

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 77

March 24, 2008

ABOUT AMERICA

* * * * *

PRESIDENT BUSH - NOT AN ASSET TO HIS PARTY

* * * * *

**2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN
Act VI Has Begun**

* * * * *

2008 CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS

* * * * *

WISDOM FROM SAUL TURTELTAUB

* * * * *

THIS AND THAT

* * * * *

RESTAURANTS

Wolfgang Puck Comes to Washington

* * * * *

[Note: The most recent issue of the Washington Watch was published in September. It now returns to publication on its usual regular, irregular basis.]

* * * * *

STATE OF THE NATION

Americans are pessimistic about the country.

66% say the country is on the wrong track. Only 20% think it is going in the right direction. The wrong track score has been in the mid-sixties for almost a year. [NBC/WSJ 3/08]

The economy is rated as "poor" by 44% while 18% think it is excellent/good. 87% think that economic conditions in the "country as a whole" are getting worse. [Gallup 3/08]

* * * * *

80% are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States. Satisfaction has dropped from 35% in January 2007 to the current 19%. [Gallup 3/08]

* * * * *

7.9% of home loans are now in default. This is the first time since 1979 that the rate has been higher than 7%.

* * * * *

63,000 people lost jobs in January.

* * * * *

47% (including 43% of 18-29 year olds and 31% of those 65 and older) are worried that they will outlive their money after retirement. [Gallup 2/08]

* * * * *

The impact of the current economy is represented by the number of people who say they are being affected "a great deal" or "quite a bit" by the following aspects of the economy.

- 79% - price of gasoline and home heating oil
 - 67% - cost of groceries and household products
 - 58% - cost of health care
 - 45% - savings and pensions for retirement
 - 41% - impact trade agreements have had on American jobs
- [NBC/WSJ 3/08]

* * * * *

43% believe that their families are worse off than they were four years ago. The last time the NBC/WSJ poll found this many folks feeling this way was in April, 1992. [3/08]

* * * * *

As the debate goes on as to whether the country is in recession, the public has decided. 76% say the country is in a recession. Democrats and independents are more likely than Republicans to have this point of view.

As to the next step, 59% believe it is at least somewhat likely that the country will be in a depression within two years. [Gallup 3/08]

* * * * *

What is abundantly clear is that the economy has replaced the war in Iraq as the #1 issue in the minds of Americans.

In a Gallup survey taken March 6-9, respondents were asked an open-ended question

"What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?"

Economy in general 35%

Situation in Iraq/war 21%

Poor healthcare/hospitals/high cost of healthcare 8%

Fuel/Oil prices 8%

Immigration/illegal aliens 6%

Unemployment/jobs 5%

Dissatisfaction with govt/Congress/politicians etc 5%

19 other issues ranging from ethical/moral/religious decline (4%) to Guns/gun control (1%).

In the NBC/WSJ survey taken March 7-10, respondents were given a specific list of issues and were asked

"Let me list some issues that have been proposed for the federal government to address. Please tell me which one of these items you think should be the top priority for the federal government."

Job creation and economic growth 26%

The war in Iraq 19%

Health care 12%

Energy and the cost of gas 10%

Terrorism 9%

Illegal immigration 9%

The environment and global warming 4%

Foreign policy and Iran 2%

As recently as December 2007 "the war in Iraq" and "health care" were the top issues at 18% each.

* * * * *

When it comes to Iraq [Gallup 3/08]

- 65% think the U.S. has "an obligation to establish a reasonable level of stability and security" in that country before all American troops are withdrawn.

- 63% believe that if U.S. troops are withdrawn, Al Qaeda is "more likely to use Iraq as a base for its terrorist operations."

- 57% believe that a greater number of Iraqis will die from violence if U.S. troops are withdrawn.

- only 18% of Americans believe that U.S. troops should be withdrawn as soon as possible. At the other end of the spectrum are 35% who believe that those troops should be kept there until the situation gets better. 41% favor a set timetable for gradual withdrawal.

- A majority (75%) are not optimistic about a speedy withdrawal.
- 2 to 3 years - 32%
- 4 to 5 years - 26%
- 6 to 10 years - 17%

* * * * *

In 2000 65% of Americans thought the United States was the leading economic power in the world. China ranked 2nd at 18%. There has been a big change. Now (2008) 40% of Americans believe that China is the leading economic power with the U.S. in 2nd place at 33%. Japan ranked 3rd in both years. [Gallup 2/08]

And while Americans had a marginally favorable opinion of China a year ago - 48% favorable/42% unfavorable - now 53% have an unfavorable opinion as opposed to 47% who still feel favorably toward that country.

* * * * *

57% of Americans say that there is at least "some conflict and tension" between people of different races . Only 11% say there is no conflict or tension at all. [NBC/WSJ 3/08]

* * * * *

PRESIDENT BUSH

Only 30% approve of the job that George Bush is doing as President according to an Associated Press survey conducted 3/5-8/08. This is the lowest approval rating that the poll has registered during Bush's tenure.

In the same survey when it comes to the economy, 67% disapprove of the job Bush is doing. Only 57% disapprove of his handling of foreign policy issues and the war on terrorism, while 67% also disapprove of the way he is handling Iraq.

Finally, when it comes to his handling of domestic issues such as health care, education, the environment and energy is approval rating is 34%.

* * * * *

In addition, 61% rate the President unfavorably. [Newsweek 3/5-08].

* * * * *

Only 33% of Republicans are satisfied with the way things are going in the country. This is the lowest score registered among Republicans since Bush took office. [Gallup 3/08]

* * * * *

Perhaps the single most telling commentary on President Bush's tenure comes as he embarks on the last 11 months of his 8 year term. Americans were asked if they think the next president "should take an approach similar to that of George W. Bush, or should the next president take a different approach than George W. Bush.

76% say that the next president should take a different approach than Bush. Only 17% would like the next president to take a similar approach. [NBC/WSJ 3/08]

Of particular import, 49% Republicans 49% that the next president should take a different approach than Bush. 36% of GOPers opt for a similar approach to that taken by Bush.

* * * * *

THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

* * * * *

CLINTON, OBAMA AND MCCAIN

The Democratic primary, the Republican primary that is now effectively over and the general election which looms large ahead, involves just 3 people. Strangely enough, given the history of U.S. Senators in races for president, it is passing strange that those 3 people are United States Senators, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain.

In the last NBC/WSJ survey, first Clinton and Obama are evaluated by Democratic voters and then Clinton, Obama and McCain are evaluated by all voters, against 10 specific qualities.

- When it comes to being
- knowledgeable and experienced enough to handle the presidency
- having strong leadership qualities needed to be president, and
- being a good commander-in-chief

Clinton is ranked over Obama by Democratic voters and McCain is ranked over Clinton and Obama among all voters.

On the other 7 qualities, Obama ranks ahead of Clinton among Democratic voters and ahead of Clinton and McCain among all voters. However, on 2 of these qualities, "high personal standards" and being "honest and straightforward", Obama and McCain are essentially rated even.

Clinton, Obama and McCain were rated on a 5 point scale with 5 being "very good" and 1 being "very poor". The percentages below represent the number of respondents who said "4 or 5."]

	Dem Primary Voters		All Voters	
	HC	BO	HC	BO
JM				
Knowledgeable and experienced enough to handle presidency	<u>73%</u>	44%	50%	<u>28%</u> <u>66%</u>
Having strong leadership qualities needed to be Pres	<u>71</u>	62	50	46 <u>61</u>
Compassionate enough to understand average people	64	<u>76</u>	44	<u>59</u> 40
Being a good commander-in-chief	<u>64</u>	59	43	41 <u>61</u>
Having high personal standards that set proper moral tone for country	61	<u>73</u>	40	<u>57</u> 56
Bring real change to direction of country	58	<u>72</u>	38	<u>50</u> 20
Shares your positions on issues	56	<u>59</u>	34	<u>39</u> 31
Inspirational and exciting choice for president	52	<u>73</u>	33	<u>56</u> 22
Honest and straightforward	52	<u>70</u>	33	<u>53</u> 52
Easygoing and likeable	45	<u>81</u>	30	<u>69</u> 37

* * * * *

DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

The Democratic Presidential primary campaign is a play in multiple acts. Act VI has begun.

During Act I the major candidates, for the most part, played quite nicely together and were basically positive. In fact, they might have been described as downright civil to each other.

During Act II the gloves came off.

Act III ended with the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primary after which the field narrowed to two, Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

Act IV played out on Super Tuesday. This was the date on which early prognosticators said the play would be over and the Democratic nominee would be known. Turns out no one told the writer that was supposed to be the plan.

In Act V, which took place on a set that looked a lot like Texas and Ohio, a variety of Clinton campaign types including the former President, said she had to win those two states to stay in the race. To the surprise of many in the audience she did.

* * * * *

Act VI began on March 11th. It will end on May 6th. During this act the "play" will go to Pennsylvania (4/22) and North Carolina and Indiana on May 6th. [345 pledged delegates to be elected.]

Here is a summary of the first 5 acts [as of March 19th]

	Obama	Clinton	Obama's net
Pledged Delegates	1414	1246	+168
Super Delegates*	213	248	- 35
Total	1627	1494	+133

[Source: realpolitics.com]

Total pledged delegates still to be elected - 562
Super delegates who have not yet announced - 334
Number of primaries and caucuses to be conducted - 9

Popular vote 13,281,132 12,577,409 +703,723
[There is a further discussion of popular vote later in
this Watch.]

States won** 27 14 +13

* Super delegates who have publicly announced their
choice.

** 48 states + D.C. + Puerto Rico (Florida and Michigan
 are not included)

* * * * *

Act VII will open on May 7th and finish on June 3 and includes scenes in West Virginia, Oregon, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, Montana and South Dakota. [217 pledged delegates to be elected.]

Act VIII starts on June 4th and will end no later than August 28th. The curtain could effectively come down earlier.

* * * * *

How is this play likely to end?

The consensus (if it means anything) seems to be that Clinton will win Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky and Puerto Rico with a total of 292 pledged delegates. Obama will win North Carolina, Oregon, Montana and South Dakota with a total of 198 pledged delegates. It seems that Indiana may be in play with its 72 delegates.

Given the proportionality rules the net result of these 9 contests could be a net paid delegate gain of 12-20 delegates for Clinton.

As the primary and caucus window closes, June 3rd, it does not currently appear that either Obama or Clinton will have sufficient pledged delegates and currently announced super delegates to hit the needed 2025 delegates.)

Obama could be leading in pledged delegates by 130-155 and in states (+DC & PR) by 31-19.

It is possible that Clinton might catch up to Obama in total popular vote but that will require some awfully good fortune on her part. She has not gotten many breaks up to now.

So, after 18 months of campaigning, winning the nomination will come down to which of them can convince a sufficient number of currently uncommitted super delegates, to vote for them. They will also try to get publicly committed super delegates to switch.

* * * * *

A QUIZ

When super delegates were created before the 1984 campaign, it was intended that they cast their votes for

- a) the candidate who won the most state contests
- b) the candidates who won the most elected delegates
- c) the candidate who won the popular vote
- d) the candidate who won the state or congressional district in which the super delegate lives
- e) the candidate who they think is most electable
- f) the candidate who won the most large must win states in the general election
- g) the candidate who they want to support for whatever the reason

The answer is (g) which also makes the answer, " all of the above."

To qualify as a super delegate a person must be a member of the U.S. House or Senate, a state governor, the chair or vice of each state party, a distinguished party leader (former presidents, vice presidents, congressional caucus leaders) and members of the Democratic National Committee for each state.

Any number of party leaders and candidates etc. have voiced opinions as to which of (a - g) should bind the super delegates. Almost always the selection is the one that is most likely to result in their preferred candidate winning the nomination.

There does not seem to be a majority view among Democrats generally as to the basis on which super delegates should make their decisions.

In a Newsweek survey conducted in early March, Democrats opined that if neither candidate has enough pledged delegates after all the primaries and caucuses,

- 43% say that the trailing candidate should concede,
- 42% think the super delegates should decide.

There is also not a consensus among Democrats as to the basis on which the super delegates should make their decision if there votes will make the difference.

42% of Democrats believe that the super delegates should vote for the candidate who they believe is best qualified. 38% think the supers should vote for the person who leads in popular votes cast. Only 14% think the supers should go for the candidate who has accumulated the most delegates. [Newsweek 3/5-6/08]

Stay tuned.

* * * * *

It is an old story by now but it is quite unlikely that Democrats in Florida and Michigan will have any say in the selection of the party's nominee for president.

While the situations in Michigan and Florida are quite different, the net result is the same.

Both states held primaries outside of the designated time periods allowed and recent efforts to find a way for them to "redo" these elections have come to naught.

No surprise, the Clinton campaign has encouraged "redos" in every way possible while the Obama campaign has been luke-warm to chilly to the efforts being made in these two states.

The respective positions of the two campaigns make perfectly good sense. Clinton is interested in every opportunity to cut down Obama's net paid delegate lead and even more important in passing him in the popular vote. Obama's campaign is chilly to the efforts to redo these elections for exactly the same reasons that Clinton is for them. Each campaign is arguing for its self interest.

Well before the convention decisions will be made that provide for delegations from these two states to be seated. But either the composition of the delegation or limits on their rights to cast ballots in certain circumstances will make certain that they can not affect the outcome of the presidential contest.

* * * * *

On January 18th Clinton had 190 publicly announced super delegates and Obama had 103. Through March 20th, Clinton had 248 super delegates, an increase of 30.5% while Obama had 213 super delegates, an increase of 106.8%.

* * * * *

If you need proof that nothing is ever simple when it comes to Democratic party presidential nominee practices and results consider the question of the size of the popular vote for each of the two candidates.

As generally reported the popular vote is

Obama 13,281,132 Clinton 12,577,409 = Obama +703,723

However, 4 states have not reported total participation; Iowa, Nevada, Maine and Washington, all caucus states. If you add in best estimates of turnout the total popular vote is

Obama 13,615,216 Clinton 12,801,271 = Obama +813,945

Then if you add in Florida on the grounds that Clinton and Obama were on the ballot the popular vote is

Obama 13,857,346 Clinton 13,338,395 = Obama +408,951

And finally, if you decide to include Florida and Michigan which is a real stretch since Obama was not on the ballot then the popular vote is

Obama 13,857,346 Clinton 13,776,704 = Obama +80,642

* * * * *

Finally, there is the tally of the number of states won by each of the candidates.[Including Puerto Rico]

Obama 27 states Clinton 14 states.

That seems simple enough. Well not so fast.

15 of the 27 states that Obama won (55.5% of them) were lost by the Democratic presidential candidate in 2000 and 2004. 7 of the 14 states that Clinton won (50%) were lost by the Democratic presidential candidate in those two elections.

The 15 "Republican states" that Obama won have a total of 618 pledged delegates in 2008 of which he won 383 or 62%. The 7 states of similar kind that Clinton won have a total of 556 pledged delegates of which she won 301 or 54%

So much for the claim that Obama was getting a disproportionate share of his votes from Republican states.

* * * * *

It was inevitable that race would be on the table in the fall election. Now it is squarely on the table in the balance of the nominating process

[The poll that is discussed below was taken after excerpts from Rev. Jeremiah Wright's sermons hit the airwaves. 3 of the 4 days of polling were conducted before Barack Obama's speech. CBS 3/15-18/08]

39% of Americans believe that a woman faces more obstacles in presidential politics today than an African American and 33% say that an African American faces greater obstacles.

African Americans say that an African American faces greater obstacles than a woman by a margin of 56% to 18%.

59% say the country is ready to elect a woman as president while 62% say it is ready to elect an African American.

By 42% to 10% respondents said that racism is a more serious problem than sexism today.

35% could recollect someone that they know having made a sexist remark in the past few months while 42% could recollect someone making a racist remark.

* * * * *

While everyone has a favorite pollster, Gallup provides the most continuous public tracking, by a single pollster of the national primary scene. [Gallup uses a rolling 3 day sample with the oldest day of interviews being dropped as a new day's interviews are added.]

Here is what it has reported since February 1st.

February 1, Clinton 44% - Obama 41.%
February 1-12 Clinton led
February 13-19 Obama led
February 20-21 Clinton led
February 22-24 Obama led
February 25 - Clinton and Obama tied
February 26-29 Obama led
February 29th Obama 49% - Clinton 43%
March 1 - Clinton and Obama tied
March 2-6 Clinton led
March 7-15 Obama led
March 16-20 Clinton led
March 20 Clinton 48% - Obama 43%

* * * * *

THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

John McCain is the Republican nominee.

McCain has to be given great credit for resurrecting what was a floundering campaign.

It is, however, the case that McCain led in every national poll gauging the Republican contest going back at least to January 2007 with the exception of a six week period (11/14/08 - 1/6/08) when Mike Huckabee was the leader.

McCain is currently enjoying the good fortune of time to continue to build his campaign toward the fall while the Democrats are still fighting with each other.

* * * * *

THE GENERAL ELECTION

Please note that the last time 4 foreign born actors won the top prizes from the Academy of Motion Pictures etc, was 1964, which was the best year for the Democrats since WWII.[A missive from Peter Hart]

And then comes California. An initiative has been filed, by a Republican lawyer, that would allocate the State's 55 electoral votes on the basis of Congressional Districts won, with the Statewide plurality or majority winner getting the extra 2 electoral votes.

An effort is being made to get the proposition on the June 3, 2008, State primary ballot. If it succeeds, California's electoral votes would be allocated on a Congressional District basis in 2008.

The first step for the proponents is to acquire the 433,971 signatures required to get the proposition on the ballot. If that effort is successful...stand back! Millions of dollars will flow into that contest, and there are no limits as to amounts or sources.

If this had been the rule in 2000, George Bush would have received at least 19 additional votes, bringing his total electoral votes from 271 to 290. Al Gore's total would have fallen from 266 to 247.

In 2004, Bush would have picked up an additional 22 electoral votes, raising his total votes from 286 to 308 and lowering John Kerry's total from 251 to 229.

* * * * *

THE CONGRESS

THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats	49	
Republicans	49	
Independents	2	(caucus Dem)

Democrats are working hard to increase their span of control in the Senate, and there are some possibilities. There are no obvious races in which the Republicans are likely to pick up a seat.

Colorado remains the most likely Democratic pickup. New Hampshire as a possible Democratic pickup is still a possibility if Jeanne Shaheen decides to run. So far there are no public signs of a possible campaign on her part.

Virginia will certainly be a target for an additional Democratic seat, now that John Warner ®) has announced that he will not seek re-election. Congressman Tom Davis ®) will likely seek the Republican nomination to replace Warner, and there is a possibility that former Governor Jim Gilmore, who early on entered and departed the Presidential race, might decide that this is the race for him. Former Democratic Governor Mark Warner, who eschewed a race for President and is often talked about as a possible Vice Presidential pick, will likely enter the race.

Mary Landrieu (D) seems to be a little stronger in Louisiana, with no significant opponent emerging.

Tim Johnson (D) of South Dakota is on a path to return to the Senate right after Labor Day. Once that happens the Republicans will likely gin up an opponent or two in short order.

Democrats continue to talk about the Maine race, with Congressman Tom Allen (D) taking on incumbent Senator Susan Collins ®). This has to be seen as a long shot.

In Alaska, incumbent Ted Stevens ®) has a marginally positive favorability rating, but in polling in a hypothetical Republican primary against sitting Alaska Governor, Sarah Palin ®), he gets beaten. There are no signs that Palin is thinking about running against him. Incidentally, there are local supporters of the Governor who have launched a campaign to draft her as the Vice Presidential candidate on the 2008 Republican national ticket.

Stevens is dealing with a continuing corruption scandal in Alaska in which his name has come up along with that of his son. The strongest Democratic candidate against him would likely be Mark Begich, the Mayor of Anchorage.

In Minnesota, incumbent Norm Coleman ®) faces the reality that 49% of Minnesotans would consider a new face in next year's election. He has a negative job rating of 58%. On the upside

for him, he has a strong lead in hypothetical races against his two possible Democratic opponents, Al Franken and Mike Ciresi.

* * * * *

Here is how the 33 Senate elections (12 Democratic incumbents, 21 Republican incumbents) look to me at this time (underlining reflects retirement). (D=Dem incumbent in office, R=GOP incumbent in office, I=Ind. incumbent in office)

Safe <u>Democratic (10)</u>	Leaning <u>Democratic (3)</u>	<u>Toss-Up (4)</u>	Leaning <u>Republican (5)</u>	Safe <u>Republican (11)</u>
Arkansas	Louisiana	Alaska	Maine	Alabama
Delaware	South Dakota	<u>Colorado</u>	Minnesota	Georgia
Illinois	<u>Virginia</u>	New Hampshire	<u>Nebraska</u>	Idaho
Iowa		<u>New Mexico</u>	North Carolina	Kansas
Massachusetts			Oklahoma	Kentucky
Michigan				Mississippi
Montana				Oregon
New Jersey				South Carolina
Rhode Island				Tennessee
West Virginia				Texas
				Wyoming

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Ind</u>
Seats not up in 2006	37	28	2
Safe in 2006	10	11	0
Leaning in 2006	3	5	0
Total	50	44	2
Toss-ups	4 (4R)		

* * * * *

THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats 233 (2 vacancies)
Republicans 202

It is still quite early to get a handle on whether the alignment in the House is likely to change in the 2008 election.

In the Democracy Corp compilation discussed previously, Democrats had a 9 point (51% to 42%) edge over the Republicans in a generic congressional ballot.

WW returns again to the Cook Political Report for an assessment of House races:

	<u>8/23/07</u>	<u>3/17/08</u>
Solid Dem	201	198
Likely Dem	17	19
Lean Dem	15	16
Total Dem	233	233
TossUP	2	10
D 0		1
R 2		9
Lean GOP	15	15
Likely GOP	19	20
Solid GOP	166	159
Total GOP	200	192

* * * * *

WISDOM FROM SAUL TURTELTAUB

"Regarding leftovers: Better they go to waste than they go to waist."

"New York exaggeration. Three Subways and the Hudson Tube."

(When I suggested to Saul that I did not understand this line, he sent me the following explanation.

"In New York when you had to go a distance it involved taking two or three subways, most connected at Times Square and the full exaggeration was "and the Hudson Tubes", which was a tunnel between Jersey City, NJ and downtown New York.

Example: "Why aren't you going out with Edna anymore? She is geographically undesirable. Three subways and the Hudson Tubes. Or more simply. Bronx."

Subsequently Saul sent me the following version.

"What a terrible date it was. I took a belt way, a parkway, a thruway to get a "no way."

And that is how a joke is born.

* * * * *

THIS AND THAT

There are 31,557,000 seconds and 525,950 minutes in a year.

Average number of people airborne over the US in any given hour - 61,000

* * * * *

Money can't buy you happiness, but it does bring you a very pleasant form of misery - Spike Milligan

I never drink water because of he disgusting things that
fish do in it - W.C. Fields

By the time a man is wise enough to watch his step, he's too
old to go anywhere - Billy Crystal

Be careful about reading health books. You may die of
misprint. - Mark Twain

I don't feel old. I don't feel anything until noon. Then
it's time for my nap. - Bob Hope

* * * * *

RESTAURANTS

* * * * *

* * * * *

Mike

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