted his city in the past 14 months.

Like Powell and Bloomberg, for those reasons and others, I will vote for the President to serve another term. Neither candidate is perfect. But, neither are they as flawed as caricatures would have you believe. I respect your choice, whatever it is. And, I hope you will respect mine.

Ever forward, together, my fellow Americans. Wednesday, let us be one again.