

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 104

November 18, 2011

FOLLOW UP TO “WHAT IS THE NAME....”

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STATE OF THE NATION

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PRESIDENT OBAMA

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2012 ELECTION Republican Nomination General Election

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THE CONGRESS

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RESTAURANTS

Charleston
Four Seasons - changes
Citronelle

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FOLLOW ON TO “WHAT IS THE NAME....”

One of WWs readers suggested that WW should provide an opportunity for readers to suggest solutions to the issues raised in the last issue, and include them in the next issue of the Watch. It seems a good idea ,so have at it. If you have an idea you want to share, email it to me at the email address on the late page.

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Richard Verone – A change of heart

Richard Verone has had a change of heart. You will recall from the last issue of the Watch that Verone robbed a bank for \$1 in Gaston, North Carolina. He then waited for the police to come and arrest him. His stated intention was to represent himself in court, “take the sentence handed down to him and take advantage of the food, housing and medical care that would be available in jail.”

His behavior and circumstances went viral, and journalists from this country, France, England, and Indonesia called the paper to learn more about the case.

He has now been in jail for five months and clearly has had a change of heart. He is now represented by Counsel, has appealed to the ACLU for a letter of support and legal assistance, and is looking forward to a jury trial.

Verone’s attorney has wisely counseled him not to talk to anyone before trial, but it appears he has now decided to become a spokesperson for an “obsolete” health care system. In a letter he wrote to the reporter at the Gazette who wrote the original story, Verone says in part, “My wish is to expose a health care system to the American people that is obsolete in its structure and I can do this by using my case.” Further he wrote, “ I would not consider this but the importance of this case leads me to be a subordinate to Americans with inadequate medical care.”

WW talked with the reporter who did both the original and follow up stories, Diane Turbyfill. She has not been able to talk to Verone or has she been able to get any information from his lawyer.

Stay tuned.

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One reader of the Watch questioned the validity of the statement in the last issue of the Watch that the wealthiest 400 people in America control more wealth than the 150 million Americans at the other end of economic spectrum. The Watch cited The Washington Post. In particular, the statement was included in an Op Ed by Sally Kohn, who is identified as a political commentator and grass-roots strategist. She is also a grassroots organizer and appears on a number of cable channels on a regular basis.

The Watch went looking for the source of that statement.

The first place we found the claim was in a speech given by Michael Moore in Madison, Wisconsin in March 2011. In that speech he said that 400 Americans have more wealth than half of all Americans.

Apparently Moore must have been questioned about the claim because on his website he posted a link to a blog post by Dave Johnson of the Commonweal Institute. Johnson wrote in 2007 that the combined net worth of the 400 wealthiest Americans – citing Forbes Magazine – was \$1.5 trillion, and that the combined net worth of the poorer 50% of American households was \$1.6 trillion. The problem of the above citation is that it does not make the point.

Two days after his Madison speech, Moore posted another item on his website that used figures for 2009. This item correctly quotes Forbes Magazine as stating that the net worth of the 400 wealthiest was \$1.27 trillion.

As to the 150 million Americans at the other end of the economic spectrum, Moore cites the Federal Reserve Board, which finds that the overall networth of all households in American in 2009 was \$53.1 trillion. Moore then cites an economist, by the name of Edward Wolff at New York University, who claims that in July 2009, the poorest 60% of U.S. household possessed 2.3% of the nation's total net worth. Moore then multiplied the total net worth of \$53.1 trillion by 2.3% and ended up with \$1.22 trillion as being the hands of the lowest 60% of U.S. households, and therefore 50% of all Americans, would be less than the \$1.27 trillion in control of the wealthiest 400 people.

Forbes Magazine says that the net worth of the top 400 people in September 2010 was \$1.37 trillion. The Federal Reserve estimate of the overall net worth of U.S. households was \$54.6 trillion in 2010. If you multiply \$54.6 trillion by 2.3% that comes to \$1.26 trillion. (WW's use of the 2.3% number from a year earlier

distorts the finding to some extent, although it is not likely that the number grew between 2009 and 2010.)

The bottom line is that there is data available that justifies the quote in the Kohn article. But the reality is that it is based on estimates by Forbes Magazine, academic institutions, and government agencies which are less than precise.

[Note: I should have written to Sally Kohn when the question was first raised. Unfortunately, I did not. I did email Sally Kohn on November 16th as this was being written.]

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For any number of years there has been an argument raging as to whether the official poverty figures put out by the Census Bureau are adequate. One of the principal complaints has been that the data used by the Bureau does not take into account various government programs designed to help those in need.

The Census Bureau has now released a Supplement Poverty Measure using different standards. While there was some expectation that the new calculation would lead to a drop in the number of folks in poverty, just the opposite has occurred.

The official 2010 poverty rate, which was 15.2%, has now been raised to 16%. There are 49.1 million people living in poverty, compared to the 46.2 million in the earlier report.

One of the largest jumps is among those 65 years of age and older. Under the original, official estimate, 9% of those in that age group live in poverty. Under the Supplemental version, 15.9% of seniors fall into that class.

There is also information included in the report that shows what would happen to the poverty rate if certain public assistance programs were eliminated.

If the earned income tax-credit (designed to off-set social security taxes) is eliminated, the poverty level jumps to 18%. If SNAP (food stamps) is eliminated, the poverty level grows to 17.7%. If the school lunch program is ended, the poverty level grows to 16.9%. [WP 11/8/11, NYT 11/12/11]

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In 1984, the median net worth of households headed by persons 35 years of age and younger was \$11,521. In 2009, it was \$3,662, a drop of 68%.

On the other hand, the 1984 median net worth of households headed by someone 65 and older was \$120,457. In 2009, it was \$170,494, an increase of 42%.

Thus, a 10-to-1 net worth advantage enjoyed by households headed by those 65 years and older in 1984, has grown to a 47-to-1 advantage in 2009. [PEW 11/7/11]

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The Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (it backs the pension benefits of 44 million private sector workers and retirees) has \$81 billion in assets with which to cover \$107 billion in pension obligations. [Fox 11/16/11]

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Of the 14 million people unemployed in the 3rd quarter of 2011, based on the basic BLS figure, 31.8% had been unemployed for a year or more. [NatJ 11/11]

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21.2% of Americans reported that they did not have enough money to buy the food they or their families needed in October. This is only the 2nd time since January 2008 when more than 20% reported this need. [Gallup 11/10/11]

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22% of U.S. adults rate their personal finances as poor. This is the highest number recorded since 2001, when Gallup began asking this question. 48% say their circumstance is getting worse. [Gallup 10/11]

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76% of Americans agree (60% strongly) that the “current economic structure of the country is out of balance and favors a very small proportion of the rich over the rest of the country.”

36% say that their personal economic situation has gotten worse in the last year, and 28% believe the economy will get worse in the next year.
[NBC/WSJ 11/11]

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To add to their misery, 68% of Americans believe that “crime is worsening” in the United States. [Gallup 10/11]

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The “Occupy Wall Street” movement has continued and spread around the country. Local authorities are beginning to lose patience, and it is not clear where the movement goes from here. One risk for the movement is that, as its activity begins to adversely impact the lives of the people in the area where they are protesting, the public will become increasingly less sympathetic to the movement.

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STATE OF THE NATION

12% are satisfied with the way things are going in the United States, while 86% are specifically dissatisfied. Positive satisfaction below 15% was previously recorded in 1979, 1992 and 2008-09. [Gallup 11/11]

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In early November, 73% of Americans said that the country is on the wrong track. That same number has been recorded every month since August.
[NBC/WSJ 11/11]

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44% believe that the worst of the recession is ahead of us. [NBC/WSJ 11/11]

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The University of Michigan Consumer Confidence Index is 64.2, up from 60.9 in October, and up from a low point of 55.7 in August. However, it is still well below the 74.3 recorded in March. [Bloomberg News 11/11]

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The Gallup survey of unemployment in mid-November ticked up to 8.5% from 8.3% in mid-October, but is still below the 10.3% it found in March, and the 9.2% it found in September. Looking at Gallup's second number, which it defines as underemployed (those who are unemployed and those working part-time but want full-time), that also rose from 17.8% in mid-October to 18.2% in mid-November. [Gallup]

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It is a close call, but 47% of respondents favor repealing the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, while 42% believe it should go forward. As expected, 80% of Republicans favor repeal, and 64% of Democrats want the country to stick with it. Independents favor repeal by 48% to 43%. [Gallup 11/11]

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No surprise, 77% of Americans want their political leaders to follow the public's views more closely. A plurality of 31% want their leaders to be willing to compromise (15% say they should stick to their beliefs). Americans also believe that 51% of every dollar that goes to the Federal government is wasted, and 81% are dissatisfied with the way in which the country is being governed. [Gallup 9/11]

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There is little difference in the amount of public support for the Tea Party and the "Occupy Wall Street" movement. 28% support the Occupy movement and 25% support the T Party movement. [NBC/WSJ 11/11]

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There are limits

In Ohio, voters overturned by referendum a law that would have limited collective bargaining rights for public employees.

The Maine legislature had repealed election day registration. The voters of Maine overturned the law in a referendum.

A referendum on the Mississippi ballot that said that Life Begins at the Moment of Fertilization was defeated by 58% to 42%.

All three of these States have Republican governors. The Governors of Ohio and Maine led the legislative efforts in those States that were overturned at the ballot box. To his credit, the Governor of Mississippi did not support the referendum in his State.

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Taxes

There is a considerable argument to be made that the top marginal Federal income tax rate of 35% should be lowered. It appears that few, if any, pay that rate on anything close to most of their income.

For the Federal income tax year 2008, based on adjusted gross income

<u>Average tax rate</u>	<u>Group Share of Income Taxes</u>
All taxpayers - 12.24%	100%
Top 1% - 23.27%	38.02%
Top 5% - 17.21%	58.73%
Top 10% - 18.71%	69.94%
Top 25% - 15.68%	86.34%/
Top 50% - 13.65%	97.30%
Bottom 50% - 2.59%	2.70%

[Internal Revenue Service Data published by Tax Foundation]

I asked my personal accountant what share of my total income from 2010 was taxed at the top marginal rate of 35%. The answer was, none of it.

It turns out that I am subject to the Alternative Minimum Tax, which has a top marginal rate of 28%. My accountant then provided me with a detailed description of how my taxes were calculated.

Actually my taxes were calculated twice. First, they were calculated on the basis of the 35% marginal rate and the deductions relevant to that calculation. Then they were calculated on the basis of the 28% AMT marginal rate without many of those deductions. The net result was that I paid more taxes under the AMT calculation than the regular calculation.

Makes a lot of sense, doesn't it?

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There have also been a number of challenges to the special 15% Federal income tax rate that is paid on dividends and capital gains. It doesn't seem fair does it? If you invest in a stock and make a profit you pay at a lower rate than a person whose total income comes from his or her employment. Well, it turns out that it is not that simple.

Assume that I own all of the stock in a company. The company makes a profit and that profit accrues to my ownership of the company's stock.

The effective tax rate of the company is 17%. Effectively, I am paying a 17% tax on the profits before I receive any dividend. Only a portion of the profits are paid out in dividends, and when I receive that income I pay the 15% rate. It is clear that I have paid considerably more than 15% on the profits of the company. In fact, I have paid slightly more than 30% on the profits of the company. [Note: While the above is based on ownership of the whole company, the impact is the same if I owned a fraction of a company.]

The balance of the profits that are not paid out in dividends increase the value of my stock in the company, but I will not face a tax on that part of the profits until I sell the stock, hopefully for an amount greater than I paid.

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Total income taxes received by the Federal government in 2009 were \$1,090,000,000,000. So-called tax expenditures (amounts not taxed) were

\$1,076,000,000,000. (Tax expenditures include the mortgage interest deduction, the charitable deduction, etc.)

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PRESIDENT OBAMA

The most recent NBC/WSJ survey found that 71% of Americans say they like President Obama personally, and 45% have favorable feelings about the President, while 40% have unfavorable feelings about the President.

The best description I have seen of public attitudes toward President Obama was written by Peter Hart in a recent memorandum following the most recent NBC/WSJ survey.

“His image lacks the clarity that most presidents have by this time (Reagan “strength and optimism,” Clinton “compassion and determination,” and Bush 43 “conviction.”) This president does not emerge with a central image or core set of values to the voters.”

Other commentary on the President can be summed up this way: people like the President, but they are not sure he is up to the job.

The President’s job approval rating seems to have settled in at 44% approving. He now ranks 8th of 9, when matched against the previous 8 Presidents at this point of their 3rd year in office. [Based on Gallup surveys]

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Eisenhower	78	13
Kennedy	58	30
G Bush (I)	56	36
Clinton	53	38
Reagan	53	37
GW Bush (II)	50	47
Nixon	49	37
Obama	43	48 (11/7-13)
Carter	38	49

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Following are several other cuts at the President's job approval rating.

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>	<u>CNN/ORC</u>
Nov 2011	44/51%	-----	44/53%	-----
Oct 2011	44/51%	46/46%	42/54%	45/52%
Aug 2011	44/51%	48/47%	44/46 WP	44/54%
July 2011	47/48%	---	47/48%	45/54%
June 2011	49/46%	48/43%(CBS)	47/49%	48/48%

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On the issue that is most important to the public, the economy, the President's performance is disapproved by 57% to 40%. Conversely, on foreign policy, the job he is doing is approved by 52% to 41%. Only 10% think that Obama has done better in office than expected. 35% say he has done worse than expected. [NBC/WSJ 11/11]

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On several other issues the President's performance rating is in negative territory. These include healthcare, on which 55% disapprove of his work, and the handling of the Federal budget deficit, where his negative rating is 67%.

For the first time, a majority of Americans, 53%, blame Obama for the state of the U.S. economy. However, 69% still blame President Bush for this circumstance.

43% believe that Obama has been a better President than George W. Bush. 34% say he is worse than Bush. However, among Independents 33% believe Obama is a better President than Bush, but 38% think he is worse. 50% believe Obama is a worse President than Bill Clinton.

As a "team," 67% of Americans think the President and the current Congress are doing a bad job. [Gallup 9/11]

When assessing blame for not finding solutions to the problems facing the country, the President is blamed by 36% of the public, while the Democrats in Congress receive 47% of the blame. 55% blame the Republicans in Congress. [NBC/WSJ 11/11]

Perry

Roemer

Romney

Ryan

Santorum

Trump

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Of the 10 media sponsored Republican nomination debates, the largest audience – 6.1 million viewers -- was for a Fox/Google sponsored debate in Orlando, Florida on September 22nd. (There is no audience report for the Bloomberg sponsored debate on October 11th, although it is unlikely it came close to the Fox audience.)

As for the straw polls, except for the Iowa Straw poll which drew about 17,000 participants (compared to the 115,000 who participated in the 2008 Republican Caucus), the next largest was Florida where 2,657 people participated (compared to 1,949,498 that participated in the Florida Republican primary in 2008).

Republican nominating process
Debates with one or more media sponsors
Straw polls

5/4/11	Fox News/South Carolina Republican Party 3.26 million 854,000 (25-54 years old)
6/13/11	CNN 3.2 million 918,000 (25-54 years old)
8/11/11	Fox News /GOP 5 million + 1.4 million (25-54 year olds)

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The next twelve months will be a time of high tension for the President and his team. It will test their mettle.

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2012 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

The Republican Nomination

22 people have been tempted or have joined the race
14 people have announced they are not running, quit the race or written it off
8 people are running
3 is the number of real players at the moment

The chart below notes the status of each of these people.

Republican Nomination Score Card

<u>Maybe</u>	<u>Exploring</u>	<u>Running</u>	<u>Not Running</u>
		Bachmann	Barbour
		Cain	Christie
			Daniels
			DeMint
		Gingrich	Guiliani
			Huckabee
		Huntsman	Johnson
			McCotter
			Palin
		Paul	Pataki
			Pawlenty

8/13/11	Iowa Straw Poll	17,000 people
	Bachmann	28.55% (4823)
	Paul	27.65% (4671)
	Pawlenty	13.57% (2293)
	Santorum	9.81% (1657)
	Cain	8.62% (1456)
	Perry	3.62% (718 – write in)
	Romney	3.36% (567)
	Gingrich	2.28% (385)
	Huntsman	.41% (69)
	McCotter	.21% (35)
9/7/11	Reagan Center Debate – NBC/Politico	
	5,400,000 total viewers on MSNBC	
	1.73 million (25-54 year olds)	
9/12/11	Tampa, Florida – T party/CNN sponsors	
	3,600,000 total viewers on CNN	
	1.1 MILLION (25-54 year olds)	
9/16/11	Pennsylvania Republican Straw Poll – 388 votes	
	Santorum	36%
	Romney	25%
	Perry	18%
	(No one else in double digits)	
9/17/11	California Republican Convention Straw poll -833 votes	
	Paul	44.9% (374 votes)
	Perry	29.3% (244 votes)
	Romney	8.8% (74 votes)
	Bachmann	7.7% (64 votes)
	Huntsman	2% (17 votes)
	Cain	1.8% (15 votes)
	Gingrich	1.7% (14 votes)
	(No one else above 1%)	
9/22/11	Orlando – Fox/Google	
	6,100,000 total viewers	
	1.7 million (25-54 year olds)	

9/24/11	Florida GOP/ P5 straw poll – 2,657 votes																		
	<table border="0"> <tr><td>Cain</td><td>37%</td></tr> <tr><td>Perry</td><td>15%</td></tr> <tr><td>Romney</td><td>14%</td></tr> <tr><td>Santorum</td><td>11%</td></tr> <tr><td>Paul</td><td>10%</td></tr> <tr><td>Gingrich</td><td>8%</td></tr> <tr><td>Huntsman</td><td>2%</td></tr> <tr><td>Bachmann</td><td></td></tr> </table>	Cain	37%	Perry	15%	Romney	14%	Santorum	11%	Paul	10%	Gingrich	8%	Huntsman	2%	Bachmann			
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9/26/11	Michigan GOP straw poll – 681 votes																		
	<table border="0"> <tr><td colspan="2">Nat Journal Hotline/NA Home Builders</td></tr> <tr><td>Romney</td><td>51%</td></tr> <tr><td>Perry</td><td>17%</td></tr> <tr><td>Cain</td><td>9%</td></tr> <tr><td>Paul</td><td>8%</td></tr> <tr><td>Bachman</td><td>4%</td></tr> <tr><td>Gingrich</td><td>4%</td></tr> <tr><td>Santorum</td><td>3%</td></tr> <tr><td>Huntsman</td><td>2%</td></tr> </table>	Nat Journal Hotline/NA Home Builders		Romney	51%	Perry	17%	Cain	9%	Paul	8%	Bachman	4%	Gingrich	4%	Santorum	3%	Huntsman	2%
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10/11/11	Bloomberg/Washington Post (No tv/cable ratings, Bloomberg does not subscribe to Nielsen)																		
10/18/11	CNN/Western Republican Leadership Conf 5.46 million viewers 1.65 million viewers (25-54)																		
11/9/11	CNBC/Michigan Republican Party 3.33 million viewers 1 million viewers (25-54) [As of 11/16/11 there have been 608,000 YouTube viewings of Perry’s “Oops” moment]																		
11/12/11	CBS/National Journal/SC GOP Party 5.3 million viewers 1.5 million viewers (25-54)																		

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The following chart tracks media and Gallup surveys of the Republican nomination battle since July 2011.

Santorum and Huntsman have never been in it and are not likely to be in it in the future unless everyone else drops out.

Bachmann had a moment, but it has passed. She will likely stay in the race through Iowa, but if she does not come in one or two there, she will be gone from the race.

Perry was the hot new kid on the block from mid-August through mid-September. Since then he has steadily declined as a result of his debate performances and public presentations. One can only describe his attempt to draw Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi into a debate as desperation. He obviously assumes she would be an easier mark than his fellow Republican candidates. It won't happen, but he if it did would be in for a big surprise.

Gingrich has slowly and steadily edged up the ladder and has become one of the three leaders. Gingrich is now beginning to face scrutiny of who he has been, what he has done, what he has said, and when he said it.

Cain, who registered at 2% in a late August CNN/OPR survey, is now running neck and neck at the top. He has done this despite allegations of impropriety and demonstrating that there is a lot he does not know. Of recent date, his image has taken a number of hits in current surveys.

And then there is Romney. He has been running steadily at the head of the pack through this half year. Except for a 30 point score in mid-July and a 28 point score in early November, he has not scored above 26% of the Republican vote.

However, in early November, a plurality of Republicans --45% -- were predicting that Romney would be the eventual nominee. The only other candidate in double digits was Cain. [Gallup 11/11]

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It is notable that Cain and Gingrich have been able to maintain their positions even though every known media outlet, including many conservative leaning outlets, have trumpeted their various foibles. At other times, these kinds of foibles would force a person out of the race. There are likely a number of reasons these issues haven't proved fatal, but here are two. First, Republican voters are still much interested in "anybody but Romney." Second, they are prepared to "forgive" personal behavior if it means that they will ultimately hear Barack Obama give a concession speech in November 2012.

2012 Republican Presidential
Candidates

<u>Survey</u>	<u>Last date of survey</u>	<u>Romney</u>	<u>Cain</u>	<u>Gingrich</u>	<u>Perry</u>	<u>Paul</u>	<u>Bachmann</u>	<u>Santorum</u>	<u>Huntsman</u>
Fox News	11/13- 11/15	22	<u>23</u>	15	7	8	6	2	3
CNN/OpRes	11/11- 11/13	<u>24</u>	14	22	12	8	6	3	3
CBS	11/6- 11/10	15	<u>18</u>	15	8	5	4	2	1
USA/Gall.	11/2-11/6	<u>21</u>	<u>21</u>	12	11	8	3	2	1
NBC/WSJ	11/2-11/5	<u>28</u>	27	13	10	10	4	2	0
ABC/WP	10/31- 11/3	<u>25</u>	23	12	14	9	4	1	1
Fox News	10/23- 10/25	20	12	<u>24</u>	10	9	3	3	0
CBS/NYT	10/19- 10/24	21	<u>25</u>	10	6	8	2	1	1
CNN/OpRes	10/14- 10/16	<u>26</u>	25	8	13	9	6	2	1
NBC/WSJ	10/6- 10/10	23	<u>27</u>	8	16	11	5	1	3
Gallup	10/3-10/7	<u>20</u>	18	7	15	8	5	3	2
ABC/WP	9/29-10/2	<u>25</u>	17	9	17	9	7	2	1
CBS	9/28-10/2	<u>17</u>	<u>17</u>	8	12	7	4	3	2
Fox News	9/25-9/27	<u>23</u>	11	17	19	6	3	3	4
CNN/OpRes	9/23-9/25	21	7	10	<u>28</u>	7	4	3	1
USA/Gall.	9/15-9/18	24	5	5	<u>31</u>	13	5	2	1
CBS/NYT	9/10-9/15	16	5	7	<u>23</u>	5	7	1	1
ABC/WP	8/29-9/1	23	3	4	<u>29</u>	8	6	2	1
Fox News	8/29-8/31	18	3	4	<u>26</u>	7	4	3	1
NBC/WSJ	8/27-8/31	23	5	5	<u>38</u>	9	8	3	2
CNN/OpRes	8/24-8/25	14	2	6	<u>27</u>	6	9	1	1
Gallup	8/17-8/21	14	4	3	<u>25</u>	11	7	3	1
Fox News	8/7-8/9	<u>21</u>	6	5	13	6	7	2	2
USA/Gall.	8/4-8/7	<u>24</u>	4	7	17	14	13	1	2
Gallup	7/20-7/24	<u>17</u>	3	3	15	8	11	2	2
ABC/WP	7/14-17	<u>26</u>	7	4	8	7	13	2	3
NBC/WSJ	7/14-17	<u>30</u>	5	8	11	8	16	3	2

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The General Election

There is unlimited analysis of the 2012 Presidential election, some of it quite good. WW finds it a bit early for any kind of analysis that deals with the likes of electoral votes.

What is known is that Americans are giving the Republican Party a 9-point advantage over the Democratic Party, 48% to 39%, on the question of which political party will do a better job of keeping the country prosperous .

Democrats and Democrat-leaning Independents are split evenly on whether they are enthusiastic about voting in the coming election. 45% are “more enthusiastic” and 44% are “less enthusiastic.” In 2008, 79% were “more enthusiastic.” [Gallup 9/11]

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Obama is essentially tied with a “generic” Republican candidate, 43% for the Republican and 42% for Obama. Among Independents in that “race” there is a 38% to 38% split. Obama gets 79% of the Democratic vote and 3% of the Republican votes. [Gallup 11/11]

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The best portrait of President Obama’s position going into the 2012 election year was written by Peter Hart in a recent memorandum following the most recent NBC/WSJ survey.

“There is one immutable fact about President Obama’s re-election chances – nobody has a more solid 44% base than he does. This may sound inconsequential or even mocking, but this is a major asset. The African-American voter is beyond rock solid, and his core support among Hispanics is impressive. He starts with 44%, even in a three-way contest with Ron Paul as the independent. His positive job rating is 44%, positive feelings toward him are 45%, and in comparing his qualities in a match-up against Romney, he has support in the mid-40s. His base will be invaluable, and this has been underestimated; yet it should not be. There is a sense that there is more to the Obama leadership and story, and many voters in the middle are waiting to see the hope and change they voted for in 2008.”

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Here are the Real Clear Politics averages in the matchup of President Obama and various Republican candidates.

		<u>Obama</u>
Romney	44.8	46.2
Paul	41.8	47.8
Gingrich	41.6	50.1
Perry	40.7	49.8
Cain	40.3	49.5
Bachmann	37.0	51.4
Huntsman	37.0	45.7
Santorum	34.0	45.0

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THE CONGRESS

If you have lost hope that Congress can get its act together to do anything meaningful, take heart. There is hope.

In an act of bipartisanship, the Congress is in the process of enacting legislation that will overturn “controversial” regulations promulgated by the Department of Agriculture. The regulations are designed to limit the “starchy vegetables and tomato paste served to million of children at school each day.”

The new regulations, in part designed to come to grips with the epidemic of childhood fatness, are based on a recommendation from the National Academy’s Institute of Medicine to limit to one cup per week the amount of starchy vegetables (including potatoes) served in school meals. They also overturn a current regulation that treats an 1/8th cup of tomato paste as one vegetable serving. (Shades of 1980 when an effort was made to treat ketchup as a vegetable for school meals.)

One argument that was made by an interested Senator was that the new starch rule would stop a school from serving a baked potato one day and an ear of fresh corn later in the week.

It also turns out that the limitation on tomato paste was having an effect on the serving of pizza and French fries, which we all know to be extraordinarily healthy foods. Many media commentators have described this action as Congress declaring that pizza is a vegetable.

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CONGRESS

82% of Americans disapprove of the job being done by Congress. This is only slightly better than the low point of Congressional job approval of 84% in August 2011.

11% of Independents, 12% of Republicans, and 13% of Democrats approve of the job being done by the Congress.

76% (51% strongly) of voters would find it acceptable if all members of the House and Senate who have been in office for more than 15 years are defeated for re-election. [NBC/WSJ 11/11]

Democrats and Republicans in Congress are held in equal disdain when it comes to the way they are handling their jobs. 66% disapprove of the performance of Democrats in Congress, and 68% of Republicans in Congress.

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THE SENATE

There have been few changes in the structure of the Senate race since the September issue of the Watch. Hawaii has moved from Safe Democrat to Toss-Up, and West Virginia has moved from Toss-Up to Lean Democrat.

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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(8)</u>	<u>Democrat(7)</u>	<u>TossUp(9)</u>	<u>Republican(4)</u>	<u>Republican(5)</u>
California	<u>Connecticut</u>	<u>Hawaii</u>	<u>Arizona</u>	Indiana
Delaware	Florida	Mass.	Maine	Mississippi
Maryland	Michigan	Missouri	<u>No. Dakota</u>	Tennessee
Minnesota	Ohio	Montana	<u>Texas</u>	Utah
New Jersey	Pennsylvania	Nebraska		Wyoming
New York	Washington	Nevada		
Rhode Island	West Virginia	<u>New Mexico</u>		
		<u>Virginia</u>		
		<u>Wisconsin</u>		

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Seats not up in 2012	30	37
Safe in 2012	8	5
Leaning in 2012	7	4
Total	45	46

Toss-ups 9 (2R/7D)

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THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WW has regularly reprinted the “House Dashboard” published by the Cook Political Report. The data below, through May 16, 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 reflects the Cook’s current Competitive House Race Chart through August 12, 2011.

THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Republicans 242
Democrats 192
Vacancy 1 (D)

	<u>1/20/11</u>	<u>5/16/11</u>	<u>6/21/11</u>	<u>8/12/11</u>	<u>11/16/11</u>
TOTAL Dem	193	191	---	---	---
Solid Dem	150	153	---	---	---
Likely Dem	27	21	22	22	18
Lean Dem	12	11	13	17	13
 Toss-up	 10	 16	 17	 15	 20
D	4	6	6	6	8
R	6	10	11	9	12
 Lean GOP	 15	 16	 18	 20	 21
Likely GOP	38	41	42	40	31
Solid GOP	183	177	---	---	---
TOTAL GOP	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)].

RESTAURANTS

Charleston
1000 Lancaster Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
410-332-7373
info@charlestonrestaurant.com

I had occasion to take Carly and Emily out to dinner in Baltimore. Being unfamiliar with Baltimore restaurants, I started casting about for suggestions. Two people who live in or near Baltimore, and the owners of two of my favorite D.C. restaurants, all put the Charleston at the top of their lists.

I turned to Open Table to make a reservation the day before we wanted to dine. There was nothing available until 9:30 p.m. Remembering that Chris Ricchi told me many restaurants hold back tables from Open Table, as well as from their

own websites, to be reserved only by calling the restaurant, I gave it a whirl.

The regular dining areas of the restaurant were, in fact filled at 7 p.m. when we wanted to have dinner, but the person handling the phone said there was a table available in the lounge at 7 and that the whole menu was available there as well. I took that table.

The restaurant is situated right on the harbor and you enter five separate areas or rooms wrap around the central foyer in a semi-circle. The first area, on the right, is the lounge. On the left, there is bar that seats 13 on tall stools. Also on the right is a seating area with tables for folks who are having a drink. At the end of the lounge there are 3 tables, 1 four-top and 2 deuces. It was at the 4-top table that we were seated. The other four rooms are of varying sizes, and seat about 120 people. Notably, all of the tables are a reasonable distance from each other.

The menu sets out the cost of 3, 4, 5, and 6 course meals with an additional charge for wines. Dessert is included as an additional course as part of the single cost. There is an additional charge for multiple wines with the various courses, but wine can be purchased by the glass.

Emily selected 3 courses plus dessert. First, she had “Rich Lobster Soup with Curry.” She followed that with “Sauteed Hudson Valley Foie Gras” and “Grilled Gunpowder Farm Buffalo Tenderloin.” For dessert she selected “Local Bosc Pear and Almond Tart.”

Carly started with “Butternut Squash Andouille Sausage & White Bean Soup.” She then turned to “Big-Eye Tuna Tartare” and “Grilled Lamb Tenderloin.” Her chosen dessert was “Fairytale Pumpkin Ice Cream”.

I selected four courses. The first two courses were “Roasted Beet Salad” and “Baby Arugula Salad.” These were followed by “Pan-Roasted Turbot” and “Pan-Roasted Magret Duck Breast.” Dessert was an excellent “Apple Sorbet” that was not on the menu. The portions are relatively small. For example, the Turbot and Duck servings were around two ounces each.

Each of us thoroughly enjoyed each course and the overall meal.

The menu is interesting and appetizing. The serving person told us that the menu is changed daily. That seems to be the case, but there is not necessarily a great deal of change from day to day. I pulled up a menu on the restaurant’s

website from November 3rd. The menu for the 5th, the night we were there, had only 2 items that were not on the menu for the 3rd. And, conversely, there were 2 items from the 3rd that were not presented on the 5th.

The men's room is of adequate size. The walls are a dark brown wall covering except for the walls behind the commode and the sink, which are covered by large white tiles. The floor is covered by small white tiles.

On the left, after entering the men's room, there is a large white-grey marble counter with a single washbasin and a large mirror on the wall. There is a stack of white cloth towels. Just past the counter there is a glass partition that reaches up from the end of the counter to the right of which is a single white marble commode.

Across from the urinal is a commode room with a single white marble commode with extra toilet paper rolls in a wooden box on the commode tank along with a box of Kleenex.

During the evening when Carly went to the women's room she mentioned that there were no clean towels in that room. When I made a visit to the men's room a bit later there were no fresh towels there either. I reported both to one of the hosts.

Our server was forth coming and gracious. The service was very good, but a bit deliberate. We were there for three hours, during which there was fairly long time before the menus were presented, and a long period between the time we ordered and the presentation of the first course. Once the courses began to arrive they were delivered at a nice pace. The meal was worth the time that it took.

There is valet parking.

The Charleston is worth an excursion from D.C. just for the evening.

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Citronelle
3030 M Street NW (in the Latham Hotel)
Washington, DC 20007
202-625-2150

Debbie, Mike T, Maureen, Peggy, Chris, and I went to Citronelle on a Saturday night. It was a joint celebration of the birthdays of Debbie, Mike T, Maureen, and Chris.

The restaurant can be entered directly from 30th Street or through the lobby of the Latham Hotel. Entry requires navigating a couple of sets of stairs within the restaurant, and elevator access is available.

There are two levels of general seating that include a number of tiny rooms or areas that offer almost total privacy. Table sizes range from two to eight persons. There is also a chef's table immediately adjacent to and within the glass enclosure of the kitchen.

There is a full glassed in view of the entire kitchen, which appears as spotless as a surgical operating room. It sits a few feet lower than the dining floor, which makes the view of kitchen operations particularly revealing.

From the moment you enter the restaurant there is attention to your every need and interest that is really above that of any other local restaurant.

This will not be an ordinary restaurant description. I could not begin to describe the various dishes which each of us ate, particularly since the descriptions in the menu are simply different than most other restaurants. And the menu description generally does not fully describe the dish. One member of our party said that the item descriptions play pleasant tricks on you as to the preparation of each dish. Fortunately, the persons who take your order and attend to your every need during the evening can describe each dish with exquisite detail without benefit of notes.

Suffice it to say, our group, with only five of us partaking, consumed three bottles of wine.

The chairs are sturdy and comfortable, with leather/cushioned yellow backs and seats that are yellow or orange.

There is no restaurant in D.C. that comes close to the elegance, quality of food and service that is provided at Citronelle. (The Inn at Little Washington is in this class of restaurants, but is not quite Citronelle.)

There are two sections to the menu. In one section, there are a variety of dishes listed from which you can select 10. However, everyone in your party must agree to eat exactly the same 10 dishes. In the other section of the menu there are sections from which you can select an appetizer, an entrée and ultimately a dessert. Each person can select separately.

The previously mentioned chef's table seats 6-8 people. The cost is \$350 per person for food and wine pairing. It is a 10 course meal. The wines are matched to each dish.

The restaurant is open Tuesday through Saturday in the evening. There are seatings beginning at 6:00 p.m. and ending at 9:30 p.m. Be prepared to be a little flexible when you make your reservation. Arrivals are staggered so as to accommodate the rhythm and capacity of the kitchen. It is never too early to make your reservation if you are planning dinner at Citronelle as part of a special occasion.

It is correctly described as expensive.

At the entry point to the restaurant there is a bar and lounge area with a more limited/short order menu that is priced more moderately.

The men's room is, as you would expect, pristine and clean. The floor and the walls, up to just above waist height, are covered with large, light tan tiles. The walls above the tile are green. Immediately upon entering there is a black tile counter into which are sunk two white ceramic washbasins and above is a mirror that completely covers the wall. To the right of the sink there are two white ceramic mid-wall urinals with gold appearing fixtures. Directly opposite the urinals there is a completely enclosed commode room with a single white ceramic commode.

There is valet parking at \$15 for the evening.

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Four Seasons Hotel
2800 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20007
202-342-0444
Fax 202-944-2075

For those of you who are devotees of the Seasons Restaurant on the first floor below the lobby (as opposed to Bourbon Steak on the lobby floor), that room will be temporarily closed beginning on December 19, 2011. The room is being refreshed/renovated. WW has been assured that the tables, while different, will be located in the same places within the room. However, the new tables will not be covered with the cloths and skirts that are now used. WW was not able to confirm the style or comfort of the new chairs.

The room is scheduled to re-open in early February.

If you are a regular, the Christmas brunch will, for this year, be located in Bourbon Steak, with a special a la carte menu as opposed to the multi-station brunch of the past. During the renovation period the regular Sunday brunches will also feature a la carte selections from a special menu. Hopefully, once the refreshing has been completed and the Seasons is again open, the brunch food stations will return.

The men's restroom on the Seasons Restaurant floor of the hotel has also been redone. While everything physically remains in the same location in the room, the tired wood framework of the several commode rooms has been replaced with a fresh light tan woodwork. The same is true of the counter that houses the several wash basins, which is now held up by a series of similarly colored wooden legs. There has been no change in the urinals.

While WW has not viewed the women's room, we assume that it too has been redone.

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Mike

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