

*Mike Berman's*

# WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 99

May 22, 2011

## STATE OF THE NATION

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PRESIDENT OBAMA

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MICHELLE OBAMA

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## 2012 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEGUN

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## THE CONGRESS

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## RESTAURANTS

Napa

San Francisco

Boston

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50% of Americans think the country is on the wrong track, while 36% say it is going in the right direction. This is the most positive response reported since September 2009. Additionally, 25% believe the economy will get worse in the next 12 months, while 31% say it will get better. [NBC 5/11, NBC/WSJ 9/11]

Peter Hart believes that this far ahead of the Presidential election, the answers to the above two questions are the best predictors of how the President is likely to do in the coming election.

73% do not believe that the next generation will be better off economically than the current generation. [Battleground 5/11]

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The official Labor Department unemployment rate for the month of April was 9.0%. That number does not count those who are working part-time, but would rather be working full-time. Gallup's unemployment rate for mid-May is 9.2%. When those who are working part-time, but would like to be working full-time, are included, the total underemployment number rises to 19.2%.

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Even though 47% of Americans think their homes are worth less now than they were before the recession, and 32% think it could take as long as 6-10 years for home values to recover, 81% still believe that homeownership is still a person's best long term investment. [PEW 4/11]

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78% of Americans believe that it is at least somewhat likely (32% very likely) that the U.S. will be the target of a major terrorist attack in the next few months in this country or overseas. [NBC 5/11]

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From a set list of issues respondents were asked to select the single issue that they consider most important: [Battleground 5/11]

- 28% economy and jobs
- 20% government spending and the budget deficit
- 11% education
- 8% gas and energy prices
- 7% Medicare and social security
- 6% healthcare costs

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47% of us believe that the government should redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich; 46% disagree. 71% of Democrats would increase taxes, while 28% of Republican share that view. Similarly, 63% of those who make less than \$30,000 a year favor increasing the relevant taxes, while 67% of those making more than \$75,000 per year say no. [Gallup 4/11]

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When asked whether Democrats or Republicans in Congress will best handle certain issues, Republicans have the advantage in turning the economy around, creating jobs, controlling the deficit, and safeguarding America from terrorism. The Democrats have a slight advantage on social security, and the two Parties are seen as roughly equal when it comes to healthcare. [Battleground 5/11]

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47% of Americans have an unfavorable view of the Tea Party movement. 33% have a favorable view. This is the highest unfavorable score (by 5 points) and the lowest favorable (by 3 points) that Gallup has recorded since it began testing this question in spring 2010. [Gallup 4/11]

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The “Parties” are over. There was a day when the national political parties and their state-based affiliates were the dominant force in campaigns and elections. They were actively involved in recruiting candidates, in developing the issues on which they ran, and providing financial support. That day of dominance has long since passed. The Parties no longer drive policy, they don’t influence the selection of the candidates who run carrying their banner, nor do they finance them.

Today, all that is left of the Democratic and Republican Parties is a mechanism. They provide the formal structure at the local, State and national levels through which candidates secure the right to carry the Parties’ banners. They are convenient collection vehicles for funds to be used for activities, such as voter registration, that candidates find useful and do not choose to handle themselves. Even those activities are effectively controlled by candidates and public office holders .

As of the end of April, both national committees were in a net debt position. The DNC was just under a million in the hole, and the RNC was about \$14,000,000 behind the curve.

In the roles of encouraging candidacies and providing either direct or independent financial support there is a series of organizations other than the Parties. An example of these organizations are the House and Senate campaign committees and the two partisan Governors organizations. And there are various independent groups that have emerged, often organized and financed outside the legislated campaign finance system.

Many well-known and experienced political operatives are opting to work for these independent groups rather than the traditional Party structures.

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Positive feelings toward the Democratic Party exceed those of the Republican party 41% to 32%. [NBC 5/11]

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Are you a tweeter? If so, you are part of a relatively small group in this country. 8% of the 74% of American adults who use the internet own up to “tweeting.” There are more female “tweeters” than male “tweeters.” There are more “tweeters” in the 18-29 year age group than there are in the 30-64 year age range. And, no surprise, the smallest group of users are those 65 years of age and older. [Pew 3/11]

College-aged young people do not seem to be into “tweeting.” Recently, when I met with a group of 20 college students from a mix of schools, I first asked how many were on Facebook. 19 of 20 said they were. I then asked how many were “tweeting” and only 3 people raised their hands. When I asked why they were not tweeting, there was an extended silence before one young man piped up. “Well, sir,” he said, “we think that ‘tweeting’ is you old folks trying to act like us young folks.”

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In 2009, 80% of internet sites tracked user behavior, 73% of social media profiles could be found through a public search engine, and, of the 58% of employers who checked out potential employees on social networking sites, 33% found information that caused them not to hire the person. [Money 5/11]

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74% of those 65 years of age or older heard about the death of bin Laden on TV, while 3% first got word on the internet. This compares with 21% of those who are 18-34 years of age who first heard about it on the internet. [PEW 5/11]

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One quarter of U.S. households do not have landline telephones. They can only be reached by cell phone. There are a variety of implications of this change, but one in particular relates to survey research. Telephone surveys that do not include

an appropriate number of cell phone respondents should be viewed with a jaundiced eye. Notably, automated polls call only landlines.

An analysis conducted by the Pew Research Center during 2010 found that support for Republican candidates was slightly higher in surveys conducted only on landlines, as opposed to surveys conducted on landline and cell phone.

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### PRESIDENT OBAMA

The President's job approval rating in Gallup took a 8 point jump, from 43% to 51%, following the death of bin Laden, and has settled in at that level.

President Obama is tied for 6th when matched against the previous 8 Presidents at this point of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in office. [Based on Gallup surveys]

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
G Bush (I)	77%	15%
GW Bush (II)	66	30
Eisenhower	68	16
Kennedy	64	24
Clinton	51	42
Nixon	50	35
Obama	50	<u>43</u> (5/16-18)
Reagan	43	45
Carter	32	53

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His job approval rating also jumped to varying degrees in other major surveys.

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>
May 2011	52/41% (NBC)	57/37%	56/38 (WP)
April 2011	49/45%	46/45%	47/50%
March 2011	xxx	49/41% (CBS)	51/45%

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PEW Research had Obama with a job approval score of 47%/45% at the beginning of April, and then, the day after bin Laden died, it jumped to 56%/38%. By May 5-8 approval had dropped back to 50% and disapproval was at 39%.

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In a CBS/NYT survey taken immediately after the death of Osama bin Laden Obama's job approval on handling foreign policy jumped from 39% in mid-April to 52%. Those who disapproved fell from 46% to 34%.

In the same (5/11) survey 34% approved his handling of the economy, the lowest score of his tenure, and a drop of 4 points from mid-April.

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An NBC survey a few days later (5/5-7) found Obama's approval rating on handling foreign policy at 57%, up from 49% in April. His job approval rating on handling the economy fell 8 points from 45% in April to 37% in May.

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30% are "not at all confident" that Obama has the right set of goals and policies to be President of the United States. Further, if you add those who are "only somewhat confident," another 31% question Obama's goals and policies – a total of 61%.

At the other end of the spectrum, 20% are "extremely confident" and 18% are "quite confident" -- 38% -- that he has the right goals and policies, while only 20% are "extremely confident" that he has the right set of goals and policies. [NBC 5/11]

Here is how President Obama is rated on a number of qualities relevant to his role. [Very good rating is 5 & 4 on a scale of 5 with 5 being the highest.] [NBC 5/11]

	<u>May 2011</u>		
	<u>Very good rating</u>	<u>Previous high</u>	
Strong Leadership qualities	54%	70%	1/09
Ability to handle a crisis	53%	54%	4/09
Firm and decisive in decision making	53%	65%	4/09
Honest and straightforward	51%	64%	4/09
Good commander-in-chief	51%	55%	4/09
Achieving his goals	41%	60%	4/07
Shares your positions on issues	38%	52%	1/09

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54% are at least somewhat positive in their feelings toward the President , while 31% have negative feelings. [NBC 5/11]

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### Michelle Obama

First Lady Michelle Obama has stepped forth on two issues which do not necessarily draw extraordinary attention, but at least one of them may be the most important health issue of our time.

One issue that she has focused on is military families, who certainly are deserving of the attention.

Of greater impact, however, is her attention to excess fatness in children. [WW, written by a fat person, uses words that most folks use, “fatness” as opposed to obesity.]

The social implications of fatness generally, and excess fatness in particular, are significant. But the health implications of this disease is one of the most significant health issues facing this country today.

Excess fatness is a driver of a variety of other life changing health problems, ranging from diabetes to joint replacement and heart trouble.

In the roughly 30 years between 1976-80 and 2007-08 obesity among young people 2-19 years of age tripled from 5.5% to 16.9%. Among those 2-5 years of age there was a doubling; among those 6-11 years of age there was a tripling; and among those 12-19 years of age obesity increased by 3.5 times.

Among adults (20-74 years of age) obesity grew by 2.5 times, from 16.4% to 40.3%. [Center for Disease Control and Prevention]

Fat young people become fat adults and then some. This is likely to be seen over time as the First Lady’s seminal contribution during the Obama Administration.

69% of the public has a favorable opinion of Mrs. Obama. This compares with the 69% favorable rating enjoyed by Laura Bush, and the 49% favorable rating of Hillary Clinton at similar points in their tenure as First Lady. [Pew 3/11,Gallup]

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## 2012 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

The Obama re-election campaign has begun. It will be located in Chicago and led by Jim Messina, a stalwart of the 2008 campaign and Deputy Chief of Staff in the White House up until a couple of months ago. David Axelrod has also returned to Chicago and will reprise his role as a principal advisor. The other half of the Axelrod/David Plouffe duo of 2008, Plouffe, is now installed in the White House overseeing communication and politics, i.e., the inside player with “campaign” responsibilities.

President Obama’s decision in 2008, to be the first general election candidate to reject general election Federal funding, essentially blew up that Federal program. No future general election candidate will dare limit his/her general election campaign expenditures to the limits provided under the Federal program. [Federal primary campaign funding had effectively ended in previous campaigns.]

Having spent \$103,000,000 in the 2008 primary, the Obama campaign then spent an additional \$672,000,000 in the general election, a total of \$775,000,000 for the cycle.

A variety of media commentators predict that Obama’s 2012 campaign will break through the \$1 billion mark.

The other financial change in the Obama campaign approach to the 2012 election has to do with independent expenditure committees. In 2008 Obama was quite forceful in insisting, as a matter of principle, that there be no independent expenditure committees operating on his behalf in that election. And one or more efforts to create this independent funding source were closed down.

While there is no “public” indication that the President has changed his position, two former Obama White House staff members have announced, and are organizing, such a committee without apparent objection from the White House.

The ostensible reason for this change in position is the Supreme Court decision that permits corporations to contribute to these committees. It couldn’t be that this might be a tight election.

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The President is able to campaign for election between now and November 2012 with little or no intra-party interference, although the Republican candidates will be teeing off on the President non-stop.



The potential Republican nominee is likely to be in a vigorous contest, at least until early to mid-spring 2012. His or her capacity to match Obama's general election spending is problematic.

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### The Republican Nomination - And then there were 15

The Republican nomination race is warming up. At least 18 people have been touted for or indicated an interest in thinking about or securing the Republican nomination. 3 of those people have already announced that they are not going to engage in this race.

The chart below notes the status of each of these people. For those of you who are not familiar with McCotter, he is Thaddeus McCotter, the Republican Congressman from the 11<sup>th</sup> District of Michigan. McCotter recently announced that he is not going to challenge Debbie Stabenow. He has been mentioned as a Presidential candidate by a number of pundits, and, according to the Detroit Free Press, "McCotter seems genuinely bemused by the talk—though he is not outright rejecting it—."

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee announced they are not running in a straight forward manner, consistent with their understanding that nothing is of less interest than a person who decides not to run.

Donald Trump had a news conference to announce that he prefers another season as the ring master of Celebrity Apprentice, but....said, "I maintain....I would be able to win the primary and, ultimately, the general election." Trump had experienced the kind of scrutiny over the last several weeks that comes with a Presidential run. He said at an event in Nashua, "Nobody said it was going to be easy, but I had no idea I would get hammered in the way I've been hammered the past few weeks."

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### Republican Nomination Score Card

Given the ever increasing number of people who are being talked about as being potential candidates for the Republican nomination for President, WW has

decided to publish the following score card until the final field is established.  
 [“Exploring” means that the person has established a Presidential Exploratory Committee or a political action committee designed to fund early efforts.)  
 “Running” means that the person has filed a regular Presidential Committee with the FEC or has made an unequivocal announcement of intention.]

<u>Maybe</u>	<u>Exploring</u>	<u>Running</u>	<u>Not Running</u>
Bachman			Barbour
	Cain		
Daniels	Gingrich		Huckabee
	Huntsman (PAC only)		
	Johnson		
McCotter			
Palin	Paul		
		Pawlenty	
Perry	Roemer		
	Romney		
	Santorum+		
			Trump

As Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum begin their quest for the nomination, both have been reminded that undisciplined thinking and commentary can be particularly dangerous in this era of 24-hour news coverage and blogging. Santorum’s comment was most out of whack in suggesting that Senator John McCain did not understand certain forms of prisoner interrogation.

Gingrich chose to attack House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan’s plan to overhaul Medicare. He referred to it as “right-wing social engineering.” It did not take long for a number of prominent Republican pundits to take direct aim at Gingrich, and he wisely, if awkwardly, backtracked.

Neither of these men was riding high before these incidents, and in this day and age these gaffs may be fatal.

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Among Republicans the best known are Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, and Mitt Romney. No surprise, they also lead in Republicans' preference for the nomination. (Preferences include second choices of those who had selected Huckabee or Trump.)

	<u>Preference</u>	<u>Name recognition</u>
Mitt Romney	20%	83%
Sarah Palin	18%	96%
Newt Gingrich	11%	84%
Ron Paul	8%	76%
Michele Bachmann	5%	58%

All other Republican "candidates" are recognized by less than 50% of Republicans and are preferred as nominee by 4% or less. Pawlenty is known by 48% and preferred by 4%. The least well known is Gary Johnson, at 21%, and the low preference score is owned by Herman Cain. Jon Huntsman is known to 25% of Republicans and draws 2% support. [Gallup 5/11]

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### GENERAL ELECTION

Any form of match race this early in the process is worth very little. But here are some data points from early May to read and forget.

Obama leads a "generic" Republican candidate 43%-40% in Gallup, and 45% to 30% in the NBC/WSJ survey. The NBC/WSJ numbers are significantly better for Obama than they were in February and March.

In the recent Battleground survey (Politico & GWU) 30% say they will definitely vote for Obama, while 38% say they will definitely not vote for him. However, against specific putative Republican candidates Obama does quite well. The candidate who appears to do best against Obama is Ron Paul. Obama runs ahead of Paul 53%-45%; against Romney 52% - 40%; against Pawlenty 52%-38%; against Gingrich 57%-40%; and against Palin 59%-38% . [5/11 surveys, Gallup, Battleground, NBC/WSJ, CNN/OR]

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There is an issue which, while not garnering a great amount of national attention, may have a significant impact on the outcome of the 2012 election. In up to 35 States efforts are being made, often led by Republican officeholders, to make

registration and voting more difficult. The work is being done in the name of preventing voter fraud. While efforts to make voting as difficult as possible are not new, the level of activity seems to be particularly high during this election cycle.

Various proposals would make voter registration more difficult, require photo identification for voting, limit early or absentee voting, cut back the number of hours that polls are open, and other odds and ends that could lead to a new level of challenges of folks attempting to register and vote.

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### THE CONGRESS

The Bin Laden affect was also felt by the Congress. Approval of the job being done by Congress hit 24% at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> week in May, up from 17% the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of April [Gallup]. Approval was also up to 22% from 20% in the NBC/WSJ survey. However, disapproval of the job being done by Congress remains at 70% in the NBC/WSJ early May survey. And there is no real difference in how the Democrats and Republicans in Congress are viewed.

Republicans in Congress are seen as better able than Democrats to deal with a variety of issues, including the Federal budget (+12), Afghanistan (+6), economy (+5), immigration (+5), and jobs (+2). The only issue on which Democrats are seen as likely to do a better job is healthcare (+3). [Gallup]

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## THE SENATE

Democratic Senate prospects took another blow when Senator Herb Kohl (D-WI) decided not to seek re-election in 2012. Given current politics in that State it ends up in the Toss-Up column, with Republican opportunity being enhanced by the potential candidacy of former Republican Governor Tommy Thompson.

It is anybody's bet whether the resignation of Senator Ensign, and the appointment of Congressman Dean Heller to replace him, improves the Republican position in Nevada. The data is mixed about the re-election prospects of appointed Senators, but WW's instinct is that it is helpful given that Heller received 63% of the vote in his Congressional district in 2010. The Democrats have a primary contest, with Congresswoman Shelley Berkeley being the current favorite. The primary will be held at the end of February 2012, providing much time for a fulsome general election campaign.

The North Dakota seat (Senator Kent Conrad D-ND retiring) is essentially gone. The Republicans seem to have selected incumbent Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) as their primary target of opportunity in 2012. Next in line are the Democratic-controlled seats in Montana (John Testor) and Nebraska (Ben Nelson). The Virginia seat to be vacated by Jim Webb(D) is a true Toss-Up. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) appears vulnerable, but so far Michigan Republicans have not come up with a strong candidate to oppose her.

Democratic candidates in Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Virginia, and Wisconsin will have some advantage in that those States are either Toss-Ups or only lean Republican or Democratic in the Presidential race. This means that the Obama campaign will have a substantial operation in each of those States. Voters that are secured for Obama will most likely support the Democratic Senate candidate.

Looking at seats not up in 2012, plus seats that are up that are safe or leaning to one Party or the other in the coming election, results in the Democrats with 45 seats and the Republicans with 46 seats. Of the 9 Toss-up seats, Obama won 5 of them in 2008 and McCain won 4.

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## THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats	51
Republicans	47
Independents	2 (caucus Dem)

Here is how the 33 Senate elections -- 23 Democratic incumbents (includes 2 Independents), 10 Republican incumbents -- look to me at this time . (D=Dem incumbent in office, R=GOP incumbent in office, I=Ind. Incumbent in office) Underlining reflects retirement.

Safe	Leaning		Leaning	Safe
<u>Democrat (9)</u>	<u>Democrat (6)</u>	<u>Toss-Up (9)</u>	<u>Republican (3)</u>	<u>Republican (6)</u>
California	<u>Connecticut</u>	Massachusetts	Maine	<u>Arizona</u>
Delaware	Florida	Missouri	<u>North Dakota</u>	Indiana
<u>Hawaii</u>	Michigan	Montana	<u>Texas</u>	Mississippi
Maryland	Ohio	Nebraska		Tennessee
Minnesota	Pennsylvania	Nevada		Utah
New Jersey	Washington	<u>New Mexico</u>		Wyoming
New York		<u>Virginia</u>		
Rhode Island		W. Virginia		
Vermont		<u>Wisconsin</u>		

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Seats not up in 2012	30	37
Safe in 2012	9	6
Leaning in 2012	6	3
Total	45	46
Toss-ups	9 (2R/7D)	

Of the 9 Toss-up States, Obama won 5 of them (Massachusetts, Nevada, New Mexico, Virginia, and Wisconsin). McCain won the other 4 (Missouri, Montana, Nebraska and West Virginia).

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## THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

There are two special House elections soon to be resolved in which both Parties are looking for “evidence” as to how they are doing. In California the special election is to fill the seat left vacant when Jane Harmon resigned. It is

assumed that a Democrat will win this seat, but in the 1<sup>st</sup> round, in which it was anticipated that both top spots would be filled by Democrats, a Republican finished second.

In upstate New York, Republican Christopher Lee resigned, and it had been assumed that the seat would be easily held by the Republicans. But a funny thing happened on the way to the election. A wealthy fellow who had run several times as a Democrat decided to run as a Tea Party candidate. While he is taking votes from both of the other candidates, the Republican candidate has suffered the most from his entry into the race.

When all is said and done, predicting the outcome of the 2012 House elections is made particularly dicey by the pending national redistricting. 12 seats will be in motion. The early view seems to be that Republicans will be slightly advantaged by the final result.

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63% of Americans think that most members of the House of Representatives do not deserve reelection. However, 57% believe that their own Representative should be re-elected. This is slightly better than the 51% who had this view just before election day 2010. [Gallup 5/11]

The generic Congressional ballot is just about dead even, with Democrats leading Republicans 42% to 41%. [Battleground 5/11]

#### THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

	Republicans	242	
	Democrats	193	
	<u>1/20/11</u>	<u>3/28/11</u>	<u>5/16/11</u>
TOTAL Dem	193	193	191
Solid Dem	150	151	153
Likely Dem	27	24	21
Lean Dem	12	10	11
Toss-up	10	16	16
D	4	8	6
R	6	8	10
Lean GOP	15	18	16
Likely GOP	38	38	41
Solid GOP	183	178	177

TOTAL GOP      242                      242                      244

[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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## RESTAURANTS

### NAPA

We went to two, quite different, restaurants on successive nights in Napa – Morimoto and Bistro Jeanty. They were different as to type of food, décor and “scene.” Both were worth the evening we spent there.

MORIMOTO  
610 Main Street  
Napa, California 94559  
702-252-1600  
[www.morimotoapa.com](http://www.morimotoapa.com)  
[info@morimotoapa.com](mailto:info@morimotoapa.com)

Peggy and Mike suggested that we have dinner at Morimoto, a restaurant that offers contemporary Japanese cuisine.

The restaurant is quite large and very modern in design. As you enter there is a regular seating area to the right, and as you head further into the restaurant there is a large open kitchen on the right. You can stop and watch the kitchen in action, but there is a lot of traffic as dishes are conveyed from the kitchen to diners.

The back of the restaurant is divided into two large rooms that are essentially open one to the other. In the area you first enter there is a large bar to the left and a comfortable seating area to the right. Folks that are either in the restaurant for a drink or waiting for a table hang out in this area. By the time we left it was quite crowded. The back end of this first room holds a number of tables that seat 4 or more.

We were led through the first room and into the second where we were seated.

My notes for the evening are less than perfect. On the appetizer front I ordered sushi and I had a tempura calamari salad. I think Peggy passed and I did not record Debbie’s choice. For entrees, Peggy chose sushi and sashimi; Debbie



selected the whole roasted lobster ‘epice’; I went with the black cod, working my way through a crispy whole fish. Each of the cooked dishes had unique tastes that made them particularly enjoyable.

The service was excellent.

The whole place is a bit of a scene and at least on this weekend night, it was very loud. So loud, in fact, that holding a conversation was somewhat difficult. The clientele trends young and well off.

The restroom fit the modern style of the restaurant.

BISTRO JEANTY  
6510 Washington Street  
Yountville, California 94599  
707-944-0103  
[www.bistrojeanty.com](http://www.bistrojeanty.com)

As the night before, at Marimoto, Debbie and I joined Peggy and Mike.

As you enter the restaurant there is a small reception desk. To the right there is a community table that seats up to 12, as well as several smaller tables. At the far end of this first room there is a bar with six tall chairs.

Once through the front room, you enter the main dining room. Between the two dining rooms the restaurant seats up to 90 people. Off of the main dining room there is a patio, which can be enclosed and heated. The night we were there it was not in use.

For appetizers our group had Grilled Smelt, Crème de Tomate en Croute (tomato soup in puff pastry), Salad de Laitue (butter lettuce salad with mustard vinaigrette), Escargots (with garlic pastis butter), and Langue D’agneau (warm lamb tongue and potato salad).

Peggy selected as her main course the Sole Meuniere (petrale sole filet, mashed potatoes and lemon-caper butter sauce). Mike picked the Cassoulet (duck confit, Toulouse sausage bacon and baked beans). Debbie and I each selected the Coq au Vin (chicken, mushrooms, bacon and red wine stew).

There is something particularly comfortable about this restaurant.

The waiters were excellent, and to our surprise one of the waiters was the same person who had served us the night before at Marimoto. He told us that the two restaurants were quite different and he enjoyed the change in scene.

You can bring your own wine, but there is a corkage fee of \$20 for the first 2 bottles and \$25 for the third. For each bottle you buy from the restaurant's list, the corkage fee on one bottle is waived.

There are two small unisex restrooms. The floors are green, and the walls are covered with three inch white tiles. There are white ceramic commodes and washbasins. The walls are covered in Italian scene posters.

By the way, the music on the website fits the menu.

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### THE RICHMOND RESTAURANT & WINE BAR

615 Balboa Street (Btwn 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues)

San Francisco, California 04118

415-379-8988

Fax 415-379-3807

[therichmond@sbcglobal.net](mailto:therichmond@sbcglobal.net)

Debbie and I went to The Richmond with Howard and Jackie. This is a relatively small neighborhood restaurant. Our table was by itself, in a corner to the right of the entrance. Straight ahead is a small bar with 6 tall chairs. Another 4-top is snuggled in next to the bar. Then, in a small room to the left, there are six tables which seat a total of 20 people. There is draping in various places around the restaurant to provide a certain amount of privacy.

Jackie and Debbie started with the Harvest Salad & Pear Vinaigrette (mixed greens, poached pears, candied walnuts, dried cranberries & blue cheese). Howard had Potato Leek soup, and I savored the Roast Beets & Cardamon Carrot Salad topped with Laura Chenel goat cheese in phyllo pastry.

Jackie ordered Boneless Pan-Fried Chicken, substituting vegetables for what was offered with the chicken – baked Rigatoni & meat sauce. Debbie went for a Bone-in Pork Chop with potato puree & mushroom sauce. Howard selected the Seared File with Wild Mushrooms, substituting polenta for potato hash. I also picked the Pan Fried Chicken, substituting potato for the Rigatoni.

The restroom is quite small. There is barely enough room to turn around. A

tiny triangle-shaped wash basin adorns the corner opposite the commode. The floor is covered with large grayish tiles. Smaller off-white tiles cover the walls to shoulder height. Above the tiles, the wall and ceiling are painted red. Above the commode hangs a framed front page of the San Francisco Chronicle from the 1980s when the 49ers won the Super Bowl.

The service left nothing to be desired.

Parking is a bit problematic because there is no obvious parking lot and the curbs are occupied by neighborhood cars.

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PERBACCO  
230 California Street  
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Stan suggested this restaurant for he and Julia, Florence and Peter, and Debbie and I.

Perbacco is quite large. To the left of the entry is a long, L-shaped bar with many high chairs. There are also several high, round tables with related chairs at the front. There are a large number of tables running the length of the restaurant to a huge open kitchen. There is also what appears to be a chef's table right before the front counter of the kitchen.

The balcony overlooking the restaurant has multiple tables, and here is where we were seated. There are a number of booths and 4 and 6-top tables.

Julia, Stan and Debbie started with the Burrata cheese, roasted broccoli, citron condimento, and blood orange salad. Florence chose the Fritto Misto of rock shrimp, seasonal beans, olives, fennel and lemon aioli. Peter enjoyed the Roasted Pear Salad with caramel vinaigrette, Gorgonzola crème and candied hazelnuts. I had two appetizers, the Roasted Pear Salad and the Piastra Roasted Octopus with fingerling potatoes, Castelvetro olives and fennel salsa verde.

For her main course Julia went for the John Dory Fillet with green asparagus and leeks in spring garlic Jus. Stan tried the Risotto with local green asparagus, melted leeks and Jamon Iberico. Florence selected the Tortelli Di Ciapin-Abe,

which is pasta filled with roasted sunchokes, sage butter, hedgehog mushrooms and radicchio. Peter chose the Pappardelle -- wide pasta ribbons with slow-cooked short rib ragout and roasted Cipolline and horseradish. Debbie tried the Rivora -- pasta filled with Meyer lemon and ricotta, and asparagus passatina with mint. I went with Agnolotti Al Coniglio -- rabbit agnolotti with vermouth reduction and mostarda di frutta.

The restroom is one of that rare breed of restrooms that accommodates men and women in the same area. There is a long rectangular room with 3 washbasins and a mirror at the far end. Along the right hand side are 4 completely enclosed commode areas, 2 marked for men and 2 for women. There are white/gray accented rectangular floor tiles. The walls are covered with narrow white tiles.

The service was first rate.

There is valet parking at night.

It is fairly noisy.

A food critic for the "San Francisco Chronicle" was at the next table with family or friends.

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CLINK  
215 Charles Street  
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The location of this restaurant takes a little explaining. Since September 2007, what was once Boston's Charles Street Jail is now the Liberty Boston Hotel, located at the foot of Beacon Hill.

The former jail now houses the main lobby, a number of restaurants, a ballroom and a number of guest rooms. A new building was constructed next to and attached to the jail. The hotel has 14 floors of rooms. The upper floor rooms overlook the river, and the view is spectacular. It appears to be the goal of the hotel to deliver Four Seasons Hotel quality service. It is not quite there yet, but is pretty close.

Clink is the principal restaurant at the Liberty Boston Hotel, although there are four other eating and drinking locations.

Clink is an “L” shaped room that seats about 70 people at tables for two, that can be reconfigured to accommodate larger groups. There are several yellow banquettes along one wall. The décor is “old jail.” There is a brick wall in the restaurant that separates the dining area from the kitchen. The wall has window-like openings with bars across them, and there are a couple of doors made of bars.

Over a period of 18 hours, Debbie and I ate three meals at Clink. We had dinner with Julian and Betsy; breakfast alone; and brunch with Heidi, Tyler, Nancy, Stan, Joe, and Bridget.

At dinner with Betsy and Julian, Betsy started with a Gem Lettuce Salad with Herb Dressing, Radishes, and Olive Oil Crouton, followed by Seared Sea Scallops with Smoked Salmon, Fennel, Leeks and Lemon Thyme. Debbie had the same salad, and then for her entrée she chose Black Pasta with Local Shellfish, Squid, Saffron Butter, and Garlic Oil.

Julian started with a half order of the scallops and the Black Pasta. I had a half order of Scallops, and Organic Chicken with Savory Bread Pudding, Raisin & Pine Nut Relish, and Chanterelle Mushroom Jus.

For dessert, we shared an Apple Rhubarb Cobbler with Brown Butter Ice Cream, and Butterscotch Pots De Crème with Madeleines.

Perhaps as a result of the brick walls around and through the room, it was extremely noisy during dinner. It was difficult to hold a conversation without intense attention.

For breakfast Debbie had mixed berries, bacon and toast. I had grapefruit, banana, bacon, and tea with lemon.

I am a regular grapefruit eater. How it is cut and presented is a big deal. You can order just sections, but they do not taste the same as a section that comes out of the grapefruit just before you eat it. The way the grapefruit at Clink was cut and presented was the best that I have ever been served. All of the sections were still in the outer skin, but each was totally separated all the way around.

There were so many different dishes ordered for brunch that I did not keep track. In addition to various combinations of fruit, dishes ordered ranged from

Smoked Salmon with a Toasted Bagel, Cream Cheese and Classic Garnish, to something called “The Slammer,” three eggs as you like, Vermont Maple Sausage, Crispy Bacon, Breakfast Potatoes, and Toast.

The service at all three meals was helpful and attentive.

*Mike*

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