

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 81

September 15, 2008

ABOUT AMERICA

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PRESIDENT BUSH 4 months to go

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2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN Act III is underway

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2008 CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS

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WISDOM FROM SAUL TURTELTAUB

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THIS AND THAT

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RESTAURANTS

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A THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE

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STATE OF THE NATION

67% of Americans continue to believe that the country is on the wrong track. The last time the wrong track number was under 50% in the NBC/WSJ survey was September, 2004, when it was 49%. [NBC/WSJ 9/08]

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In July, 87% of Americans said the economy is getting worse; currently 76% have that view. Conversely, those who say the economy is poor has fallen from 48% to 39%. [Gallup 9/08]

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Unemployment hit a five year high last month and home foreclosures hit a new record as well.

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The Democratic Party continues to be viewed more positively than the Republican Party, 49% to 40%. On the reverse side, the Republican Party is rated negatively by 43%, while 33% have that view of the Democratic party. [NBC/WSJ 9/08]

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When asked to name the single most important issue in making their choice for President, here is what the respondents had to say:

Economy/jobs/gas/energy	41%
Economy/jobs - 37	
gas/oil prices/energy - 4	
War in Iraq	10
Health care	9
Terrorism/National security	6
Ethics/honesty/corruption in govt	5
Taxes	2
Abortion	2

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44% of adults say they are satisfied with the quality of primary and secondary education in the country. Yet only 77% of the parents of school-aged children are satisfied with their own children's education. [Gallup 9/08]

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50% of women generally describe themselves as pro-choice, while 43% say they are pro-life. Not surprisingly, Democratic women are most strongly pro-choice (57%), while only (32%) of Republican women are pro-choice. Independent women are pro-choice by 51% to 40%.

However, only 13% of Americans generally say that a candidate's position on abortion is the sole determiner of their vote. Another 49% say it is one of many important issues. [Gallup 9/08]

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By age 24, young adults (30%) are more likely to be married than living together (20%). By age 29, the marriage rate grows to 59%. [Gallup 8/08]

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BUSH

61% of Americans disapprove of the job that George Bush is doing as President. 34% approve. 33% "feel" favorably about him, while 55% have negative feelings.

68% disapprove of the job that he is doing on the economy; 62% disapprove of the way he is handling foreign policy. [NBC/WSJ 9/08 and 8/08]

As compared to other modern two-term Presidents at the same time in their tenure, Bush remains at the bottom of the pack.

	<u>Approval</u>	<u>Disapproval</u>
Bill Clinton	60%	34%
Dwight Eisenhower	58%	28%
Ronald Reagan	54%	37%
Lyndon Johnson	42%	51%
George Bush	33%	64%

[Gallup]

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OBAMA VS McCain

As you may recall, WW sees the Presidential race as a play in 5 acts.

Act I - Post-"nomination" to the conventions

The pre-convention period was relatively quiet for both Party's candidates. There was some drama between the Obama campaign and Senator Clinton and President Clinton. It is hard to understand why the Obama campaign didn't give them their convention program positions within a week or 10 days after she publicly withdrew from the race. Their failure to do so kept tensions alive for a longer period than necessary.

Obama made it clear that he did not intend to take Federal public financing (\$84,000,000) in the general election. McCain has taken the funding.

The Obama campaign has taken over the Democratic National Committee and moved many of its historical general election functions to Chicago. McCain on the other hand has installed some trusted lieutenants at the Republican National Committee.

Act II - The Conventions 8/25-9/4/08

Both Parties delivered well-organized public spectacles, with the Republicans to be given particular credit for having pulled themselves together after losing most of the first day of their convention.

Each of the two conventions drew TV/Cable audiences that were the largest since 1992. Over the 3-day period, in which both conventions had prime time hour activity, the Republican convention drew the larger audience.

Comparing the 3 nights when both conventions were in session, Tuesday-Thursday, The Republicans won the ratings contest on Wednesday (Palin) and Thursday (McCain) and the Democrats won when Hillary Clinton was the featured speaker in the prime time hour - 10:00-11:00 EST.

The individual ratings for each of the principals + Clinton was as follows:
[each point of ratings equals 1,150,000 households]

	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Households</u>	<u>Persons more than 2 years of age</u>
John McCain	24.6	28,298,000	38,933,000
Barack Obama	24.5	27,716,000	38,379,000
Sarah Palin	23.5	26,933,000	37,244,000
Joe Biden	16.4	18,841,000	24,029,000
H.Clinton	17.8	20,066,000	25,974,000

	Women 18 & over	Men 18 & over	African Americans
John McCain	19,193,000	17,933,000	3,063,000
Barack Obama	19,894,000	16,205,000	7,542,000
Sara Palin	19,511,000	16,426,000	3,011,000
Joe Biden	12,609,000	9,573,000	4,413,000
H. Clinton	14,311,000	10,525,000	4,492,000

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The Democratic and Republican Vice Presidential running mates are quite different.

Barack Obama's pick, Senator Joe Biden (D-Del), is a long-time Washington player, who is just finishing his 6th term in the Senate.

John McCain managed to surprise most of the political world with his selection of Governor Sarah Palin (R-Alaska), who has been Governor of Alaska just under 2 years. Prior to that time, she was Mayor of a town of less than 10,000 people. McCain decided to try and hit the long ball, and he seems to have done so.

What does each of them bring to the "party?"

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The obvious is that Biden adds an important foreign policy credential to the Democratic team.

But there is something that Biden brings that is not so obvious, his knowledge and his relationships.

He brings on-the-spot knowledge of Senator John McCain and his legislative record in practice, enabling Biden to engage McCain in ways and with authority that others cannot.

He also brings knowledge of the Congress, its players and its ways. Even though Democrats are likely to increase their majority in the next Senate, this will be the place where Obama will have the most difficulty passing his programs. A well-connected Vice President, especially as respected as Biden, is effectively the Administration's best lobbyist in the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Biden's knowledge of the government as a whole is imperative to the "change" Obama plans to implement as President. In essence, to change a system you have to know how it works, which Biden does.

In the area of foreign policy, his knowledge of the players on the international stage and the history of dangerous hot spots around the world, will be invaluable to Obama as he governs.

In a related area, Israel is not Obama's strongest suit. Israel has no better friend in the U.S. Congress than Biden, and that is something that can be used in the Jewish community.

While Biden will be an effective advocate on the campaign trail, in particular in working class communities, his most important role will come if Obama is elected.

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Palin's most obvious contribution is coming in the here and now. It is clear that she has resolved whatever hesitancy the Christian right had about the McCain candidacy. While McCain said the right things, they were not sure about him. Now they know they will have an unquestioned advocate just down the hall from the Oval office. She appears to live the values about which this community is so concerned.

There is no questioning the excitement that she has infused into the McCain campaign. She has captured the imagination of the public. The crowds that McCain has drawn since the convention, in his joint appearances with Palin, far exceed anything he drew solo.

Palin is a strong woman to whom many women relate because they admire the role that she has played in raising a large family and serving as a major public official.

The early evidence is that she has given McCain a new lease on life among white women. The ABC/WP survey found a 20-point swing among this group after the Republican convention. While eyebrows were raised at the size of the swing, the NBC/WSJ survey found a 10-point swing. Something is obviously going on.

If anything, Palin's addition to the ticket has assured that the McCain campaign has dominated the media coverage since her selection.

Palin should not be underestimated. Anyone who can be presented to the stage of a national political convention for the first time, in a major prime time role, and deliver the performance that she delivered, has strengths that may not be apparent or expected.

Palin's strongest attraction is that she is authentic. And John McCain knows what he has when he says "I can't wait to introduce Palin to Washington."

Palin will undoubtedly spend some of her time with McCain, helping to drum up his crowds. But don't be surprised if a new bus shows up called "Straight Talk Express #2" in which Palin will campaign back and forth through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Missouri.

Her contribution to the operation of the Administration, if McCain is elected, will play out after January 20th.

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70% to 47% Americans see Biden as being more prepared for the job of Vice President than Palin. However, 60% to 40% see Palin as someone to whom they can relate.

Following the Republican convention, 44% rate Palin favorably as opposed to 22% who had that view before the convention. No surprise that Biden's favorability at 37% did not change during the same time period.

39% of McCain voters say the Vice Presidential choice influences their support of him. 24% say this about Obama.
[CBS 9/08]

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WHO'S THE BETTER LEADER?

With the selection of Sarah Palin, the Republican Governor of Alaska, as the Vice Presidential nominee of the Republican Party, the debate is once again joined. Between women and men, who makes the better leader?

69% of Americans believe that men and women make equally good leaders. 21% say men are superior and 6% give that recognition to women.

When asked why there are not more women in public office, 51% of respondents say it is because Americans simply are not ready to elect women to high office; 43% say that women who are active in politics are held back by men; 38% say women are discriminated against in all realms of society, and politics is no exception.

Women make up 17% of the members of the U.S. House, 16% of U.S. Senators, 18% of Governors and 24% of State legislators. The United States ranks 85th in the world in the share of women in its national legislative body.

Below are a series of characteristics and judgements concerning what is most true of men or women.

	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
Emotional	85	5
Compassionate	80	5
Creative	62	11
Manipulative	52	26
Honest	50	20
Outgoing	47	28
Intelligent	38	14
Ambitious	34	34
Decisive	33	44
Stubborn	32	45
Hardworking	28	28
Arrogant	10	70

[Pew Research Center 8/08]

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Act III - Post-conventions to the 1st Debate

The response to the polls after the conventions by the political chattering class has been deafening. Obama supporters are hanging crepe and explaining endlessly what Obama has to do immediately if he is to be elected. McCain's backers are showing a level of excitement that would suggest they think the race is all but over and McCain is preparing to move into the White House.

Both groups need to get a grip. Bottom line, this campaign still has a long way to go.

With the caveat that polls around conventions are notoriously unpredictable, here is a look at the data before and after the conventions.

Gallup tracking polls

8/22-24	Obama 45	McCain 45	- Even
8/25-28	Democratic convention		
8/29-31	Obama 49	McCain 43	- Obama +5
9/1-4	Republican convention		
9/5-7	Obama 44	McCain 49	- McCain + 5

NBC/Wall Street Journal

8/15-18	Obama 45	McCain 42	- Obama + 3
8/25-9/4	Democratic and Republican conventions		
9/6-8	Obama/Biden 46	McCain/Palin 45	- Obama +1

Washington Post/ABC

8/22	Obama 49	McCain 43	- Obama +5
8/25-9/4	Democratic and Republican conventions		
9/5-7	Obama 47	McCain 46	- Obama +1

CBS

8/15-19 Obama 45 McCain 42 - Obama +3
8/25-28 Democratic convention
8/29-31 Obama/Biden 48 McCain/Palin 40 - Obama +5
9/1-4 Republican convention
9/5-7 Obama 44 McCain 46 - McCain +2

Bottom line - the race was within the margin of error before the conventions and that is where it is today.

To remind, after the Democratic convention in 2004, John Kerry was 9 points behind George Bush immediately after the Republican convention which ended on September 2nd, that year.

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Through his selection of Sarah Palin, McCain has re-energized his campaign. Obama has yet to close the deal with American voters.

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When it comes to feelings about the two candidates, their scores are about the same.

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
McCain	50	33
Obama	53	32

[NBC/WSJ 9/08]

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McCain continues to be seen as far more prepared to be President than Obama. 76% now hold the view that McCain is prepared, an increase of 8 points since his convention. By the same token, Obama is now seen as ready by 42% of those surveyed. [CBS 9/08]

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74% believe that McCain will follow President Bush's policies very/somewhat closely. [NBC/WSJ 9/08]

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The NBC/WSJ survey also asked respondents which of the two candidates "will bring real change and direction to the country." On this measure, Obama continues to lead by a goodly number, but McCain has made considerable progress.

	<u>Very/Fairly likely to bring real change</u>	
McCain	35%	(an increase of 15 points since June)
Obama	52%	(an increase of 4 points since June)

But when comparing the two extremes on the standard, the certainty about McCain shows a considerable drop, while Obama is positive.

	<u>Very likely</u>	<u>Not at all likely</u>	
McCain	15	41	(-26)
Obama	30	24	(+6)

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If you can believe what folks say, McCain's age is a greater liability than Obama's race. Respondents were asked whether they would be "enthusiastic, comfortable, have reservations, or be very uncomfortable" with persons having the referenced characteristics.

	<u>Enthusiastic/ comfortable</u>	<u>Have reservations/ Very uncomfortable</u>
An African American	87%	10%
A person over age 70	51%	49%
[NBC/WSJ 9/08]		

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Most recently John McCain has improved the margin of his relatively consistent lead over Obama on the statement - "Is a strong and decisive leader." For the last couple of months McCain has had an average lead of about 6 points. Now that has widened to 11 points, 52% - 41%. Following his convention Obama actually showed a 2-point lead over McCain on this score, but that has disappeared and then some. [Gallop 9/08]

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Various news organizations maintain electoral vote counts that are periodically reassessed and updated. Each organization has its own formula for deciding which candidate will receive a State's electoral votes. The chart below summarizes a number of those reports as of September 11, 2008: (WW has taken the liberty of lumping together firm and leaning counts to the extent those categories are used by a given organization.)

	<u>Obama</u>	<u>Toss-UP</u>	<u>McCain</u>
CNN	243	106	189
538.com	270	---	268
MSNBC	228	110	200
NYTimes	238	73	227

Pollster.Com	243	71	224
RCP	217	105	216
USAToday	248	155	135
WSJ	183	166	189

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Respondents to a ABC/WP survey (9/5-7) were asked whether Obama or McCain was better at a number of specific issues or characteristics.

Obama scored above 50% on education, having a better personality/temperament to be President, better understands people like you, and would do more to bring change to Washington.

McCain scored above 50% on the war in Iraq, international affairs, handling an unexpected major crisis, the U.S. campaign against terrorism, and being a better Commander-in-Chief.

The single largest positive score for either candidate is the 69% who say McCain would be a better Commander-in-Chief.

	Barack Obama <u>Better</u>	John McCain <u>Better</u>
Education	52	37
Social Issues, such as abortion, gay and civil unions	48	41
The economy	47	42
Energy Policy	45	43
Taxes	45	44
Federal Budget Deficit	44	39
War in Iraq	41	51
International Affairs	39	51
Unexpected Major Crisis	37	54
U.S. Campaign against Terrorism	36	56

	Barack Obama <u>Better</u>	John McCain <u>Better</u>
Has better personality /temperament to be President	57	35
Better Understands problems of people like you	51	39
Would do more to bring change to Washington	51	39
Better represents your own personal values	48	44

Is the stronger leader	44	48
More consistent in his positions	41	47
More honest and Trustworthy	38	44
Better Commander-in-Chief	24	69

[Washington Post/ABC Poll 9/5-7/08]

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In a recent Washington Post/ABC survey (9/08) respondents were asked 3 questions.

A review of those questions leaves the following general impressions.

On the question of handling taxes, the economy and the Federal budget deficit, the two candidates are treated equally.

But on the question of how well either of them understands the economic problems people in this country are having, Obama has a clear advantage over McCain.

Taxes are a problem for Obama. At least half the respondents think their taxes will go up if he is elected. About 1/3 of folks think that is the case with McCain. However, while 1/3 think their taxes will go down under Obama, only 9% think that about McCain.

"Regardless of whom you may support, whom do you trust more to handle the following:"

	<u>Taxes</u>	<u>The economy</u>	<u>Federal budget deficit</u>
Obama	45%	45%	44%
McCain	44%	42%	39%

"Do you think (Obama/McCain) does or does not understand the economic problems people in this country are having?"

	<u>Does</u>	<u>Does not</u>
Obama	74%	23%
McCain	53%	43%

"If (Obama/McCain) were elected President, do you think your federal taxes would go up, down or stay about the same?"

	<u>Up</u>	<u>Down</u>
Obama	51%	33%
McCain	34%	9%

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On the question of whether Hillary Clinton voters are returning to the fold and now supporting Obama, the information varies. As of the first of the month, Gallup found that 81% of former Clinton backers were now supporting Obama, an increase of 11 points since before the Democratic convention. The most recent NBC/WSJ survey found that 60% of former Clinton supporters are now supporting Obama, a jump of 8 points since August.

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Intense interest in the election [10 & 9 on a 10-point scale] is just about what it was in September 2004. [NBC/WSJ 9/08]

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The McCain campaign regularly complains that the media is tilted toward Obama in terms of favorable coverage. The public shares this view. (Keep in mind that this survey was conducted September 5-7 at the height of Palin rumors, etc.)

The news media have been

	<u>McCain</u>	<u>Palin</u>	<u>Obama</u>	<u>Biden</u>
Harder on	31%	54%	18%	3%
Easier on	11%	10%	36%	23%

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Act IV - The Debates 9/26-10/15

Other days on which the election may be decided.

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Final Act - October 16 - November 4, 2008

Is down the road.

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THE CONGRESS

Democrats continue to be on the path of increasing their margins in the U.S. Senate and House. A generic vote, suggests, however, that the "race" is tightening.

	<u>DEM</u>	<u>GOP</u>	<u>NET</u>	
Democracy Corps	50	45	5	9/1-3
Hotline/FD	51	42	9	9/5-7
USAToday/Gallup	48	45	3	9/5-7 (Registered voters)
USAToday/Gallup	45	50	-5	9/5-7 (outlier)(likely voters)

The public remains unhappy with the performance of the Democratic-controlled House and Senate.

In at least 4 national surveys taken 8/12-31 the average disapproval of Congress was 74%. 18% approved its work.

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THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats 49

Republicans 49

Independents 2 (caucus Dem)

While Democrats continue to show substantial progress toward increasing their majority, the prospects for reaching the magic number of 60 does not seem to be great.

Among the Toss-Up States, the Democratic candidates lead in Colorado and New Hampshire. Republican incumbents are leading in Minnesota, Oregon and Mississippi.

New Mexico and Alaska are two currently Republican- controlled seats in which Democrats are now leading. In Alaska, Ted Stevens (R) trails Mark Begich (D), and in New Mexico, which is an open seat, Tom Udall (D) has a solid lead.

Despite his legal problems, Ted Stevens survived his primary with ease, and ostensibly he will come to trial in D.C. Federal Court in sufficient time to have the matter resolved, at least at the trial level, before the election.

Minnesota, which last month moved from Toss-Up to Lean Republican, moves back to Toss-Up.

In New Hampshire, Jean Shaheen (D) seems to be doing a little better in her race to unseat incumbent Republican John Sununu.

Mary Landrieu (D), the incumbent in Louisiana, who has been on everyone's watch list for the entire cycle, is holding her own and likely to be re-elected.

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Looking at the races today, it is not hard to see the Democratic caucus at 55 seats, including 1 Independent, Bernie Sanders (I-VT).

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Here is how the 35 Senate elections (12 Democratic incumbents, 23 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(11)</u>	Leaning <u>Democratic(4)</u>	<u>Toss-Up(5)</u>	Leaning <u>Republican(4)</u>	Safe <u>Republican(11)</u>
Arkansas	Alaska	<u>Colorado</u>	Kentucky	Alabama
Delaware	Louisiana	Minnesota	Maine	Georgia
Illinois	New Mexico	Mississippi	<u>Nebraska</u>	Idaho
Iowa	South Dakota	New Hampshire	North Carolina	Kansas
Massachusetts		Oregon		Mississippi(A)
Michigan				Oklahoma
Montana				South Carolina
New Jersey				Tennessee
Rhode Island				Texas
<u>Virginia</u>				Wyoming(A)
West Virginia				Wyoming(B)

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Ind</u>
Seats not up in 2008	37	26	2
Safe in 2008	11	11	0
Leaning in 2008	4	4	0
Total	52	41	2
Toss-ups	5 (5R) (Leaning 2D, 3R)		

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THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Democrats 236 (includes 1 vacancy)
Republicans 199

There has not been a lot of change in the House ratings since last month.

WW's best guess at the moment - 12 to 17 Democratic pickups.

	<u>6/19/08</u>	<u>8/15/08</u>	<u>9/15/08</u>
Total Dem	238	241	241
Solid Dem	203	203	206
Likely Dem	14	15	12
Lean Dem	14	15	15
 TossUp	 26	 25	 27
D	7	8	8
R	19	17	19
 Lean GOP	 8	 11	 11
Likely GOP	18	33	30
Solid GOP	152	133	134
Total GOP	197	194	194

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WISDOM FROM SAUL TURTELTAUB

You know the airport is less than thirty minutes from your hotel when you arrive in the back seat of your taxi cab and still can't click on the seatbelt.

The problem in being taken by a good friend to dinner at his favorite restaurant, where he introduces you proudly to the owner, is that you can't ask for ketchup.

While waiting for the car in front of me to drive on, after standing for an endless amount of time at a stop sign, and having decided he was waiting for it to say "GO," and being in Sun Valley, Idaho, where no one ever blows a horn or displays impatience, I realized the motto for such a town should be, "If you're not bleeding and you're in a hurry, you're in the wrong town."

Got up this morning; the TV didn't work; called the Cable Company and got disconnected; tried later on my cell phone in the car, no reception and the car needs brakes; realized the only machine that did its job today and everyday was the spoon.

Also resolved not to buy anything that has to be opened with teeth, from cheese to CDs.

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THIS AND THAT

Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.

1/3 of ice cream sold is vanilla.

1/3 of potatoes sold are French-fried.

7% of Americans eat at McDonald's on any day.

The only President awarded a patent was Abraham Lincoln for a system of buoying vessels over shoals.

Honey is the only food that does not spoil.

In the Caribbean there are oysters that can climb trees.

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Taller people - men 5'10" or taller and women 5'4" or taller - report higher satisfaction with life than folks who are shorter. [Gallup 9/08]

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RESTAURANTS

NEW YORK CITY

BARBUTO

775 Washington Street @ West 12th Street
New York, New York 10014
212-924-9700
Fax 212-924-9300
www.barbutonyc.com

This interesting little restaurant was suggested by Lisa, with whom I had a delightful lunch.

On the day we were there the weather was totally suitable for eating outside. The way this restaurant is constructed is the front wall consists of two very large

overhead sliding garage doors. When the weather is appropriate, as it was that day, the front and the side of the restaurant were fully open.

The menu changes every day. On the day we were there for lunch the menu included a mix of items that made it possible to select items that are more traditionally eaten at breakfast, like eggs or pancakes, or lunch, like salads and pastas.

Lisa selected the insalata Manzo - seared hanger steak, arugula, frisee, shallot & pecorino. I opted for gnocchi con granturco - crisp potato dumplings, corn, scallions & Pecorino Romano. Lisa had sorbet and I had ice cream to finish off the meal. Based on those meals we both felt we would opt to eat there again.

There appeared to be about 40 seats available. The service was quite good.

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SAN FRANCISCO

As will soon become apparent, your editor recently spent time in San Francisco for the occasion of Katie Neisen and Mark Jordan's wedding.

I was able to sample three breakfast/lunch joints, a restaurant at the Ferry Building, an In-N-Out Burger, and a first-rate, high-end restaurant.

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ACQUERELLO
1722 Sacramento Street
San Francisco, California 94109
415-567-5432
www.acquerello.com

As always, dinner with Julia and Stan is a treat! Stanley always selects interesting restaurants for our dinners. Julia is always an interesting dinner partner.

Acquerello's well-appointed dining room seats up to 55 people for regular dining, in tables of two and four that can be combined for parties of various sizes. For special events, the dining room can seat as many as 75 people; however, it becomes pretty crowded.

The service was exceptional. There appear to be 3 captains working the floor, including the owner and his son, as well as a serving person. It occurred to me that the service might have been a function of the fact that the owner knows Stanley (as it seems everyone does in the San Francisco food world). However, all of the other diners appeared to be getting roughly the same attention.

At the onset we were served a Fresh Brodo of vegetables with peas and beans.

Julia is a vegetarian and, since she was not finding an entree on the menu that was exactly to her liking, she was offered a special vegetable entre consisting of several prepared vegetables which followed her selected first course, Delicate Parmesan Baudino topped with lemony zucchini salad.

Stan started with Roast Peppers stuffed with tuna-Piedmontese style, followed by a Risotto of sweet prawns with Prosecco and English peas, and concluded with Baked halibut over regula with shellfish, peas and saffron vinaigrette.

I could not resist starting with Chilled Sonoma lamb tongue with pickled baby carrots and salsa verde. The taste is more subdued than my all-time favorite of pickled beef tongue. As a second course I chose Lemon-ricotta gnocchi with spinach and zucchini sauce, and finished with Pan-sauteed black bass over duo of lentils with shaved artichoke salad.

None of us were in the mood to be tempted by one of the tasty desserts, except for a few delightful cookies.

Stan and Julia tried a number of wines. The first selection that was presented to Julia did not meet her taste, so a second bottle of a different taste was quickly provided.

Commensurate with the high level of service we experienced generally, when I asked for directions to the men's room, our serving person led me to a floor-to-ceiling curtain. She parted the curtain and pointed in a direction that turned out to be the men's room.

The men's room is very commodious. The floor is covered with large tan tiles. Large grey tiles cover the walls to about the 3-foot level, topped by a strip of 1/2 size large tan tiles. The balance of the walls and ceiling are painted in a dark brown color.

In addition to very serviceable white ceramic commode and washbasin, there is one amenity now found in most men's rooms. Next to the door and across from the commode and washbasin there is a square glass top table with flowers and a burning candle. On each of two sides of the table there is an antique-appearing wooden chair with a floor seat cushion.

Reservations are clearly required.

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CURBSIDE CAFE
2417 California Street
San Francisco, California
[Don't bother thinking about making a reservation]
Open from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday - Sunday.

I went to Curbside with Bill and Suzie. It is quite small. Inside there is room for 24 people at tables for two that can be brought together for larger groups. There are also two tables out on the sidewalk that seat 2 and 3 people respectively. There is one bench that seats 2 people and the wooden chairs are not such that you would want to spend the afternoon on them.

There was one serving person who handled all of the action from greeting folks to taking orders and delivering up the food. He was in perpetual motion. However, when he was attending to a given customer he was attentive and unhurried.

Folks who appeared to be regulars simply came in and sat down at open tables without waiting to be seated.

At noon we were presented with menus that offered breakfast and lunch. Suzie had a vegetable salad topped with a chicken breast. Bill had an omelette with cottage cheese and tomato, rather than toast and potatoes. I started with an excellent onion soup (lots of onions) and then had a grilled chicken sandwich with vegetables on a panini bread.

Among the offerings, 7 sandwiches, 5 salad combos, 7 salads, 3 entrees, 8 omelettes. One example of the entrees is scallops and shrimp on angel hair pasta.

The restroom is "modest." The doors say "Restroom" with male and female symbols. Walking in, you are in a room that is approximately 4 feet by 4 ft. It has a white ceramic commode and a tiny white ceramic wash basin set into a corner next to the commode. The refuse container between the commode and the washbasin overflowed with used brown paper towels. There is a dark floor of some composition and dark tiles up to about waist height. These are topped by one row of medium-sized, bright red tiles. The rest of the walls and ceiling are painted in a dark color.

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IN-N-OUT BURGER

Simma, Ron, Rita, Jay and I decided to try, on Stan's recommendation, an In-N-Out Burger. To hear Stan tell it, it is "the burger." And, if you don't order it in a certain way, you make it very clear to everyone that you are not "In-N-Out Burger sophisticated."

In-N-Out Burger shops are found in California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. We were in San Francisco, so we decided to try one in that area.

To experience the In-N-Out Burger you must follow Stanley's instructions.

1st - you hire a Lincoln Navigator with a driver

2nd - you explain to the Four Seasons hotel doorman and the driver why you have decided to go to the Daly City outlet in Mateo, which is 30 minutes from the hotel, rather than the Ferry Pier mall that is 9 blocks from the hotel or the shop that is on Jefferson Street that is about 10 minutes from the hotel and also close to Stanley's house.

The reason for the selection of this particular In-N-Out Burger is of course quite simple. It is because Stanley thinks that the In-N-Out Burger shop outside the city has the better burgers than the ones closer to us. This is notwithstanding the fact that the meat, cheese, bread, potatoes, and condiments in all of these stores come from the same suppliers, and the cooking instructions and training are identical. [If, at this point, you have a question as to who is crazier, Stanley or the 5 of us, it may be a close call.]

Eating at In-N-Out burger is not complicated. There are 3 options.

#1 - A double cheese, double burger on a bun

#2 - A single cheese, single burger on a bun

#3 - A single burger on a bun

The actual burger and bun are medium-sized, larger than a White Castle, but smaller than a McDonalds. Each burger comes with lettuce tomato, onions, and sauce, all optional.

Each also comes with French fries, unless you request otherwise. Much is made of the preparation of the French fries. Each store starts the day with a fresh batch of whole potatoes that are washed, peeled and hand-cut, one potato at a time. They are cooked in 100%, trans-fat free, cholesterol-free, vegetable oil.

I did not record what each person in our party ordered, but each of them ordered a single item. I decided to do a taste testing, and ordered a double/double and a single/single. It is my judgement that the single/single is better than the double/double. Because of the greater amount of cheese in the larger version, the whole thing becomes soggy more quickly than the single/single. I did manage to finish both and a few fries to boot.

The general conclusion of everyone in the party was that we have eaten better, if different burgers. However, there was some feeling that they were not as good as McDonalds.

The restroom was clean, but nothing to write about.

On the way back to the hotel I asked our driver whether he had a view about the In-N-Out burgers. In his view, the burgers at Taylors, another hamburger haven, are superior. and it is also located only 9 blocks from our hotel.

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ROCCO'S CAFE
South of Market Street
1131 Folsom Street, between 7th & 8th
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-554-0522
Fax 415-554-0531
www.roccoscafe.com

This is a neighborhood joint that Stanley selected for my first breakfast in San Francisco. The place looks like it has been there for decades, but at least this location opened in 1990.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner is served. The menu is endless. There are 11 different omelettes, 5 kinds of fritiatas, and about 8 additional egg combinations, in addition to the omelettes. And then of course, there are a half dozen kinds of pancakes, waffles, and French toast, and the usual list of meats.

While WW is not going to layout the entire lunch and dinner menus, there are 19 kinds of pasta, along with 12 sandwiches, plus a flock of other entrees on the luncheon menu. And, yes, they do have take-out and offer delivery.

When we arrived at about 7:45 a.m. there was ample parking on the street. The small supermarket that is located next door to Rocco's had opened the large metal gate that covered its front door.

It seats about 50-60 people with small 2 person tables that can obviously be configured for whatever size group comes through the door.

As you enter, you see to the left a large L-shaped counter and the open kitchen that seems to fill the back quarter of the restaurant. The walls are covered with framed pictures of everything from movie stars to you name it.

Stanley chose a half cantaloupe (very large) with bananas and cottage cheese. I selected the Denver omelette, made with egg whites. The omelette was excellent, but the size could easily feed two people. I did not finish it. I also had cottage cheese and tomatoes on the side, rather than toast and potatoes.

I also had an excellent hot chocolate. Stanley stuck with coffee, and when he noted that it was not very hot, the serving person apologized and made a fresh pot.

There is a unisex restroom. It fits the rest of the restaurant. There is a reddish door that has the word "Restroom" on a plaque in the middle. Another sign says "This is not an exit." I entered. The entire restroom is not larger than 4 feet wide and 6 feet long. Immediately to the left is a single white ceramic commode. Directly ahead is a small white ceramic wash basin. Directly to the right there is a wooden door that is slightly ajar. I glanced through the door and saw a narrow set of stairs heading into the basement. The floor is covered with mid-sized black tiles, and the walls are covered with multi-colored tiles in shapes that are not quite squares and not quite triangles. The restroom is not as dingy as some we have seen, I would still put it in the group.

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MAMA'S
on Washington Square
1701 Stockton Street
San Francisco, California 94133
415-362-6421
www.mamas.sf.com

If you decide to try Mama's, which WW recommends that you do, wear comfortable shoes; it is inevitable that you will spend some time waiting in line. There is the line outside the restaurant to get in, and the line leading to the location at which you place your order and pay. After paying, you may stand around for a while before you get a place to sit down. However, once inside you can entertain yourself watching the cooking process.

Mama's is open from 8 a.m.-3 p.m., Tuesday - Sunday. There is seating for about 45 people on two levels. With the exception of a couple of tables that can handle up to 6 people, the other tables are for two, but are regularly moved together or apart depending on the size of parties that are waiting to be seated.

Stan, Jay and I arrived at Mama's at about 8:20 a.m. and there was already a line. Stanley has a fairly complicated formula for figuring out each wave of diners, so that you wait outside for the shortest period of time. It is obvious that the formula is flawed.

WW's advice is, be prepared to be patient. This is not the place to go if you are looking for a quick bite.

The centerpiece of the restaurant is the open kitchen, where a head chef and 2 assistants seem to be in perpetual motion. The menus are hung on the walls above the kitchen. [If you go online you can print out a menu in advance sans the

daily specials. The daily specials are written on two small whiteboards, one that shows through the window so you can see it from outside, and the other over the chef's head.]

On average, the restaurant serves 290 people a day, which means each chair turns over 6 times a day.

Once you order and are assigned a table, your meal is served to you by one of 4 serving people. I could not quite figure out the system they used to know where meals were to go as they came off the cooking line. I forgot to ask, but whatever the system it seemed to be unerring.

For some reason, Stanley has gone healthy in his eating habits. You'll recall that at Rocco's he ordered cantaloupe, bananas and cottage cheese. At Mama's he ordered bananas, blue berries and plain yogurt.

Happily, Jay did not succumb to Stanley's new habits, and ordered the Smoked salmon scramble with green onions, bagel and cream cheese, and an orange juice.

Throwing care to the wind for a second time, I ordered the French Toast Sampler plate with 3 kinds of french toast - cranberry orange walnut, banana nut, and Swedish cinnamon topped with bananas and mixed berries and a side of bacon. All of it was excellent.

There is a full menu of breakfast treats, including such weekend specials as Dungeness Crab Omelette with Avocado and Sour Cream or a Shrimp and Avocado Benedict with Grilled tomatoes.

There is also a more limited luncheon menu, ranging from a traditional hamburger to a California sandwich described as Avocado, Tomato, Red Onion, and Jack Cheese on whole grain bread with salad.

I did not check out the restrooms. It seemed like too much work to get through the crowd to get to the back of the restaurant, where I assume they were located.

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THE SLANTED DOOR
1 Ferry Building #3
San Francisco, California 94111
415-861-8032
Fax 415-861-8329
www.slanteddoor.com

This 175 seat restaurant describes itself as Vietnamese, but is probably better described as Pan Asian.

There were 5 of us at lunch, Jay, Rita, Simma, Ron and me. We shared 6 dishes, several of the dishes in multiple servings: chilled Galapagos shrimp; crispy imperial rolls with shrimp, pork, glass noodles and peanuts; barbecued Niman Ranch pork spareribs with honey Hoisin sauce; grapefruit and jicama salad with red cabbage, pickled carrots and candied pecans; Niman Ranch shaking beef cubed filet mignon, Sausalie Springs watercress, red onions and lime dipping sauce; and chicken claypot with caramel sauce, chilies and fresh ginger. Jay alone also enjoyed a shrimp and pork wonton soup with five sliced pork and egg noodles.

All in all, a relatively light (except for the ribs), but filling meal.

Again we passed on dessert, although I was particularly drawn to a couple of the offerings: Chocolate pudding cake with caramel sauce and whipped creme fraiche, and Cardamon rice pudding with wilted muscat and summer royal grapes.

If you are a lemonade fan, do not pass up the freshly made lemonade. It is served from a carafe that is left at the table.

If at all possible try for one of the booths that overlook the harbor. The floor-to-ceiling glass windows overlook the Golden Gate Bridge, the ferry landings, and on a nice day a skyline filled with sails.

The restroom is unisex to the extreme. On one side is a long sink and mirror to be used by women and men alike, and on the other side of the room a series of individual, fully-enclosed rooms, each with a single white ceramic commode.

While you are at it, take a stroll through the rest of the peer. There are a variety of interesting shops vending fresh and prepared foods and other related products. On Saturdays, there is an outdoor farmers' market of excellent composition.

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THEATER

In the ordinary course WW does not review or otherwise comment on stage or theatrical productions. And it is unlikely that the readers of WW would be interested in the tastes of your editor. However, for the first time in the 23 years (!) in which some form of the WW has been published, your editor is making a recommendation. It is not likely to happen again.

BEACH BLANKET BABYLON
Club Fugazi
678 Beach Blanket Babylong Blvd (Green Street)
San Francisco, California
415-421-4222
beachblanketbabylon.com

This show has been running, in various iterations and in various places in the city, for some 34 years.

On the night that Jay, Rita, Simma, Ron, and I attended the subject of its humor was both dated and contemporary.

There is no way to describe the show, except to say that all 5 of us laughed or giggled pretty much non-stop throughout the 90-minute performance.

Just take WW's word for it, go to the show. It is worth the price of admission. To be safe, order your tickets in advance.

As you will note from the performance schedule below, persons under the age of 21 may only attend certain performances. This is not a show for children.

Beer, wine, soft drinks, and some caloric nibbles are available.

Performance times

Wednesday and Thursday 8:00 p.m.

Friday and Saturday 6:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

Sunday 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Persons under 21 are only admitted to the Sunday matinee

Mike

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