

# Politics or statesmanship from McCain?

Republican decides to suspend presidential campaign during financial crisis

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A political science professor sees Republican presidential candidate John McCain's decision Wednesday to suspend his campaign to concentrate on fixing the nation's financial mess as a poorly disguised ploy.

A McCain delegate to the Republican National Convention disagrees.

"His implication is, 'I care more about this issue than (Barack) Obama does, and I'm above politics, and while we're in a crisis, we have to put politics aside,'" said Kent Redfield, who teaches at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"It's not like we're talking about a hurricane," Redfield said. "We're talking about something that was created by political action. The irony is you have a political ploy from the McCain camp to show he's above politics."

The move could derail the first debate between McCain and Obama, on foreign policy, which is scheduled for Friday.

That makes sense, according to Kent Gray, a local McCain delegate to this month's Republican National Convention.

"I think it would have been an awkward debate because the questions would have been about foreign policy, and some of the answers would have to go back to what is affecting the American public," said Gray.

McCain, a U.S. senator from Arizona, said he'll remain in Washington until Congress decides on a Wall Street bailout bill, and he challenged Obama, a U.S. senator from Illinois, to do the same.

Obama has rejected the move, saying the next president needs to "deal with more than one thing at once."

Because McCain and Obama are not working directly on Congress' bailout plan, Redfield said he suspects holding the debate as scheduled would not affect the plan itself or the stock market.

"I don't think what he's proposing is going to have any impact, plus or minus, on what kind of bill we're going to get or when it passes," Redfield said. "I think it's a little presumptive to believe that Congress and the American public are going to be distracted by the presidential campaign."

Gray said McCain's abrupt departure from the political arena for a short time shouldn't damage his chances of being elected.

"Overall, I think the country can live without four days of intense political campaigning," he said. "I think probably most people will probably not even notice it that much unless you're in one of the battleground states."

But state Sen. John Sullivan, D-Rushville, said McCain's strategy is a mistake.

"The economy is a huge issue, there's no question about it, but we can't stop what we're doing and focus on one thing, and you can't do that as president," he said. "What's happening with the war on Iraq is a huge issue on people's minds as well. Should that discussion be halted for the time being? I don't think so."

Ward 2 Ald. Gail Simpson, a Democrat, echoed similar sentiments.

"I think it's important that we hear from the presidential candidates, because we've got less than 40 days until the election," she said. "Basically what McCain has been doing all along is trying to get people off point. People are waiting anxiously for this debate, and now all of a sudden McCain comes out with a diversion.

"I don't think that he's needed now in Washington, and I think he needs to go ahead and debate so we can get some answers."

The office of U.S. Rep. John Shimkus, R-Collinsville, and the Republican Party of Illinois declined comment.

Among a random selection of voters interviewed outside the Old State Capitol Wednesday, Joe Grimm of Springfield said McCain's decision "doesn't

sound like a bad idea.”

“Senator Obama ought to feel the same way,” he said.

Another Springfield resident, Brad Bolin, called McCain’s move insignificant.

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