

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 112

August 17, 2012

STATE OF THE NATION

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PRESIDENT OBAMA

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2012 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION

80 Days Until the Election

The Schedule

Paul Ryan the Republican V.P. Nominee

The Conventions

The Debates

The Election – Not a Time for Educating

A Book Worth Reading

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THE MONEY

[See Snapshot on August 22]

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THE CONGRESS

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RESTAURANTS

An omelet enhancement

Washington, DC

**Charleston, South Carolina
Hollywood, Florida**

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STATE OF THE NATION

In the early August Politico/GW/Battleground survey 61% said the country is on the wrong track. 32% said it is on the right track. When compared to early 2009, there is a slight drop in the number saying the country on the wrong track. However, the number saying the country is going in the right direction is essentially the same as it was in 2009.

		<u>Right Direction</u>	<u>Wrong Track</u>
8/5-8/9	Pol/GW/BG	32	61
7/18-7/22	NBC/WSJ	32	60
7/11-7/16	CBS/NYT	30	64
7/5-7/8	ABC/WP	33	63
6/20-6/24	NBC/WSJ	31	61
5/31-6/3	CBS/NYT	31	62
5/16-20/12	NBC/WSJ	33	58
4/13-17/12	NBC/WSJ	33	59
4/13/17/12	CBS/NYT	31	61
4/8-12/12	ABC/WP	33	64
7/2011	NBC/WSJ	25	67
6/2011	ABC/WP	32	66
1/2011	CBS/NYT	32	64
2/2010	CBS/NYT	33	62
1/2010	NBC/WSJ	34	54
2/2009	ABC/WP	31	67

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The average annual unemployment rate dropped from 9.3% in 2009 to 9% in 2011. The rate has been essentially static during the first seven months of 2012 at 8.3%. The Gallup unemployment/underemployed rate has dropped from 18.7% in January of 2012 to 17.1% in July.

	<u>BLS*</u>	<u>Gallup **</u>
July	8.3%	17.1%
June	8.2%	17.3%
May	8.2%	18.0%
April	8.1%	18.2%
March	8.2%	18.0%
February	8.3%	19.1%
January	8.3%	18.7%
Average 2011	9.0%	18.7%
Average 2010	9.6%	18.8%
Average 2009	9.3%	

*Seasonally adjusted rate/Bureau of Labor Statistics

**Gallup combines an unadjusted unemployed rate with those who are working part-time but want full-time employment.

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26% of Americans are now satisfied with the way things are going in the United States. This is up from a low of 11% in mid-2011. The high point of this marker for the Obama administration was about two-thirds of the way through 2009. As a reference, the high point in the last 33 years was 71% in 1999.

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After 5 months of improvement, the economic confidence of Americans has fallen over the last 2 months to the July level of -26. Yet, it is still better by almost 2 to 1 than it was a year ago. [Gallup]

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28% of Americans say that “the most important thing” that can be done to improve the U.S. economy is to create more and better jobs. Another 9% list less outsourcing of jobs and bringing jobs home as the most important thing that can be done.

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- * 70% believe that people's values in America have been getting worse in the past ten years
- * 46% think values will get weaker over the next ten years
- * 36% think that American values are stronger than the rest of the world, while 33% say they are weaker
- * 66% say the U.S. economy is on the wrong track
- * 51% and 52% say the American economic system has been unfair to middle-class Americans and working-class Americans respectively.
- * 79% believe that executives at Wall Street banks have a different set of values than they do
- * 89% believe that the values of executives at large Wall Street banks are worse than fundamental American values
- * 71% believe that America's elected officials mainly reflect the values of the wealthy
- * 77% believe that people are generally motivated by self interest.

[The Atlantic/Aspen Institute American Values Survey – 6/12]

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When asked – open ended – what they think is the most important problem facing the country today, 54% said the “economy in general or unemployment/jobs.” The next highest noted concern was an expression by 15% of a “dissatisfaction with government.” [Gallup]

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ODDS AND ENDS

Bill Gates Starts Toilet Search

Microsoft founder and history's biggest philanthropist Bill Gates has a new obsession: toilets. He and his wife's Foundation launched a "Reinvent the Toilet Fair" in Seattle on Thursday, awarding prizes for new sanitation innovations. "Toilets are extremely important for public health and, when you think of it, even human dignity," Gates said in a statement. The fair attracted hundreds of investors, inventors, and researchers. The California Institute of Technology

walked away with first place, for a solar-powered toilet. "Inventing new toilets is one of the most important things we can do to reduce child deaths and disease and improve people's lives," Gates said. [Daily Beast 8/17/12]

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SITORSQUOT

This seems like the appropriate place to bring to the attention of Washington Watch readers an app which it recently discovered – SITORSQUOT.

It describes itself as follows, "Enjoy the go while you are on the go! Need a pit stop? Find and review bathrooms all over the world."

If you choose, you can login with Facebook or log in directly.

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PRESIDENT OBAMA

With less than three months to go before the general election, the public's grade for the job President Obama is doing (as found by Gallup) is lower than that of 5 of the previous Presidents at this point in their first term. The list of 8 follows.

The President's job approval rating in Gallup on August 12th was 45% approval and 49% disapproval.

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Eisenhower	68	19
Nixon	56	33 (6/12)
Reagan	54	38
Clinton	53	39
GBush (II)	49	43
Obama	45	49 (8/12/12)
G Bush (I)	40	54
Carter	32	55

The following are several additional cuts at the President's job approval rating over the last 16 months.

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>	<u>CNN/ORC</u>
Aug 2012	---	---	---	49/48%
July 2012	49/48%	44/46%	47/49%	---
June 2012	47/48%	---	---	50/59%
May 2012	48/46%	50/48%	47/49%	49/50%
Apr 2012	49/46%	48/42%	50/45%	49/48%
Mar 2012	50/45%	41/47%	46/50%	51/45%
Feb 2012	---	50/43%	50/46%	50/48%
Jan 2012	48/46%	45/47%(CBS)	48/48%	47/51%
Dec 2011	46/48 %	44/46 %(CBS)	49/47%	49/48%
Oct 2011	44/51%	46/46%	42/54%	45/52%
Aug 2011	44/51%	48/47%	44/46 WP	44/54%
Jan 2011	53/41%	49/49%	54/43%	53/45%

Americans continue to rate Obama negatively on the economy, disapproving the job he is doing 53% to the 44% who approve of what he is doing. This is roughly the flip of how he is seen on handling foreign policy, where 53% approve of the job he is doing and 41% disapprove. [NBC/WSJ 7/12]

Among a group of 11 occupational groups, the group that is most positive about the President's performance are professional workers. 52% approve of the job he is doing. The group that most disapproves of the job he is doing are business owners, of whom 57% disapprove.

Currently, 49% of us have positive feelings toward the President and 43% have negative feelings. Last month it was 48% positive and 38% negative. The change is a product of a drop in the number of people who are described as neutral, from 14% in June to 8% in July. This is the lowest neutral group recorded in this survey since Obama became President. The previous low was 10% who described themselves as neutral in May of this year, when 49% said they were positive toward the President and 41% were recorded as negative. [NBC/WSJ 4/12]

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When asked about their “feelings” toward Obama, 67% like him personally, but a good chunk of those folks disapprove of many of his policies. 29% don’t like him or his policies.

Like Obama personally/approve of most of his policies	41%
Like Obama personally/disapprove of many of his policies	26%
Don’t like Obama personally/approve of most of his policies	2%
Don’t like Obama personally/disapprove of many of his policies	29%

[NBC/WSJ 7/12]

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2012 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION

80 Days Until the Election

To some, 80 days may seem like a very short time, to others a very long time. What is certain is that almost anything can and will happen.

If, with 160 days to go before the election, you had ruminated about what was likely to happen in the next 80 days, how many of the following events would have made your list?

- * The deadly shootings at the Aurora, Colorado movie theater and the Sikh Temple in Wisconsin
- * The Curiosity rover landing on Mars
- * The Chick-Fil-A boycott

- * Power outages in India that first left 300 million, and then 600 million , people without power
- * Jeremy Lin leaving the Knicks
- * The impact of the massive drought in the U.S.
- * Kim Jong Un of North Korea revealing his wife to the world
- * The revelation of an alleged manipulation of the Libor
- * The removal of Joe Paterno's statue from Penn State grounds
- * Gore Vidal passing
- * Katie Holmes filing for divorce from Tom Cruise
- * Kristen Stewart being caught cheating on Robert Pattinson
- * Paul Ryan being named as Mitt Romney's choice for VP
- * Linda McMahon winning the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate in Connecticut

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The Schedule

August 27-30, 2012	Republican Convention, Tampa, FL
September 4-6, 2012	Democratic National Convention, Charlotte, NC
October 3, 2012	1 st Presidential Debate – Denver, CO
October 11, 2012	Vice Presidential Debate – Danville, KY
October 16, 2012	2 nd Presidential Debate – Hempstead, NY
October 22, 2012	3 rd Presidential Debate – Boca Raton, FL
November 6, 2012	Election Day

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Romney's Dilemma

At the beginning of this month Mitt Romney was looking at a race in which President Obama seemed to have a small, but steady, lead nationally and in the so-called battleground States.

The Obama team bet that spending large amounts of money early to go after Romney in every possible way would pay off in the end. They took to disparaging Romney in every way possible. Not a crazy strategy, as the current state of the race makes clear.

Romney at that point had at least three opportunities to change the dynamic or direction of the race.

One was the selection of his Vice Presidential running mate. Everyone “knows” that in the final analysis ,V.P.s rarely deliver a State or a large number of votes, but the selection does tell us something about the Presidential candidate.

The second opportunity comes with Romney’s speech at the convention. While the TV ratings for the conventions are down, the hour that is likely to draw the most viewers for each of the conventions is the acceptance speech of the nominees. If a candidate says something worthwhile, the thousands of reporters and media folks attending the convention will get the word out far and wide. It is also true that, if the speech is a dud, that will also be reported.

The third opportunity comes with the first debate on October 3rd. At that point the campaign will have about one month to go. It will be the first time that interested potential voters will be able to assess the Presidential candidates side by side.

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The Selection of Paul Ryan

The selection of Ryan was a surprise for many on both ends of the political spectrum. Anecdotal indicators were that most folks thought that Romney should and would select Senator Rob Portman.

Romney obviously decided not to do that. It does seem clear that Romney made the choice himself, so the reasons why he made the choice are really only known to him (and possibly Beth Meyers). We do know that the choice was not foisted on him the way some folks feel Governor Palin was foisted on John McCain in 2008.

I will discuss more about the hue and cry that has ensued with his announcement a little later, but now lets take a look at Paul Ryan. Who is he, what does he bring to the campaign, and what does he stand for?

Ryan is a 42-year old Republican Congressman from Janesville, Wisconsin. He is now serving his 7th term in the House of Representatives, having won re-election last time with 68% of the vote. He is married, with three relatively young

children. His family lives in Janesville. He is a Catholic, he is a hunter, and, oh yes, when Congress is in session, he apparently lives in his Capitol Hill office.

He is very smart, he is well informed, he is a physical fitness buff, he often walks through the halls of the Congressional office buildings with earbuds in place, listening to music. Some folks on both sides of the aisle regard him fondly and others find him to be thin-skinned and arrogant. He is reasonably wealthy.

He is not particularly “gaffe – prone.” When you Google “Paul Ryan Gaffe” there are about 2,000 results. For comparison when you Google “Bobby Jindal Gaffe,” there are about 7,000 results.

And, oh by the way, the conservative wing of the Republican Party, including those who see themselves as Tea Party devotees, love him. They believe they have in Ryan a true conservative, and they are likely right.

One person described Ryan to the Watch as “Palin with substance.”

What does he do for Romney? First, Ryan is a true conservative, so one of the most important things he does is to make the conservative wing of the Republican Party much more comfortable with Romney. The conservatives have been less than enthused about the putative Republican nominee. In this regard, WW is reminded of the 1976 campaign and President Carter’s selection of Walter Mondale as his running mate. One of the things that Mondale did for Carter was to make organized labor much more comfortable with Carter. Mondale spent many an hour during the campaign in union towns and halls.

Second, he appears to make Romney more publicly comfortable. Since announcing Ryan, Romney, who more often than not seemed somewhat awkward in his public presentation, seems to be freer and better.

Third, having spent those many years in Congress and having done as much public speaking as he has done, he should be able to hold his own in the Vice Presidential debate with Joe Biden.

Fourth, he has, for better or worse, changed the subject of the campaign from who Romney is and what he did or did not do at Bain Capital, to some actual issues. How that debate, assuming it ensues, will work for Romney also remains to be seen.

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Beyond the above, who is Paul Ryan?

* His voting record as a conservative is not at the upper end. That is to say, based on National Journal Rankings in 2008, he was the 45th most conservative member of the House, and in 2011 he was the 150th most conservative member of the House.

* He believes the size of the Federal Government should be drastically reduced. He would do this by

- cutting funding for such social safety net programs as food stamps and housing assistance. Food stamps alone would be cut \$133.5 billion over 10 years [46,000,000 Americans currently live below the poverty level of \$22, 314/year for a family of four].
- cutting spending for education, including such programs as Pell grants.
- eliminating tax breaks that benefit low-income Americans. such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit. He would also eliminate some tax breaks for the wealthier, but those remain undefined.
- eliminating taxes on capital gains, dividends, and interest (all changes that tend to favor the wealthy).
- and he would lower the top tax rate from 35% to 25%, and establish a 10% rate for those who are low earners. (Currently those in the bottom 40% of house hold income pay a rate of 6%.)

* He has in the past spoken favorably about raising the retirement age for Social Security and curtailing benefits for well-off retirees.

* He would dramatically change the Medicare program, replacing traditional Medicare benefits with government support to purchase private insurance. He does make clear that these changes would not affect any person aged 55 and older.

He would also reign in Medicaid in a way that would inevitably lead to a curtailment of the resources available for this program.

* Of course, he would repeal Obama's health care plan.

* While he would seek savings from Pentagon spending, this is one area in which he would see the budget growing over time. [The above commentary is based on a report in the Washington Post 8/12/12]

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The Romney/Ryan “ticket” received very little initial bounce as a result of the announcement of Ryan.

Nate Silver of Fivethirtyeight.com has provided an analysis of the Vice President announcement boost, as has the Gallup organization. In the chart below the only races included are those in which the announcement of the V.P. occurred before either convention. The only race left out is 1992, given the impact of Perot’s departure from the race.

1984	Mondale/Ferraro	+2
1988	Dukakis/Bentsen	+2
2000	Bush/Cheney	+3
2004	Kerry/Edwards	+4
2008	Obama/Biden	-2
2012	Romney/Ryan	+1

Whether Ryan’s addition to the ticket will, in fact, be a help or a hindrance to Romney is still an open question. We will never really know what elements contribute to the margin’s of each candidate’s vote.

Washington Watch’s initial reaction to the selection of Ryan has been relatively positive as to whether it helps Romney. Many think I have totally lost my mind or at least my political judgment.

Some Republican strategists and public officials have begun ringing their hands, essentially saying that with the selection of Ryan, the race is over and Romney has lost. Then they wonder out loud what detrimental impact that will have on down-ballot races.

Many Democrats shouted with joy at hearing Romney’s selection. They too think the race is all but over and Obama has won.

One astute Republican strategist said better than I what the selection of Ryan means to the campaign – and he said it positively, “ Until now it has been a campaign about nothing...now it is a campaign about something.”

On November 7th (hopefully the final results will be known) either the bed wetters or the currently even-keeled in the Republican Party will be right. And the Democrats will either be exulted or deflated.

Right now, no one really knows whether Romney’s selection of Ryan was one of the dumbest or one of the smartest moves he will have made.

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The Conventions

The Republican convention provides the second opportunity for Romney to change the dynamic of the contest with his convention speech.

As noted in the June 2012 Washington Watch, these conventions are a very expensive anachronism. Perhaps the modifications introduced by the Democrats this year will lead to other changes. The Democrats will have regular evening plenary sessions only on Tuesday and Wednesday. The Thursday night session, at an outdoor sport stadium, will primarily feature the acceptance speeches of President Obama and Vice President Biden.

The last time the Republican Party held a multi-ballot convention was in 1948 when Tom Dewey needed 3 ballots to secure the nomination. The previous multi-ballot Republican nominating battle was in 1940, when Wendall Wilkie needed 6 ballots to secure his place on the Republican ticket.

The Democrats last multi-ballot nomination fight was in 1952, when Adlai Stevenson required 3 ballots to claim his place in history. The previous multi-ballot Democratic contest was Franklin’s Roosevelt’s nomination in 1932, which required 4 ballots.

Since 1960, there have been only three nominating conventions in either Party in which the nominee received less than 62% of the votes on the 1st ballot:

John Kennedy in 1960 – 53%
Gerry Ford in 1976 – 53%
Walter Mondale in 1984 – 56%

Since 1956 the number of delegates to the Democratic National Convention has grown by 304%, while the number of Republican delegates has grown by 137%.

1956 - the two parties had roughly the same number of delegates:
Democrats 1372 - Republicans 1323
1960 - the number of Democratic convention delegates had started to grow, while the number of Republican delegates was about the same
Democrats 1521 - Republicans 1331
1972 - the number of Democratic delegates doubled and the Republican delegate total remained roughly the same
Democrats 3016 - Republicans 1348
1976 - saw the Democrat number remaining stable and the number of Republican delegates growing by about 50%
Democrats 3008 - Republicans 2259
2008 - the Democratic total grew by near 50% and the Republican total by 10%
Democrats 4418 - Republicans 2516
2012 - will bring a Democratic delegate pool that has grown by 25% and a Republican pool that has dropped by 9%
Democrats 5552 - Republicans 2286

Electronic coverage of the conventions has grown exponentially since 1844, when news of convention proceedings was sent out by telegraph for the first time.

1880 - Telephone was first used to transmit convention information
1924 – The Republican convention in Cleveland was the first convention to be broadcast on radio
1940 – First transmission of reports by a television station came from the Republican convention in Philadelphia
1948 – First live convention reports were broadcast from the Republican convention

The high point of TV ratings for the Democratic convention occurred in 1960, when the broadcast TV rating was 29.2. The highest rated Republican convention occurred in 1976, with a rating of 31.5.

The chart below shows the number of nights of coverage by the major TV networks at each of the conventions from 1992 through 2012.

Number of Nights of Coverage
Major Broadcast Networks

	<u>1992</u>		<u>1996</u>		<u>2000</u>	
	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>
ABC	4	4	4	4	4	4
CBS	3	4	4	4	2	2
NBC	4	4	4	4	3	3

	<u>2004</u>		<u>2008</u>		<u>2012</u>	
	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Rep</u>
ABC	3	3	4	3	3**	3**
CBS	3	3	4	3	3***	4***
NBC	3	3	4	3 *	2****	3****

- * Republicans canceled the first night of their convention because of the hurricane.
- ** ABC will be on from 10-11p.m. Tuesday – Thursday at each convention
- *** CBS will be on from 10-11p.m. Monday – Thursday at the Republican convention and 10-11p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday and 9-11p.m. Thursday at the Democratic convention
- **** NBC will be on from 10-11p.m. Tuesday – Thursday at the Republican convention with a possible extension to Monday and from 10-11p.m. Tuesday and 9-11 p.m. Thursday and the Democratic convention (Wednesday night it is broadcasting an NFL football game – it will not be carrying former President Clinton’s speech that evening)

In a change from the practice at recent conventions at which the Vice Presidential nominee has been the principal speaker on Wednesday night, Vice President Biden will give his speech to the convention on Thursday at 9 p.m. just prior to the President’s acceptance speech

Comparison of Combined Convention ratings 1968-2004
(Based on Nielsen combined ratings with PBS added)

	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Republican</u>
2008 (ABC, CBS, NBC (CNN, MSNBC, FOXNC, PBS)	22.1	23.8*
2004 (ABC, CBS, NBC (CNN, MSNBC, FOXNC, PBS)	15.2	16.7
2000 (ABC, CBS, NBC (CNN, MSNBC, FOXNC, PBS)	16.8	15.3
1996 (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, PBS)	17.2	16.5
1992 (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, PBS)	22.0	20.5

* DNC had 4 nights of coverage, RNC had 3 nights of coverage

While TV/Cable network coverage is relatively modest, the thousands of journalists and media personnel that swarm the convention proceedings provide an extraordinary amount of coverage overall to the presidential nominees acceptance speeches.

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Is there really a so-called convention bounce?

In 7 of the 11 conventions since 1968 one or both conventions moved the numbers for the nominee of the Party after the convention: 1968, 1976, 1980, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2008. The most dramatic post-convention bounce came after the 1992 Democratic convention, in which, following the initial exodus of Ross Perot from the Presidential race, Clinton jumped 16 points and Bush dropped 14 points.

For complete data on the bounce or lack thereof from 1968 – 2004 see the Washington Watch for August 2008. In 2008, pre-Democratic convention, Gallup had the race even, with Obama and McCain each at 45%. Following the Democratic convention, Obama led McCain 49% - 45%. Following the subsequent Republican convention, the race switched and McCain led Obama 49% - 45%.

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The Debates

The first debate in particular provides a third opportunity for Romney to change the dynamic of this race. This will be the first time that the two men will face one another on the same stage.

One of the more positive happenings of what has been a generally nasty campaign was the effort of three young women who learned in one of their high school classes that a woman has not moderated a Presidential debate since 1992. Deciding that the time had come to change the record, they launched a petition drive which generated hundreds of thousands of signatures. They attempted to deliver their initial petition to the Debate Commission, but were rebuffed. They were not deterred however, and their efforts were rewarded. Candy Crowley of CNN will moderate the second debate.

The following is a bit of history.

From 1976 to 1984 ,the debates were sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Under the League of Women Voters' stewardship, women made up 43% of moderators.

In 1987, the two parties established the Commission on Presidential Debates. Under the Commission on Presidential Debates, women have been selected to moderate 11% of debates.

Jim Lehrer alone has moderated more than twice as many debates as women have.

Both moderators of Vice Presidential debates sponsored by the League of Women Voters were male. Of the six Vice Presidential debate moderators selected by the Commission on Presidential debates, half were female.

Presidential Debate Moderators

	First Debate Moderator	Second Debate Moderator	Third Debate Moderator	Fourth Debate Moderator
1960	Howard K. Smith	Frank McGee	Bill Shadel	Quincy Howe
1976	Edwin Newman	Pauline Frederick	Barbara Walters	
1980	Bill Moyers	Howard K Smith		
1984	Barbara Walters	Edwin Newman		
1988	Jim Lehrer	Bernard Shaw		
1992	Jim Lehrer	Carole Simpson	Jim Lehrer	
1996	Jim Lehrer	Jim Lehrer		
2000	Jim Lehrer	Jim Lehrer	Jim Lehrer	
2004	Jim Lehrer	Charlie Gibson	Bob Schieffer	
2008	Jim Lehrer	Tom Brokaw	Bob Schieffer	
2012	Jim Lehrer	Candy Crowley	Bob Schieffer	

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2012 Presidential General Election

At this time in 2000, 42% of Americans said they had given a great deal of thought to the Presidential election. By this time in 2004 that had risen to 69% and in 2008 it hit 70%. Today it is 64%. [Gallup 8/12]

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50% say that Obama has a background and set of values with which they can identify. 47% say they cannot identify with his background or values. Juxtaposed with this view, 42% say that Romney has a background and set of values with which they can identify and 52% do not. [NBC/WSJ 7/12]

Based on data collected by Real Clear Politics through August 8th Obama has had a small, but steady, lead over Romney for the last month. The following are survey results from media-related polling organizations. [WW tends to find them more consistently reliable. This is not to say that all non-media sources are not reliable. It is to say that the slant of some non-media sources – left and right – leave something to be desired.]

<u>Survey</u>	<u>Last Date</u>	<u>Obama</u>	<u>Romney</u>
CNN/OpRes	8/8	52	45
Fox News	8/7	49	40
Pew Research	7/26	51	41
NBC/WSJ	7/22	49	43
Fox News	7/17	45	41
CBS/NYT	7/16	46	47
Pew Research	7/9	50	43
ABC/WP	7/8	47	47
CNN/OpRes	7/1	49	46

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As noted before, this is not a national election. Below is a list of what are described by many as the battleground States. Obama won them all in 2008. Bush won 8 of them in 2004 and 7 of them in 2000.

Obama leads in 9 of these States at the present time, but only in 3 of them does he hit 50% or more.

It is likely that even now, although it will likely become more obvious over the remaining months of the campaign, the real battleground States are probably a half dozen in number.

	Current Obama/ Romney Polling	Obama Approval/ Disapproval Rating	Un- Employ ment	New Voting Law	2008	2004	2000	State- wide Races	Competitive Congressional Races
Colorado	49/46*	43/50	8.2		Obama	Bush	Bush	None	2 of 7
Florida	47/48*	46/47	8.6	X	Obama	Bush	Bush	Sen.	8 of 27
Iowa	48/43	46/47	5.2		Obama	Bush	Gore	None	3 of 4
Michigan	48/42	49/44	8.6		Obama	Kerry	Gore	Sen.	3 of 15
Nevada	50/46	45/48	11.6		Obama	Bush	Bush	Sen.	2 of 4
New Hampshire	51/45	43/50	5.1	X	Obama	Kerry	Bush	Gov.	2 of 2
New Mexico	49/44	45/48	6.5		Obama	Bush	Gore	Sen.	0 of 3
North Carolina	49/46	45/48	9.4		Obama	Bush	Bush	Gov.	4 of 13
Ohio	44/46*	44/48	7.2	X	Obama	Bush	Bush	Sen.	3 of 16

Penn.	47/42	46/49	7.5	X	Obama	Kerry	Gore	Sen.	4 of 18
Virginia	45/48*	46/48	5.7	X	Obama	Bush	Bush	Sen.	1 of 11
Wisconsin	51/45	49/45	7.0		Obama	Kerry	Gore	Sen.	2 of 8

Approval/Disapproval Ratings are from Gallup Daily Tracking, January-June, 2012

All match race poll numbers were the most recent ones available s on Real Clear Politics as of August 16, 2012, excluding polls conducted by Rasmussen.

*These polls were from a set of polls released by Purple Strategies on August 15th. Nate Silver has noted that Purple Strategies tends to poll Republican candidates at 2 points higher than media surveys, and in this set, the candidate leading each state had been trailing in those states in previous polls. However, at least as relates to the state of Wisconsin a CNN/ORG survey comes out at the same place as Purple Strategies.

Unemployment Rates via BLS for June 2012

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The Electoral College

Here are cuts at the electoral college that WW will regularly reprint as we head toward the Presidential election. 270 Electoral votes are needed to win.

	Cook <u>4/24</u>	Cook <u>5/31</u>	Cook <u>7/2</u>
Solid/Likely Dem	182	186	201
Lean Dem	45	45	45
Total	227	231	247
Toss Up	101	120	85
Lean GOP	19	0	15
Solid/Likely GOP	191	191	191
Total	210	191	206

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InTrade Prediction Market

As of 8/15/12, here are the percentage chances that Obama or Romney will win the election. The price per share being bid for Obama shares is \$5.67, while the bid price for Romney shares is \$4.23.

	<u>1/12</u>	<u>2/16</u>	<u>3/20</u>	<u>4/26</u>	<u>8/15</u>
Barack Obama	50.6	60.3	59.9	60.2	56.7
Romney	--	--	--	38.2	42.3

* * * * *

Taxes

Through the efforts of the Obama campaign and with the cooperation of the news media, the amount of Federal income taxes paid by Romney has become one of the side bar issues of the campaign.

Romney has declined to release more than two years of his tax returns. He released his 2010 return and has said he will release his 2011 return when it is completed, which must certainly occur before October 15th.

Some have alleged that he paid little or no taxes during some period of years before 2010.

After being bugged by friend and foe alike to resolve the issue by releasing more returns, Romney instead announced that he had paid at least 13% of his income in Federal income taxes in the last 10 years. (The rate was 13.6% in 2010.) And one can be certain that the team vetting his Vice Presidential candidate asked for substantially more than two years of returns.

This places his tax rate at the middle quintile of average Federal income taxes.

	<u>Average federal income tax rate</u>	<u>Average Household Income 2009</u>
Lowest Quintile	1%	\$11,552
2 nd Quintile	9%	29,257
Middle Quintile	13%	49,534
4 th Quintile	17%	78,694
Top Quintile	23%	170,844

The bottom line -- Romney pays a tax rate akin to a household making roughly \$50,000 a year.

This issue is more of an irritant than anything else. It is not going to cost Romney many, if any, votes on election day, whether or not he releases more of his returns. To the extent that there are those who oppose him because of his wealth, there is no question that he is wealthy. And for those for whom this is a voting issue, they will have any other number of reasons to deny him their vote.

In a recent Gallup survey, when asked what the most important problems facing the country are today, of 65% of respondents who listed some form of economic problem, only 1% named taxes.

Now that he has revealed his tax rate, the question being asked is what else is in the returns that Romney is afraid to disclose.

Whatever time he spends responding to badgering on this issue is time he does not spend on those issues which may, in fact, garner him the Presidency. It is hard to understand why Romney did not decide to get rid of this issue months ago.

There is no suggestion that Romney has done anything wrong or failed to file appropriate returns. It is certainly the case that his returns have been prepared by competent professionals.

* * * * *

One of the things working for Obama is that Americans find him more likeable than Romney by 2 to 1. 60% find Obama likeable and 30% have the same view of Romney. However, when it comes to specific domestic issues, Romney is considered to be better able to handle them. On handling the economy and creating jobs, two of the most significant issues of this campaign, Romney leads by 19 points to 10 points respectively. On healthcare, the two men are rated equally.

When asked “whether they have a favorable or unfavorable opinion” of Obama and Romney, Americans responded favorably to Obama by 54% to 44%. Conversely, Romney is rated unfavorable by 47% while 43% rate him favorably. [Gallup]

* * * * *

Charlie Cook presents an interesting look at the impact of Independents on Presidential elections.

1996 Clinton won Independents by 8% and won the popular vote by 8%

2000 Bush won Independents by 2% and lost the popular vote by .5%

2004 Kerry won Independents by 1% and lost the popular vote by 3%

2008 Obama won Independents by 8% and won the popular vote by 7%

In the second week of August, Romney led Obama 44% to 42% among Independents. [Gallup updated August 12, based on 3 week rolling average.]

* * * * *

90% of Americans say they already “know what they need to know about” Obama. 69% have the same view about Romney. [Pew 7/12]

* * * * *

A Book Worth Reading

The Candidate

“What It Takes To Win – And Hold – The White House”

by

Samuel L. Popkin

WW does not generally recommend books but this is an exception. Sam Popkin’s new book may be the first. Given the current election, its publication earlier this year is particularly timely.

It meets several tests that are important to me. It is not too long, only 272 pages. It is a good read and it makes sense. The footnoting and bibliography are extensive, in case there is something that causes you to want to look a little further.

Here are two paragraphs from the last chapter of the book, entitled “Is this any way to Pick a President?”

“Anyone willing to run for president puts his neck on the line. No one should think it is all smoke and mirrors, or that it doesn’t take brains and courage to do well. It is the toughest, fastest political competition there is. The winner of a presidential election is the most powerful person in the world; the runner-up is the biggest loser in the world.

“But is this any way to pick a president? Does, the protracted, expensive, long march that begins with state primaries and ends with the general election produce better or worse presidents than we got in the age when party leaders picked their party’s nominee?”

If you want the answer – read the book.

[In honor of full disclosure, I have known Sam for a very long time. While he is three years younger than me, he grew up in Superior, Wisconsin, while I was growing up in Duluth, Minnesota. These towns are referred to as the “Twin Ports,” separated by water and connected by a bridge. We were both active in the northern region of the AZA, a B’nai Brith youth organization, and I am quoted in the book – accurately.]

* * * * *

THE CONGRESS

The Congress has, for the second time this year, scored the lowest approval rating in the 38 years that Gallup has been asking this question. Only 10% of Americans approve of the job it is doing, the same as it was in February of this year.

In the last year and a half, approval of the Congress has ranged from 24% in May of 2011 to the 10% level at which it is now operating.

THE SENATE

THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats 51
Republicans 47
Independents 2 (caucus Dem)

It is likely that control of the Senate will ultimately come down to the races in Florida, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

If one adds to the list the seats that are safe or leaning, such as the seats in Hawaii, New Mexico, Nevada, and North Dakota, the seat tally is 47 to 47.

Here is how the 33 Senate elections, made up of 23 Democratic incumbents (including 2 Independents) and 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>TossUp(10)</u>	<u>Republican(3)</u>	<u>Republican(5)</u>
California	<u>Connecticut</u>	Florida	<u>Arizona</u>	Mississippi
Delaware	Maine	Hawaii	Indiana	Tennessee
Maryland	Michigan	Mass.	Nebraska	<u>Texas</u>
Minnesota	New Jersey	Missouri		Utah
New York	Ohio	Montana		Wyoming
Rhode Island	Pennsylvania	Nevada		
Vermont		<u>New Mexico</u>		
Washington		<u>No. Dakota</u>		
West Virginia		<u>Virginia</u>		
		<u>Wisconsin</u>		

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Seats not up in 2012	30	37
Safe in 2012	9	5
Leaning in 2012	6	3
Total	45	45
Toss-ups	10 (2R/8D)	

The following Toss-Up list “pushes” the States that are in the Toss-Up category in the direction in which most currently available public polling suggests they are headed. The Toss-Ups of the Toss-Ups are:

New Total 47 47

Florida
Mass
Missouri
Montana
Virginia
Wisconsin

Toss-ups 6 (2R/4D)

* * * * *

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

There are no non-partisan commentators who are predicting that Republican control of the House is anyway in doubt. Predictions, to the extent they are specific, seem to range from a Democratic loss of a seat or two to a pick up of 5 or 6 seats.

While, in January 2012, potential voters preferred a Democratic-controlled Congress, potential voters now split evenly on whether they prefer a Democratic-controlled Congress to a Republican-controlled Congress, and they have had that view for at least the last 3 months. The following are the preferences reflected in the NBC/WSJ survey going back to April 2009.

	<u>Dem Control</u>	<u>GOP Control</u>
7/2012	46%	45%
6/2012	45%	44%
4/2012	46%	44%
1/2012	47%	41%
6/2011	44%	44%
10/2010	46%	44%
	(Democrats lost control of the House in the 2010 election)	
1/2010	41%	44%
4/2009	48%	39%

WW has regularly reprinted the “House Dashboard” published by the Cook Political Report. The data from January 20, 2011 is from the Dashboard. However, the Dashboard is not being published at this time because of the uncertainties caused by re-districting. Therefore, the chart below (other than 1/20/11) reflects the Cook’s current Competitive House Race Chart through April 19, 2012 . [As always, thanks to “The Cook Political Report.”]

THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Republicans 240
 Democrats 191
 Vacancies 4

	<u>1/20/11</u>	<u>3/15/12</u>	<u>4/19/12</u>	<u>6/14/12</u>	<u>8/2/12</u>
TOTAL Dem	193	---	---	182	181
Solid Dem	150	---	---	157	156
Likely Dem	27	18	17	14	13
Lean Dem	12	14	14	11	12
Toss-up	10	21	22	24	25
D	4	8	8	9	9
R	6	13	14	15	16
Lean GOP	15	21	19	18	19
Likely GOP	38	29	27	24	22
Solid GOP	183	---	---	187	188
TOTAL GOP	242	---	---	229	229

“The Rothenberg Political Report” has also posted a report that deals with the entire House. [Thanks to the Rothenberg Report]

	<u>1/12</u>	<u>2/12</u>	<u>3/12</u>	<u>4/12</u>	<u>6/12</u>	<u>8/2/12</u>
Safe Democrat	166	164	164	162	162	159
Competitive	78	78	79	80	75	75
D Favored					9	9
Lean D					10	12
Toss Up Tilt D					4	5
Toss Up					11	10

Toss Up Tilt R					15	14
Lean R					13	13
R Favored					13	12
Safe Republican	191	193	192	193	198	201

* * * * *

RESTAURANTS

On my most recent trip to Sun Valley, Idaho, which was also Debbie's first trip, we ate breakfast at Christina's in Ketchum for 8 straight days. We also had lunch there several times.

It is there, one morning, that I accidentally created what has now become a favorite repast.

As I often do, I ordered an egg white omelet cooked without oil or butter. On that day I asked them to throw in some finely chopped white onions. Because I don't add salt, these omelets can be a bit tasteless, so I regularly add a light coating of ketchup.

The ketchup was delivered to the table in a small white ceramic bowl. Also delivered in this fashion was a jam to be added to toast or other bread product.

On this particular day, engaged in conversation, I accidentally covered the omelet with jam and without noticing began to eat it. It had a terrific taste, so jam as an enhancement to my omelets has become a regular affair.

Subsequently, I learned from Debbie that her mother used to serve omelets with jam or jelly in the middle as a form of stuffing. So, for breakfast last Saturday, I ordered an egg white omelet, no butter or oil, with finely chopped white onions. The filling used by the restaurant (Four Seasons) was a house-made cherry preserve with whole cherries included. It was quite good, but on balance I thought I preferred using preserves as a spread, rather than a filling. On Sunday morning I tried again with two changes, a less puffy omelet and strawberry jam as stuffing, along with onions, of course. This worked even better. I think the trick is to use jams.

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I Ricchi
1220 19th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-835-0459
Fax 202-872-1220
Iricchi@aol.com

Those who read the Watch know that I Ricchi is one of my regular haunts that I have reviewed in the past.

But at the moment there is a special treat available at I Ricchi.

Chef Eleonora Uccella, visiting from Florence, is cooking at I Ricchi from now through the early part of September. New tastes and dishes are the order of the day. It is worth making the effort to schedule dinner or attend other special events at the restaurant before chef Uccella departs.

* * * * *

Stachowski's Market
1425 28th St NW (corner of 28th and P)
Washington, DC 20007
202-506-3125
www.stachowskis.com
smarketdc@gmail.com

Stachowski's Market is a recently opened meat market (butcher shop) in Georgetown. It is located in what used to be Griffon's Market.

Each day it offers a couple of prepared meals. For example on Friday, August 10th, it offered butcher shop cacciatore over penne rigate and Pollo alla Milanese with a summer vegetable medley. Pre-ordered meals can be ready from 5:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. They should be reserved by telephone.

Stachowski's also offers a variety of other fresh and prepared meat products. These include sandwiches, sausages like Smoked Kielbasa, and charcuterie like Pheasant Pate.

In our first order from Stachowski's, Debbie ordered a sandwich called a 4

Meat rinder (Salami, Coppa, Mortadella, and Soopressata). It is a very large sandwich, which could easily feed two, if not three people.

I ordered smoked trout. Instead of the usual piece of a larger smoked trout, Stachowski's offers a very small whole smoked trout that has been deboned. The meat from the whole trout was about 5 ounces.

They also offer some excellent pre-packaged cookies.

We fully enjoyed all of these items. We also bought home coleslaw and potato salad. These did not live up to the standard of the other items.

The one down side is that there is rarely parking available. We did manage to find a place to pull over and, while I stayed in the car, Debbie went inside. When she had decided what she wanted she returned to the car and I went in.

I think you will find it useful to check out the store's website to get the "full flavor" of its offerings.

Open Tuesday-Saturday 10am-8pm
Sunday 11am-6pm
Closed Mondays

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Charleston, South Carolina

After we left Palmetto Bluff (See Issue #110) we spent three nights in Charleston. The following are the three restaurants at which we had dinner. [Note: For those of you whose primary interest in my restaurant reviews has to do with the men's room descriptions, I must report that, with the exception of one of the restaurants in this group, while I took my usual photographs of each restroom, I failed to label them, and now as I write, I cannot remember which is which.]

Hank's Seafood Restaurant
10 Hayne Street
Corner of Church & Hayne St.
843-723-3474
Info@hanksseafoodrestaurant.com

We went to Hank's at the suggestion of Debbie's friends, Norm and

Barbara, who joined us for dinner.

It is quite a large restaurant. There is a large bar to the left as you enter with the usual array of high stools. The main dinner seating area is filled with a combination of tables from 2s through 8s and a number of booths running along one wall. We were seated at one of the booths. The booth was quite comfortable even for one with a large waist.

We all had spinach salads with Goat Cheese, Grape Tomatoes, Bacon and Croutons tossed in the House Vinaigrette.

For entrees, Barbara chose Buttermilk Fried Chicken with double boneless breasts, collard greens and mashed potatoes.

Norm selected the Shrimp and Grits, tender local shrimp sautéed with Smoked Andouille Sausage simmered in Tomato Jus with Garlic and served over Cream Stone Ground Grits.

Debbie went for the Soft Shell Crab special which she does just about every time it shows up on a menu.

I picked the Low Country Bouillabaisse, Selection of Fresh Fish, Clams, Oysters, Mussels, Shrimp and Scallops simmered in a light tomato, leek and garlic broth. It was accompanied by toasted garlic croutons

The restaurant is open for dinner 7 days a week, beginning at 5 p.m. Reservations are suggested, although this is likely more important on the weekend than mid-week.

39 Rue De Jean
39 John Street
Charleston, SC
843-722-8881
843-722-8835 fax
info@39ruedejean.com

Mike Mandel recommended this restaurant and called ahead. His friend the chef was not there that day, but the restaurant responded with considerable special attention.

The restaurant is rustic like a bistro with pine wood floors. As you enter, there is a shoulder high wall that splits the room. To the left is a large bar with high stools and a series of round tables. There are also 4 booths which seat two people. To the right is the principal dining room.

Next to the center wall is a line of four 4 person booths. There is a banquette along the far wall that has five tables for 2 persons. There are also three tables of 4 persons and three tables of 6.

There is a whole upstairs dining room, which we did not see.

After we placed our order, there arrived the first unexpected treat of the evening. In front of us was placed a large bowl of mussels. Mussels are not ordinarily my favorite dish, but being polite, I weighed in. They were spectacular. The sauce used was Normande, but there are 6 different sauces available depending on what you order when you order this dish. Debbie's best guess was that it was a sauce of white wine, shallot, and cauliflower cream, and Roquefort cheese.

I ordered onion soup gratinee with caramelized onions in rich broth.

We also shared a seaweed salad and escargots in garlic and parsley butter.

Debbie ordered Sunday Bouillabaisse, seafood served in garlic and white wine with crotini and red pepper rouille. Debbie says it was the best Bouillabaisse broth she has ever tasted.

I went for Braised Rabbit with white wine, crème Fraiche, whole grain mustard, and potatoes dauphinoise.

We were so full by this time that we decided to forego dessert. However, just at that moment, a dessert arrived that we did not order. Of course, we could not be impolite by either declining it or not eating it. It was a spectacular combination of cake and ice cream.

* * * * *

High Cotton
Maverick Bar & Grill
199 East Bay Street
Charleston, SC
843-724-3815
www.highcottoncharleston.com

As you enter the restaurant, directly ahead is a bar room with a long bar with high stools and seating for another 40 people. It did not appear that regular dinners were being served there.

Just to the left there are two relatively small dining areas, the second of which seats 26 at tables of various sizes.

To the right is the main dining room. There are rounds of 6 and 8 on the main floor as well as squares of 2 and 4 for a total of about 100 seats in this main area. On this particular evening there was a table of 14 at one end of the room. It is clear that just about any size party can easily be accommodated, including a banquette at one end. There are 8 ceiling fans.

We were seated in one of three booths at one side of the room. It was on a raised area about 2 steps above the rest of the dining floor. It made for a very nice view of the whole room and the street beyond through the windows.

All the food served is locally grown.

Debbie and I shared a bowl of sweet corn and leek soup with lump crab fritters and a bibb lettuce wedge with apple smoked bacon, fried green tomatoes, blue cheese and tarragon vinaigrette.

Debbie selected Pan Roasted Snapper, soffrito, confit cherry tomatoes, basil puree and smoked paprika cracker.

I opted for Crab Crusted Grouper, Roast Red Creamed Potatoes, tiny green beans and smoked tomato broth.

We also shared an order of Succotash with basil shallots and cherry tomatoes.

For dessert we managed to consume an order of Pecan Pie and ice cream.

The men's room is perfectly adequate. It has large tan tiles on the walls to shoulder height with the balance of the walls being painted tan. There are large brown tiles on the floor, white ceramic wash basins, with partial walls separating the wash basin from the urinal. There is a separate door closing of the commode.

Sugar Reef Tropical Grill
Ocean Front
600 North Surf Road
On the Hollywood Boardwalk
Hollywood, Florida

Sugar Reef Tropical Grill is a traditional oceanside boardwalk restaurant. The front is totally open and there is a porch which is part of the dining room, but for all practical purposes, it's on the edge of the sidewalk. We ate in what amounts to the inside of the restaurant under the air conditioning unit. It was a hot day and we were intent on a little relief.

Overall the restaurant probably seats about 50 people in various size tables.

We ate there with Karen and Larry, friends of Debbie's. We all had salads. Karen had a beet and goat cheese combination. Larry had a traditional Greek salad. Debbie had a spinach salad and I had a Caesar salad. All of the salads were plentiful

There really is not much more to say. It was a totally pleasant time.

Mike

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