

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 93

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STATE OF THE NATION

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PRESIDENT OBAMA

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THE CONGRESS Both Houses are in Play

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RESTAURANTS Cambridge, Mass

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Unemployment remained at 9.6% in August (that is the last report of the unemployment number before the election by the Bureau of Labor Statistics). The most recent Gallup survey showed an unemployment rate of 10.1%. The number unemployed and underemployed remains at 18.6%.

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32% believe the economy will get better in the next 12 months, while 24% think it will get worse. [NBC/WSJ 9/10]

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Public opinion as to whether the country is headed in the right direction (RD) or is on the wrong track (WT) has not changed much since March.

	NBC/WSJ <u>RD/WT</u>	NYT/CBS <u>RD/WT</u>	WP/ABC <u>RD/WT</u>
October	----	32/63% CBS	-----
September	32/59%	33/60%	----
August (late)	30/61%	----	----
August (early)	32/58%	----	----
June	29/61%	32/60%	37/60%
March	33/59%	----	38/60%
February	----	33/62%	----
January 2010	34/54%	36/55%	37/62%
December 2009	33/55%	37/56%	----
February 2009	41/44%	23/68%	31/67%

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The American public could care less what experts say about whether the recession is over. They know whether or not it is over, and from their perspective it is not over. In the latest NBC/WSJ survey (9/10), respondents were told that a panel of experts declared that the recession “officially” ended in June 2009. When asked their opinion of whether it was over, 70% of those surveyed said the country is still in recession.

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How much trust do you have in government? Here is how Americans responded when asked how much trust or confidence they had in various elements of the governmental enterprise. The percentages below reflect those who said “a great deal” or “fair amount.”

70% Local government
69% American people as a whole
66% Federal judicial branch headed by Supreme Court
52% State government
49% Federal executive branch headed by President
47% Men and women in political life
43% Mass media
36% Federal legislative branch, House and Senate [Gallup 9/10]

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When it comes to the U.S. government:

- * 59% think the government has too much power; only 8% say it has too little. In 2003, 39% held the view that the government has too much power.
- * 49% say there is too much government regulation, while 27% think there has been too little.
- * 46% believe that the Federal government poses an immediate threat to the rights and freedoms of ordinary individuals. This is up from 30% in 2003.

Americans are equally divided – 18% to 19% as to whether the government should do only those things described as “basic government functions” or if it should do everything it can “to try and improve the lives of its citizens.” 28% of Republicans opt for only basic government services, while 29% of Democrats support the do-everything position.

It is no surprise that 69% have great confidence in the American people, but only 47% have confidence in the men and women running for public office.

Meanwhile, 15% think the Federal government is not doing enough to create jobs and reduce unemployment. 13% think it is not doing enough to secure our borders and address immigration. 12% think the government is not doing enough to focus on the country and its people’s problems. [Gallup 9 & 10/10]

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For the 2nd year in a row, Social Security recipients will not get a cost of living increase.

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26.3% of Americans have some form of Federal government-provided health care – Medicare, Medicaid, or Military/Veterans benefits. This is an increase from the 22.5% who reported using that form of healthcare in January 2008. 42% of respondents believe that the Federal government should have total responsibility for making certain that “all Americans have adequate healthcare.” 20% say that the government should have no responsibility. [Gallup 10/10]

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The Congress will soon take up the question of whether to extend the tax “cuts” that are scheduled to expire at the end of 2010. 49% think the tax breaks should end, while 45% think they should not end. On the narrower question of whether the tax cuts should be extended for those making more than \$250,000 per year, considering that to extend them will cost 700 billion dollars over the next 10 years, Americans split 47%-47% on whether the cuts should be kept in place. [NBC/WSJ 9/10]

48% of the nation’s pre-tax income goes to the top 10% of households. The top 10% represents households earning more than \$110,000 per year. [WP 10/6/10]

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By 57% to 39% Americans want their Member of Congress “to fight for more government spending in their districts in order to create jobs” rather than “fight government spending.” [WP/Kaiser]

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Approval of the Supreme Court is down to 51% from 62% in 2000. [Gallup 10/10]

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The Democratic Party has a positive rating of 37%, while the Republican Party is rated at 31% on that scale. On the down-side, the Democrats are rated negatively by 42% and the Republicans 43%. [NBC/WSJ 9/10]

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THE PRESIDENT

As President Obama approaches his first mid-term election, the approval of the job he is doing, as well as personal feelings toward him, are in negative territory. His primary relevance in this campaign is that his Administration’s record is the fodder for Republican candidates as they take on their Democratic opponents.

Since it is too late for him to overcome the substantive arguments that are being made by Republicans, the President has chosen to focus on a series of public

and electronic events designed to stimulate that part of his 2008 base that is not likely to vote in this election.

And if Congressional Democrats do as badly as some are predicting, the President's standing with the public will certainly be stated as one of the causes.

The President's approval rating has been at or below 50% since the middle of the year.

Obama overall job approval (App/Dis)

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>
October 2010	----	45/45% (CBS)	50/47%
September 2010	46/49%	----	46/52%
August 2010	47/48%	48/44% (CBS)	----
June 2010	45/48%	47/43%	----
March 2010	48/47%	49/41%	53/33%
January 2010	48/43%	50/40%	53/44%
December 2009	47/46%	50/39%	50/46%
October	51/42%	----	57/40%
July	53/40%	----	58/37%
February 2009	60/26%	62/15%	68/25%

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While President Obama's current job approval ratings are not great, the average of 52% approval that he has received during his tenure to date far exceeds that of the Congress, which is at 26%, measured in surveys when both approval ratings were asked at the same time. [Gallup]

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On the questions of whether Obama "has the personality and leadership qualities a President should have" and whether respondents agree with Obama on the issues that matter most to them, there has been a drop in the number who agree with these propositions.

	<u>Oct 2010</u>	<u>April 2010</u>
Qualities		
Agree	59%	75%
Disagree	40%	24%

Issues that matter

Agree	42%	57%
Disagree	55%	41%

[CNN/OR 10/10]

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When matched against the approval ratings of the last 8 Presidents in October of the 2nd year of their initial terms in office, Obama continues in 7th place, just ahead of Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. [Based on Gallup surveys]

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Kennedy	63	25-(Oct)
GW Bush (II)	62	31-(Oct)
Eisenhower	61	26-(Oct)
Nixon	58	27-(Oct)
Bush (I)	56	33-(Oct)
Carter	49	36-(Oct)
<u>Obama</u>	<u>46</u>	48-(Oct)
Reagan	42	48-(Oct)
Clinton	41	52-(Oct)

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Personal feelings about the President have declined, although they remain more positive than negative.

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
September 2010	47%	41%
August 2010	46%	41%
June 2010	47%	40%
March 2010	50%	38%
January 2010	52%	35%
December 2009	50%	30%
October 2009	56%	33%
February 2009	68%	19%

[NBC/WSJ]

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When it comes to the economy, Obama's job approval rating has not been in positive territory since the middle of 2009.

Obama job approval/disapproval on the economy

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>Wash Post/ABC</u>
October 2010	----	----	45/53%
September 2010	42/54%	41/51%	41/47%
August 2010	44/52%	----	----
July 2010	----	----	43/54%
June 2010	48/50%	45/48%	50/49%
March 2010	47/50%	45/45%	45/52%
January 2010	43/49%	46/48%	47/52%
December 2009	42/51%	47/43%	46/52%
October	47/46%	54/38%	50/48%
June	51/38%	57/35%	56/41%
February 2009	56/31%	55/24%	60/34%

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[Note: Shortly after the last edition of WW went online an email was received suggesting a significant omission from the list of President Obama's meaningful accomplishments to date. After due reflection, the omission is corrected with the statement below from the email:

“ Saving the financial system and avoiding the second great depression.”]

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56% still believe that Obama inherited the current economic conditions, as opposed to being responsible for them. This is down from 84% who had that view in February 2009 and 65% who believed that in January 2010. [NBC/WSJ 9/10]

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THE CONGRESS

Control of both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives is in play in the November 2nd election.

At least in terms of the issues that are dominating this election, the election is over, we just do not yet know who has won. As with most elections, it is all about

turnout. Who will care enough to make the effort to vote. It is axiomatic that people who choose not to vote are in fact voting through their failure to participate.

Much of the strong Republican showing in this election is driven by the fact that 66% of Republicans express a high interest in the 2010 election. Only 52% of Democrats share that view. [NBC/WSJ 0/10]

36% have trust and confidence in the Legislative branch. This compares with 71% in 1973; 54% in 1997; 65% in 2001; and 45% in 2009. [Gallup 10/10]

In 4 surveys conducted between 9/13 and 10/3, 74% of Americans disapprove of how the Congress is doing its job, while 20% approve. [Gallup, NBC/WSJ, FOX, ABC/WP].

More specifically, 61% disapprove of the job that the Democrats are doing in Congress, and 67% disapprove of the job being done by the Republicans. [WP/ABC 10/10]

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By 51% to 40%, Americans approve of the job being done by their own representative in Congress. [WP/ABC 10/10]

Yet 25% would vote for an independent candidate for Congress. 56% favor giving a new person a chance, and 48% would vote to replace every Member of Congress. [NBC/WSJ]

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In April 2009, 53% thought that the Republicans and Democrats in Washington were “bickering more.” This month 77% have that view. [PEW 10/10]

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U.S. SENATE

Up until the last few weeks, most observers agreed that the Democrats would lose a number of seats. It was generally assumed the margin would be 52 or 53 seats, including the 2 Independents.

Today it is not hard to describe, and many people have, the circumstances under which the Democrats would lose their majority.

WW has looked to see whether there is any correlation between the unemployment rates and the home foreclosure rates in States that are currently represented by Democrats, and in which Democratic Senate candidates (incumbents and non-incumbents) are in races in which their election is not considered to be Safe Democrat at this time.

The impact of the unemployment rate was based on the individual State rates and how it compared to the national unemployment rate. Where a State ranked in terms of the number of foreclosures vs the number of housing units was used as the standard for evaluating the impact of foreclosures.

The net result is that there does not appear to be any obvious correlation between these two measurements and how the Democratic candidates are doing in this election.

	<u>Unemployment Rate August '10</u>	<u>State Foreclosure Ranking</u>
<u>Lean Democrat</u>		
Connecticut	9.1	25
Delaware	8.4	38
<u>Toss-Ups</u>		
California	12.4	3
Colorado	8.2	9
Illinois	10.1	10
Nevada	14.4	1
Washington	8.9	23
West Virginia	8.8	48
<u>Lean Republican</u>		
Arkansas	7.5	21
Pennsylvania	9.2	34
Wisconsin	7.9	19
<u>Safe Republican</u>		
Indiana	10.2	20
North Dakota	3.7	49

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Consensus seems to be that Democrats will keep control of the Senate by the slimmest of margins. One scenario that has occurred to WW is that the end result is a 50/50 Senate. In that case, the Tea Party candidate's victory in the Republican primary in Delaware, assuming she loses the general, will have cost the Republicans control of the Senate. Mike Castle, the Republican Congressman that she defeated, was the odds-on favorite to win the general.

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Since the first issue of WW in this cycle, April 2009, the number of Senate seats that are Solid or Leaning Democrat has dropped from 15 to 8. The number of Solid or Leaning Republican seats has grown from 15 to 21. The number of Toss-up seats has grown from 7 to 12 and then fallen back to 8.

	<u>Solid D</u>	<u>Lean D</u>	<u>T-up</u>	<u>Lean R</u>	<u>Solid R</u>
October 2010	6	2	8	7	14
September 2010	7	1	12	3	14
July 2010	8	1	12	3	13
April 2010	7	3	8	6	12
April 2009	9	6	7	4	11

Of the 8 Toss-Up races, 1 leans Democrat, 3 lean to the GOP and 4 are even.

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THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats	57
Republicans	41
Independents	2 (caucus Dem)

Here is how the 37 Senate elections (19 Democratic incumbents, 18 Republican incumbents) look to me at this time (underlining reflects retirement). (D=Dem incumbent in office, R=GOP incumbent in office, I=Ind. incumbent in office) [*Gillibrand]

Safe	Leaning		Leaning	Safe
<u>Democrat(6)</u>	<u>Democrat(2)</u>	<u>Toss-Up(8)</u>	<u>Republican(7)</u>	<u>Republican(14)</u>
Hawaii	Connecticut	California	Arkansas	Alabama
Maryland	<u>Delaware</u>	Colorado	Florida	Alaska
New York(A)		Illinois	Louisiana	Arizona
New York(B)*		Kentucky	<u>New Hampshire</u>	Georgia
Oregon		<u>Missouri</u>	<u>Ohio</u>	Idaho
Vermont		Nevada	<u>Pennsylvania</u>	Indiana
		Washington	Wisconsin	Iowa
		West Virginia		<u>Kansas</u>
				No. Carolina
				No. Dakota
				Oklahoma
				So. Carolina
				So. Dakota
				Utah

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Ind</u>
Seats not up in 2010	37	24	2
Safe in 2010	6	14	0
Leaning in 2010	2	7	0
Total	45	45	2

Toss-ups	8 (2R/6D)	
	Even	4 (IL/NV/WA/WV)
	Lean GOP	3 (CO/KY/MO)
	Lean Dem	1 (CA)

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U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Listening to those who spend the most time keeping track of House races (other than active partisans), it is hard to find much to argue with the proposition that it is more likely than not that Democrats will lose control of the House in the coming election.

To remind -- theoretically, a 39-seat shift will give the Republicans control. However, there is general agreement that the Republicans will probably lose 3 or 4 of the seats they currently hold. If that occurs, the magic number is 42 or 43.

Nate Silver, at FiveThirtyEight.com, has a model that projects “ a Republican gain of about 48 seats (that could change of course by Election Day)”. He goes further to say he would not dispute a model that made a “best guess” of 56 seats, or 37 seats.

“The Cook Political Report’s” House Editor, David Wasserman, noted that the Democrats chances of losing at least 50 seats are now greater than their chances of holding losses under 45 seats.

The air is filled with “erudite” predictions of Republican pickups in the 60-70 seat range.

A long time Democrat activist called to say he wanted to be on record that the Democrats will control the House by 9 seats. If he turns out to be correct, his identity will be revealed in the next issue of WW.

There are certainly enough seats in play to make possible some of the most aggressive predictions. Stu Rothenberg says there are 97 seats in play, of which 88 are held by Democrats. “The Cook Political Report,” as of October 11,th was showing:

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Dem seats</u>	<u>GOP seats</u>
Toss-Ups	40	38	2
Lean Dem	32	30	2
Lean GOP	<u>20</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>3</u>
	92	85	7

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Talking to a variety of pollsters and other students about the coming election, the consensus over/under number is 50-52. It is hard for WW to argue with the likes of those with whom WW has spoken or whose written predictions WW has observed.

WW’s guess is that the Democrats will hold the house by 2 or 3 members or lose it by 10.

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The generic ballot question is considered to be significant when it comes to predicting House elections, but not Senate elections.

In the selection of surveys noted below, the “generic” question is asked of registered voters, unless otherwise noted.

<u>Survey</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>R/D</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Gallup	7/10-12/09	44/50	D+6
ABC/WP	2/4-8/10	48/45	R+3
Gallup	3/1-7	44/47	D+3
CNN/OR	7/16-29	49/44	R+5
Fox	7/27-28	47/36	R+11
Gallup	8/9-15	50/43	R+7
ABC/WP LV	8/30-9/2	53/40	R+13
Fox	9/1-2	46/37	R+9
CNN/OR	9/1-2	52/45	R+7
Gallup RV	9/6-12	48/43	R+5
NYT/CBS	9/10-14	36/40	D+4
NYT/CBS LV	9/10-14	40/38	R+2
Gallup	9/13-19	45/46	D+1
CNN/OR	9/21-23	53/44	R+9
Gallup	9/20-26	46/46	--
Fox	9/28-29	44/38	R+6
Gallup	9/23-10/3	53/40	R+13 LV (Higher turnout)*
	9/23-10/3	56/38	R+18 LV (Lower turnout)*
ABC/WP	9/30-10/3	49/43	R+6 LV
CBS	10/1-5	45/37	R+8 LV
CNN/OR	10/5-7	52/45	R+7 LV
Gallup	10/10	53/41	R+12LV (Higher turnout)*
	10/10	56/39	R+17LV (Lower turnout)*

* Gallup Lower turnout assumes that 40% of eligible Americans will vote.

* Higher turnout assumes that more than 50% will vote.

The NBC/WSJ survey puts the question slightly differently than most of the other surveys: it asks respondents for their preference for the outcome of the coming Congressional elections. Therefore, its results are listed separately. So far this year, it is questioning registered vs. likely voters.

NBC/WSJ	6/10	45/43	R+2
NBC/WSJ	8/10(early)	42/43	D+1
NBC/WSJ	8/10(late)	43/43	0
NBC/WSJ	9/22-26/10	44/44	0

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One of the indicators of how many seats a President's Party will lose is the President's approval rating leading up to the election in the Gallup survey. Other apparent indicators, at least since 1994, are the Wrong Track number in the NBC/WSJ survey (ex: are things in the country on the wrong track) and the disapproval of Congress number in the ABC/WP survey.

Here is what the numbers looked like in late September/early October of the election years listed below.

	<u>Pres Job Approval</u>	<u>Wrong Track</u>	<u>Job Disapproval of Congress</u>	<u>Seats Lost</u>
Carter 1978	49%	--	--	-15 seats
Reagan 1982	42%	--	--	-20 seats
Reagan 1986	63%	--	--	- 5 seats
Bush I 1990	56%	59%	63%	- 8 seats
Clinton 1994	41%	55%	78%	-54 seats
Clinton 1998	65%	31%	44%	- 5 seats
Bush II 2002	62%	42%	43%	- 8 seats
Bush II 2006	37%	61%	66%	-30 seats
Obama 2010	46%	59%	73%	

The number of seats "The Cook Political Report" rates as solidly Democrat has dropped by 51 seats since April 2009, from 197 to 146. The total number of solidly Republican seats has grown from 139 to 162. The number of Toss-Ups has grown from 5-40 seats. Of the current Toss-Ups, 38 are currently held by Democrats. 2 are held by Republicans.

	<u>4/1/09</u>	<u>10/13/10</u>	
Solid Dem	197	141	(-56)
Likely Dem	36	25	(-11)
Lean Dem	19	32	(+13)
TOTAL Dem	252	198	(-54)
TOTAL GOP	178	197	(+19)
Lean GOP	4	20	(+ 20)
Likely GOP	35	15	(-20)
Solid GOP	139	162	(+23)

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THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats 256
Republicans 179

	<u>4/1/09</u>	<u>12/16/09</u>	<u>7/24/10</u>	<u>9/10</u>	<u>10/13/10</u>
TOTAL Dem	252	242	221	209	198
Solid Dem	197	174	154	154	141
Likely Dem	36	45	34	25	25
Lean Dem	19	23	33	30	32
Toss-up	5	19	33	45	40
D	4	16	30	42	38
R	1	3	3	3	2
Lean GOP	4	8	7	6	20
Likely GOP	35	15	13	14	15
Solid GOP	139	151	161	161	162
TOTAL GOP	178	174	181	181	197

[As always, thanks to “The Cook Political Report.” It is the best when it comes to analysis of Congressional races (as well as other electoral matters)].

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The biggest GOP gain in the House since WWII was 55 seats in 1946. The largest gain of Senate seats by either party since WWII was in 1958. (Republicans lost 13 seats and the Senate expanded from 96 to 98 members. [Clarus Research]

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RESTAURANTS

CRAIGIE ON MAIN

853 Main Street
Cambridge, Mass 02139

617-497-5511

Fax 617-497-5522

www.craigieonmain.com

I went to this restaurant for dinner with, and at the suggestion of, Heidi and SaraBeth.

The restaurant seats 70 people at tables of 2 & 4. In addition, there are 4 seats at the edge of the open kitchen, and 11 at the bar, where food is also served.

There is a variety of ways in which you can approach dinner. There is a Prix Fixe menu for which you can select dishes from the A La Carte menu. It comes with a wine choice and with dessert. There are also 6- and 10-course tasting menus. Each of these choices includes vegetarian options.

We decided to select from the A La Carte menu. Heidi and I selected Grilled Spanish Octopus with grilled cipollini onion, fresh hearts of palm, and lemon salad with charred-spiced tomato puree. SaraBeth eschewed a starter.

For her entrée Heidi picked Glacee of Summer Farm Vegetables with five grain and mushroom pilaf, garden herb coulis with walnut oil. Sarabeth selected Miso and Sake-Lees Marinated Roasted Swordfish with cucumbers, pluots, Thai basil and fennel puree. I opted for Vermont Organic Pork Three ways: Spiced-Crusted Rib, Crispy Suckling Confit, and Grilled Belly.

We decided to forego dessert, although we did receive complimentary sorbets after our entrées.

There are 7 appetizers, 8 entrees and 6 desserts.

The food served is organic whenever possible and always natural. A final decision on each night's menu is made after they determine what is available that they are prepared to use.

The service from front door through dinner was very good. Our serving person happened to spill some wine on Heidi, but the server, as well as two separate hosts, came by to apologize and offer to have her blouse and slacks cleaned.

The men's room is relatively small, with a single commode and wash basin. The floor is covered in large grey tiles, and the walls are covered in white tiles to just above waist height. The walls are dark grey above the tiles. The walls are decorated with a variety of postcard pictures.

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Further on the Bagel

An avid reader suggests the following: In an effort to avoid a few calories, once the bagel is cut in two, hollow out each side before adding your spread of choice.

Mike

Suite 500
2100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-728-1100
mberman@dubersteingroup.com