

LATE SHOW with DAVID LETTERMAN
Thursday, October 16, 2008
Full Transcript – Monologue, Top Ten & John McCain interview

Monologue

Thank you very much, Ladies & Gentlemen.

Boy, you folks are here on a great night and I'll tell you why – the entire balcony is filled with state troopers fired by Sarah Palin....there they are.

And by the way, I'm your host for the program. I'm Dave the Plumber.

I guess I don't need to tell you folks that on the program tonight, Senator John McCain is our guest tonight. Yeah, maybe I won't show.

How many of you saw the debate last night from Hofstra out there on Long Island. Anybody see? I wanna tell you, it was a different John McCain, wasn't it? He was electric. He electrified the crowd. And afterwards, Cloris Leachman tossed him her hotel key.

But the first debate was podiums. The first debate was podiums. Then they had the town hall format. Last night it was desks. Now the next debate...competitive eating. That's going to be great to see what they can....I don't know.

Lots of talk in the debate last night about Joe the Plumber. Joe the Plumber. How about that? Do you remember him from the 60s Drano commercials? Joe the Plumber. Do you remember? And I think he's also the one who ordered the hit on Sammy the Bull.

Joe the Plumber is such a celebrity now that after the debate, he was rushed to Washington to unclog a valve on Dick Cheney. Crazy. Unbelievable.

Can you feel it though, everybody in New York City has Joe the Plumber fever? Can you feel it? I mean, even the Statue of Liberty was holding a plunger. And we were going to have Joe the Plumber on the program. We had him booked on the show. But at the last minute he canceled on us to do an interview with Katie Couric.

It was interesting last night during the debate. At one point, John McCain brought up Barack Obama's relationship with 60s radical William Ayers. And then Barack Obama brings up McCain's relationship with John Brown at Harper's Ferry.

Do you know who was at the debate last night? Hillary Clinton. That's right. I'm thinking to myself, is it really a good idea to be leaving Bill home alone?

And then last night, I was fascinated because they had the split screen. The split screen technology – so on the one side of the screen you saw a younger black man, and then on the other side of the screen, you see an older white man. And it was, honest to God, it was like a before and after of Michael Jackson.

THE "LATE SHOW" TOP TEN

"Messages left on Joe the Plumber's Answering Machine"

10. "Hey, heard you mentioned in the debate, now can you come over and get the hairball out of my drain?"
9. "Joe Six Pack calling; what are you trying to pull?"
8. "Sorry, wrong number. I was looking for Larry the Cable Guy."
7. "Dude – did you get to meet Sallie Mae?"
6. "This is Sarah Palin, do you consider yourself a maverick plumber?"
5. "You had a better night than Joe the Dodgers Manager."
4. "Hi, this is Bob Schieffer. Hijack one of my debates again and I'll bust your kneecaps with a pipe wrench."
3. "Joe, you gotta get a copy of this Late Show Fun Facts book – it's hilarious!"
2. "It's Brian from the Late Show, are you available tonight if McCain cancels?"
1. "It's Madonna, are you seeing anybody?"

JOHN McCAIN INTERVIEW

David Letterman: Our first guest is currently serving his fourth senatorial term and is the Republican nominee for the President of the United States. Please welcome, your senator from the great state of Arizona, John McCain. Senator.

Nice to see you John. Thanks so much for being here.

John McCain: Thank you for the bus tour. And that little trip down memory lane there.

DL: Can you stay?

JM: Depends on how bad it gets. I have a son in the Marine Corps and I asked him to Fed Ex me his helmet and flack jacket. But it didn't get here in time.

DL: I think you'll be alright. Now what exactly happened? I thought I was doing my part to save the economy...and then later I got to think, well maybe I'm just not important enough.

JM: Can I give you an answer?

DL: Please.

JM: I screwed up. But look at all the conversation I gave you.

DL: Yes, it really was fun.

JM: Including having a Mr. Olbermann on.

DL: You know, John, you called me –

JM: I haven't had so much fun since my last interrogation.

DL: You called me an hour and a half and said, "We've gotta get right back to Washington." But you didn't go right back to Washington.

JM: I screwed up. What can I say? What can I say? It's been reviewed pretty well, what happened.

DL: You had a meeting – you probably had a meeting and everyone said, "It's just Dave." We don't care.

JM: Yeah, "It's only Dave. There's only a few million who'll be watching. What the hell? Who cares?"

DL: Well, I'm willing to put this behind us.

JM: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

DL: And thank you for coming back. And if you are elected and you become the President of the United States, I wanna be –

JM: I'll be back. Secret Service and all.

DL: Oh good. But I'm not done. I want your friend Sarah Palin here. I'd like to have her here. And if you're in the White House, I want to be the guy who sits in the outer office reading magazines. "What? Yeah, go on in!"

JM: Is this a shakedown or a ransom?

DL: How about that debate last night? How do you think that went?

JM: I thought it went well and I think you were mentioning, the first time we were behind podiums, as I recall. Second time we were a town hall meeting. Third time sit-down. The next one we'd be lying down, I guess. That was the only...sort of a Roman kind of thing. I thought it was very good. Look, I admire and respect Senator Obama. I have said that on many, many occasions. And he's inspired America. We have stark differences. It's been a tough campaign and I'm sure the next 19 days will be even tougher. But think of all the material it gives you for the next 19 days. There's gonna be kind of a sad feeling around here when the election finally takes place.

DL: We're going off the air, John. Tell us about Joe the Plumber. You invoked Joe the Plumber, the guy from Ohio. What's the deal there?

JM: Well, I saw him on a clip on television and he said that he had a business -- he was a plumber, worked all his life. He wanted to buy the business and he didn't want to have his taxes increased if he did so. So I kind of related to him and...Joe the Plumber -- Joe, if you're watching, I'm sorry. But from what I've read, and I have not talked to him, but from what I've read, he's taken it pretty well. He says everybody gets their fifteen minutes... But on a serious note for a moment, Americans are hurting right now. Americans are hurting right now. We know that. They can't stay in their homes. They've lost their jobs. The whole economic collapse -- which is not their fault. They've been the victims of a drive-by shooting from Washington and Wall Street.

DL: In the case of Joe the Plumber, most small business -- and I assume Joe the Plumber is in that category -- they don't gross \$250,000 a year. Is that about right?

JM: A lot of them do -- small businesses who make more than \$250,000 a year, provide employment to 16 million people. Half of all small business income, make over \$250,000 and they would be taxed. Look, now is not the time to raise anybody's taxes except yours. And I guarantee you that when I'm president, I'll do it! My first executive order. Share the wealth. Share the wealth. Distribute the wealth. Let's do it. You don't work too hard.

DL: No, I'm not breaking my back at all. But you talked about at the debates, balancing the budget -- you said you know how to balance the budget. You know how to save billions. I think in the previous debate, you said you knew how to get Osama Bin Laden. Now did I hear correctly? Am I right about those?

JM: Not exactly connected, but...

DL: No, I know they're not connected...but if you do, let's go. Let's do these things. Let's get Bin Laden. Put that at the top of the list.

JM: In 19 days, I'll be elected...look –

DL: Bin Laden. Let's just start there.

JM: First of all, obviously, you don't want to say exactly, but the point –

DL: But you have a plan.

JM: I know what we need to do. OK? And one of the things we need to do is – we veer from serious to joking here, and I think that's fine – but we don't have sufficient human intelligence. We have great satellites. We know a lot of your conversations. So...But we don't have the ability to get people who look like the people who live there, who know the customs, who know the religion, who can infiltrate into the area. Look, this area where he's hiding out hasn't been governed by anybody since Alexander the Great. There are clans and families and groups of people. So we can go in...he has now – our intelligence, published, published, my friends. I don't have any secret information. There are sort of circles of people around where he is so that when somebody comes in and penetrates, the warning is sounded and he is able to escape.

DL: Right, but you feel confidently that you have maybe the advantage of greater information than the current president. But you have an idea...

JM: I think I know, because of my many years being involved in these issues, how to develop a plan. One of the areas, of course, is human intelligence, which we're very badly lacking. And so I am confident that we can get him. Anybody who kills 3000 Americans – innocent Americans – we've got to get him. We have to. We must.

DL: Yes, I mean...eight years later, let's go.

JM: You're exactly right.

DL: Buddy of mine saw him in Trenton.

JM: I have no comment.

DL: Let me talk about some of these – and it was brought up last night by Bob Schieffer, who talked about –

JM: Who did a good job, I thought.

DL: Who did a fine job. Nice guy and a great job. He talked about campaigns – some questionable tactics on your part, some questionable tactics by Barack Obama. And for

your part, when they go down the list, when they chronicle some of these things that are being hollered out from the crowd, regarding Barack Obama – “traitor, treason, terrorist” – and so on and so forth – and worse, as a matter of fact, that Barack Obama alluded to himself last night.

JM: Do you know what’s being shouted out at his rallies? There’s always a few fringe people who will abuse their Constitutional rights. Who will show up at these kinds of things and you’ll get that fringe element. But I’d love for you to come to one of my rallies. They’d love to see you. A lot of fans of yours come to our rallies. But look, I have groups – rally I was at the other day, Military Wives for McCain. Veterans, wearing their hats from all the wars we were in. There are a few fringe people. There are a few fringe people that attend Senator Obama’s rallies. But these are people who are involved and engaged in the political process and I’m very glad that they are. I’m very glad they are. And I confront them, Dave. You saw that. I confront them when they say anything that is out of bounds, ok? I do.

DL: Does your running mate also do that? Does she sit on them pretty good when this stuff comes up?

JM: She does. She doesn’t countenance that kind of thing. I mean, nobody does. Senator Obama doesn’t. Joe Biden doesn’t.

DL: But Senator, you yourself in previous campaigns have been the victim of some pretty nasty campaign abuse. So do you feel because of that or just because of your humanity you have a responsibility to lift your purpose here?

JM: I feel I have a responsibility that if someone says anything improper and I am within earshot...Look, people who are quote, GOPers, whom I’ve never known or heard of, made remarks about Senator Obama questioning his patriotism, etc. I have always repudiated those remarks, Dave. Every time there has been one. And yet he won’t repudiate the remarks made by a man I admire and I’ve written a chapter in my book about, John Lewis. He linked Sarah Palin and me to segregation, George Wallace, and even the bombing of a church in Birmingham that killed four innocent young children. There’s no room for that in American politics. And I was sorry that last night Senator Obama did not repudiate John Lewis who is a respected American hero, who...I can’t tell you how saddened I was at those remarks.

DL: But I thought it was addressed by Barack last night.

JM: He didn’t repudiate them. Those remarks should be repudiated, made by anybody. So, look, these are tough times in America. You know that. This is what most people view as the most important race. And of course there is a negativism that’s associated with it. But I’d also like to say again. I asked Senator Obama to do town hall meetings. I would love to have Senator Obama come on this show. And I’ll sit there and he’ll sit here and we’ll debate the issues. But he would not do that. That changes the tenor of the campaign when you’re on Dave Letterman and trying to defend yourself. So

let me just say this. 19 more days. We had a good debate. We had three good debates. Now it's going to be a tough slog. And let's all keep it in bounds and be respectful. But there are differences. That's why we're different party and different philosophy.

commercial break

DL: Let's talk about Sarah Palin, Governor of Alaska.

JM: Before we do that, can we get that map out again and that tour...

DL: No, we're not going to get the map out...You can have that. You can put that on the Straight Talk Express.

JM: I'd like to have that as a souvenir.

DL: So shortly after, I don't know...Labor Day, I guess it was...the announcement that you had selected a running mate and it was Sarah Palin. Now, I didn't know that Sarah Palin was governor of Alaska. I never heard of her. I mean, I knew Alaska was a state, and I knew they must have a governor. But I'd never heard of her.

JM: Who's the governor of Arizona?

DL: I don't know.

JM: Well, I hope you get to know her. I hope she comes on this show.

DL: What are the chances of that? Seriously?

JM: Actually, I think they're pretty good.

DL: Really?

JM: Yeah, I will try...we've only got 19 more days but I would uh...she's campaigning very hard. But I'd like to tell you that I think she is a person who I think has ignited a lot of young people all over this country.

DL: Certainly created a lot of attention that the campaigns had not had before. And the question is, if she had been a man, would you also have selected him as a man?

JM: Yes, because I believe that Sarah Palin is a reformer. She's the most popular governor in the United States of America. She gave her taxpayers back money. She negotiated a \$40 billion natural gas pipeline deal and confronted the big oil companies when she did it. She's been a member of the PTA, the city council, the mayor and a governor. And I am very honored to know her and her family. She has – by the way, her husband, Todd, is a four-time champion of a race of 2000 miles across Alaska in the dead of winter. Amazing person. His grandmother is a native Alaskan. In one of his races, he

broke his arm and continued the race for 250 more miles. It's just a wonderful family. And they have a very special child and I'm very proud of them. So I'm very proud to have Sarah with me and I think she has energized our ticket and energized a lot of Americans.

DL: No question about that. But I'll tell you... I mean, was she your first choice?

JM: Absolutely.

DL: And what is the process when it comes time to pick that position. How do you do that? Is it you and a committee? Is it just you going through your phonebook? I mean, honestly, I don't...how do you select a vice president? You knew about her. But the rest of America, sadly, didn't really know about her.

JM: Well, we have this dart board... We had looked at and vetted, as you call, vetted, to get information on all the people that would be – and that's a pretty long list of people and then you narrow it down –

DL: Had you spent time with her?

JM: A couple of times, I'd met with her. I didn't know her real well but I knew her reputation and I didn't know her well at all. I didn't know her well at all. I knew her reputation as a reformer. Running against a governor of her own party, an incumbent governor. She took the guy on after she believed that bad things were going on in Alaska. And she was right.

DL: Now here's my point of view on this. And again, I really don't know anything. And I'm an independent. I have no party affiliation. When this happened, I thought to myself, wow, you know in my daily life – and anybody who's got kids, yourself, anybody – you try to take the best care of your children that you can for their future. Present and future. And I kind of felt like that's the responsibility to a huge extent of our administration. So the person, man or woman, who is in charge of that, has got to do the same. And I was just wondering if the thoughtfulness of that process included your selection of Vice President.

JM: Oh sure.

DL: I mean, if you are unable to fulfill your office, we get a 9/11 attack, Sarah Palin is the president who leads us through that.

JM: Sure. She's been the governor of a state with 24,000 employees. She's...I mean, maybe you don't like Alaska. But the point is, it's the biggest state we have. And I'm sure they'd welcome you there.

DL: I'm a big fan of Alaska.

JM: Look, in all due respect, one of the people I admire most was an obscure governor of a southern state called Arkansas. And he turned out to be a fairly successful president. I mean, Ronald Reagan was a cowboy – no experience in international affairs. Look, I think she has shown leadership. I think she's shown executive ability. And I think she has shown a degree of reform that we need – does anyone think we don't need to clean up the mess in Washington?

DL: Let me just get back to my question. Well, I mean, either you're right or you're wrong. You know what you're talking about or you don't know what you're talking about. But I'm just telling you from my perspective that I thought, Oh, oh my God. I'm sure she's a lovely woman. I'm sure she's done a great job in Alaska. But in terms – this country. I'm 61. I've never seen it in this big a mess. I've seen economic problems. I've seen war. I've never seen a combination of things quite like this. I've never seen the free fall diminishment of the impression of the United States around the country. I've never seen anything like this. I have a four-year-old son. I wonder what the hell, is it going to be 160 twenty years from now on his birthday? So I'm thinking, alright, this is a pretty important job.

JM: But with all due respect, she's had the leadership experience that's necessary to run bureaucracies, to reform...And because she was not known inside the Georgetown cocktail circuit, doesn't matter to me.

DL: Let me ask you a question. In your guts, in your stomach – you're a smart, tough, savvy guy –

JM: Thank you. That'll be a commercial, coming to you soon.

DL: If I were to run upstairs, wake you up in the middle of the night, and say, "John, is Sarah Palin really the woman to lead us through the next four, eight years? Through the next 9/11 attack?"

JM: Absolutely. She has inspired Americans. That's the thing we need. We need inspiration now. We need courage. We need to know that we're the greatest nation in the world. And we can come through this. I agree with your assessment of the way the world and this country is. And they need somebody they say – this, this is a person who is an inspiration to us. This is a person who has done so many things that are very unusual. So all I can tell you is that if you are looking for somebody, someone who is in the old boy network of Washington, many of whom have gotten us into this ditch to start with, then that's fine. But I think America is crying out for change. And she represents the kind of change that we need. Have we pretty well exhausted this topic?

DL: No, no. I'm just getting started! Now she's also, she's the one, I think who says that Barack Obama pals around with terrorists. Has she in fact said that at rallies?

JM: I don't...yes. And he did. And refused to acknowledge the fact.

DL: Who did he pal around with?

JM: William Ayers who said on 9/11 that he wished that he'd bombed more. OK? His wife was on the Top 10 of FBI's Most Wanted.

DL: But this all took place...when he was active, Barack Obama was eight years old.

JM: Eight years old. And Mr. Ayers in 2001, September 11, 2001, said, "I wished I had bombed more." It's an unrep—

DL: But what is that relationship?

JM: It's all we need to know. Senator Clinton said, "We need to know about the relationship." First he said he was just a guy in the neighborhood. And so it's a matter of trusting the word of someone.

DL: I know. I know.

JM: That's all.

DL: But you will also admit that we cannot really control who we interact with in our lives 100%.

JM: How long we interact with them and how we interact with them...But the point in this campaign is the economy, the economy and the economy.

DL: But did you not have a relationship with Gordon Liddy?

JM: I met him, you know, I mean...

DL: Didn't you attend a fund raiser at his house?

JM: Gordon Liddy's?

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DL: How about that Tina Fey?

JM: I know Gordon Liddy. He paid his debt. He went to prison, he paid his debt, as people do. I'm not in any way embarrassed to know Gordon Liddy. And his son, who is also a good friend and supporter of mine.

DL: But you understand that the same case could be made of your relationship with him as being made with William Ayers.

JM: Everything about any relationship that I've had I will make completely open and give a complete accounting of. Senator Obama said that he was a guy who lived in the neighborhood. OK, it was more than that.

DL: They served on a committee at one point.

JM: Yes, that gave \$230,000 to ACORN which is now involved in what may be one of the great voter frauds in history. It could be. We need to know.

DL: Are they double dating? Are they going to dinner? What are they doing? Are they driving cross country?

JM: Maybe going to Denny's. Who knows? The Grand Slam...

DL: Now she said "pals around with terrorists." OK, so alright. Let's say we give her William Ayers. He was eight and William Ayers was 29. But they palled around.

JM: There's millions of word said in the campaign. Come on!

DL: But that's where we live. In politics, isn't it?

JM: Millions of words. Yes indeed. Look, let's...

DL: Let's talk about Tina Fey. Tremendous talent.

JM: Tremendous talent.

DL: Now when that started, what was the reaction of the campaign? Ohhhh man? Or, Oh, this is great for us?

JM: Look, it's just part of the political scene. Tina Fey does a great job. Sarah Palin enjoys it. She understands it's part of what politics is all about. I notice that our friend Lorne Michaels is milking it for everything – you're gonna go on twice in a week. That's great.

DL: Is she Sarah Palin going to be on the Saturday Night Live?

JM: I think she is, yes.

DL: That's great. That's huge. That'll be enormous.

JM: That will probably get more of an audience than our debate did.

DL: Now Sarah Palin, she helped the ticket immediately, didn't she? There was that huge boost after the convention.

JM: She still does. Look, we went to...where was it...Norfolk, Virginia. Virginia Beach, Virginia. 17,000 people show up. I mean, they're very enthusiastic. I mean, this person is a role model to lots of people. And I understand cynicism about it but I'm so proud of her.

DL: Have people talked to you about taking her off the ticket? Did that ever happen?

JM: No. No.

DL: Did people in the party ever mention that? Did you ever hear any discussion?

JM: No. Only those who were rejected.

DL: Well, Senator, the campaign rolls on. You've got 19 more days, is that what it is?

JM: 19. Who's counting? Who's counting?

DL: Thank you very much for showing up. Thanks for coming back.

JM: I thank you for having me back.

DL: Good luck, Senator. John McCain, Ladies and Gentlemen.
