

Ohio Political Journal

THE CAMPAIGNERS

Les AuCoin is a former nine-term U.S. Congressman (D-OR), author, and visiting professor (Southern Oregon University). He and his wife, Sue, a professional photographer, reside in Ashland, Oregon. They have a summer home in Bozeman, Montana.

This log describes the experiences Sue and I had in Ohio as surrogates for Barack Obama and Joe Biden in the last month of the 2008 presidential election campaign. Ohio was then and is now a must-win state; since 1900, FDR and JFK are the only presidents of any party who lost the state and went on to win the White House.

We were determined to do all we could to eradicate Bush-Cheney-Rove politics. To us, that meant stopping John McCain and Sara Palin. It wasn't enough to just vote and donate. We wanted to put twenty-four years of campaign trail experience into the fight. In Obama, we also had a candidate who excited us more than anyone since JFK.

In the end, we had driven 8,151 miles to, around, and back from the Buckeye state. Sue followed the schedule and map, drove, photographed, and helped plot strategy while I dusted off my speaking voice, having retired from Congress 15 years earlier. Some of Ohio governor Ted Strickland's top volunteers scheduled us and other surrogates for a week at a time, sometimes with last-minute changes. Sue and I did the whole gig on our own nickel—gas, meals, apartment rent. Plus, other essentials, like table wine!

Being part of Obama's victory was a keepsake memory. So were the customs, culture, and politics of Ohioans and the rhythms and high stakes of presidential politics. We

learned an amazing amount about national politics, some of the moments we capture here.



LAUNCH, NEOCONSERVATIVES, PROGRESSIVE ERA, ROBBER BARON

Four Days 'Til Launch

In Battleground States, Democrats, deregulation, High Expectations, Obama, Political activism on

September 27, 2008 at 4:06 pm

Bozeman, Montana

On Wednesday, my wife and I will drop everything we're doing and drive to Ohio to campaign for Barack Obama and Joe Biden for the last month of the campaign.

We hope we can provide a modicum of help in a battleground state for a ticket we hope and believe will lead the country into a new era of progressive governance and away from the law-of-the-jungle, soak-the-middle class, robber baron era of most of the last thirty years.

But the most important thing we will influence will no doubt be our own psyches. If we sit by as observers much longer, we're both going to blow a gasket. Rather than hoping neoconservatives won't steal this country, we want to help Obama and Biden stop them from it, and roll back the trickle-down fleecing, the environmental pillaging and the preemptive war-making that has already occurred.

We hope this journal will give you an up-close and personal look at the campaign from the trenches of a hotly contested state that **may decide the election**. In 104 years—with only three exceptions—no one has won the White House without winning Ohio's electoral votes.

So, we'll now throw everything we have into Ohio to try to restore the best instincts of the country we grew up in. If, god forbid, Obama should lose, at least we'll have a good answer when our granddaughters ask us, "Pop-Pops and Nana, what did *you* do in the table stakes election of 2008?"

BIDEN-PALIN DEBATE, BUCKEYES, POLLS, RASCAL, SUPERSTITION, SWING STATES

Tight As a Tic

In Biden, Palin, Tight on September 29, 2008 at 10:05 am

Bozeman, Montana

Polls show it maddeningly close in Buckeye land, but none of them is fresher than seven days old. Rasmussen (9/23) has it McCain 47, Obama 46, Other, 3, Undecided, 3.

Insider Advantage (9/22) has it dead even, 46-46, with Other at 1 percent and Undecided at 7.

This is just me, but I think Thursday's Biden-Palin debate could have a major effect on the numbers in this still unsettled race, in swing states like Ohio and nationally.

I tend to get superstitious about these things. And I can't believe that Palin in debate will seem as shockingly ... shallow as she was in the Katie Couric interviews. If true, it means she will beat expectations (now at approximately zero). In turn, that would give a boost to what Republicans manage with a straight face to call their "ticket."

On the other hand, I've known Joe Biden as a friend for more than thirty years. When he is on top of his game, he's as good a debater as there is. Be on top of your game, Joe.

God, we can't wait to get out there to work off some of this nervous energy!

Our beloved dog Rascal, however, has chosen this moment to relapse on an intestinal illness we thought he'd licked a week ago. We'll have to delay our departure by at least a day to take him to a specialist in Helena to pinpoint what's going on. Can't leave a sick dog with our daughter here in Bozeman. Aargh!

AARP DISCOUNT, BIDEN-PALIN DEBATE, SOUTH DAKOTA, SPEARFISH SOUTH DAKOTA, TRAVELING BILLBOARD

Hello, South Dakota!

In Biden, Montana, Palin, South Dakota, Uncategorized, Wyoming on

October 2, 2008 at 6:27 pm

Spearfish, South Dakota

No fish here that I can find. Or spears. But we did find a clean hotel with a comfortable bed at a reasonable rate. AARP discount. I feel like an old fart.



Our traveling billboard

The last thing before leaving was to paint the sign on the back window.

On the freeway, all across red eastern Montana, red, red Wyoming and into red, red, red South Dakota, people saw our sign and waved madly. Some used all five fingers.

Twenty minutes 'til Biden-Palin. Catch you later. C'mon, Joe!

IOWA, LILY TOMLIN, SOUTH DAKOTA, TRUDY THE BAG LADY, UNDECIDEDS, WATERLOO

You Can't Always Choose Where You Spend A Night

In Biden, central Oregon, Culver, Dave Willis, Iowa, Lily Tomlin, Madras, Palin, South Dakota, Waterloo on

October 3, 2008 at 9:26 pm

Waterloo, Iowa

If on this trip we're going to meet our Waterloo, let it be in *Iowa*, not Ohio.

Eleven and a half hours on the road today, across South Dakota (a helluva lot wider than tall, dammit!), and into Iowa.



This fellow--though not representative of Ohio undecideds (and we can be glad for that!)--is among the targets of our mission. Study this chap and leave a comment with a suggestion for a message that might reach him. (Don't be too serious.)

If any of you have ever driven from Madras to Culver—central Oregon flatland farming country—then you have as good as driven through Iowa. Those miles are on a spool, and someone keeps rolling them out ahead of you, ahead of you, ahead ...

I've been thinking about the Biden-Palin debate all day, and it came to me who Palin reminds me of: Trudy, the Bag Lady, in our friend, Lily Tomlin's character in her one-

woman play, *Searching For Signs Of Intelligent Life In The Universe*. Trudy, see, was a conduit for messages from deep space.

How else does one explain the collision of thought shards or **Ifill questions and Palin answers** passing each other like ships in a fog?

I'm proud of Joe Biden. If Palin beat expectations, I say, well, if you start at zero ...

(My best friend in Ashland wrote to tell me he was sure during the telecast that Palin was winking at him.)

G'Night.

ARRIVAL!, BILL AYERS, CHARLES KEATING, COLUMBUS, FLAT TIRE, MCCAIN ETHICS, MCCAIN GOES NEGATIVE

Hello, Columbus!

In campaign smears, deregulation, financial meltdown, Glass-Steagall Act, Gramm, jobs, Obama, Palin, Uncategorized, unions on

October 6, 2008 at 10:29 am

Columbus, Ohio

Well, all right! We be here, Ohio, and on Wednesday, we start stumping. Our only mishap along the way: a flat tire in Richmond, Indiana, on the Ohio border.



Our elation in arriving safely was tempered by the news this morning about McCain's decision to go negative.

Sarah Failin' followed orders by smilingly barking about Obama "**paling around with terrorists**." Her reference is to Bill Ayers, a founder of the Weather Underground, a group that took credit of non-fatal bombings of the Pentagon and U.S. Capitol when Obama was only a child.

(Ayers is now a Distinguished Professor of Education at The University of Illinois at Chicago, worked with Mayor Richard Daley to reform Chicago public schools, and was one of three authors of a successful \$49.5 million private foundation proposal to finance those reforms.)

Smearing is what happens to a candidacy like McCain's, **when it has run out of things to talk about.**

But, John Boy, if you want to talk about associations, be careful.

You, John, were rapped by the Senate ethics committee (as an adult) for “paling around” with **Charles Keating**, the S&L swindler you tried to protect (as an adult), and you were complicit in the savings and loan debacle that cost Americans \$160 billion in savings.

Having learned nothing from that experience, John, you joined Senator Phil Gramm (as an adult) in deregulating the banking, securities and insurance industries and –a move that made possible the risky Wall Street wheeling and dealing that has cost Americans more than \$1 trillion in savings and investments and is worsening by the day.

Just checked with our schedulers. I told them I want to speak in as many union halls as possible. The blue-collar vote here may make the difference. Ohio has lost 250 thousand manufacturing jobs during the Bush years, with McCain's support (as adult).

DEBATE, MCCAIN, OBAMA, POLLS, UNDECIDEDS

Debate Polls Are All Obama, But . . .

In debate polls, McCain, Obama, Obama's possible ceiling, second debate, Undecideds on

October 7, 2008 at 11:34 am

In Round 2, McCain needed a game-changer, and did not get it. Obama wanted to close the sale and did not do it. But Obama moved closer to his goal than McCain did his, with 29 days left, by sweeping the board on **polls judging the debate.**

Here are the results at **MediaCurves.Com.**

On the other hand, a recent **AP-Yahoo! News poll** found that 18 percent of likely voters are up for grabs — undecided or willing to change their minds — little more than five

weeks before Americans choose between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain.

A large chunk of these voters say they are hurting on a personal level from the country's economic woes, and, like everyone else, they say the economy is the top issue. Most are looking for a better life and a leader to help make it happen — and most haven't found what they seek in Obama or McCain.

Apropos of this, over at [Five Thirty Eight blog](#), there's a discussion of race and what Obama's ceiling may be, and some concern that he may be near it, which would mean, if true, that McCain has an advantage with those undecideds. It's the most nerve-wracking election I've ever been through.

Update: *A reader just left an important comment that shows flaws in Five Thirty Eight's analysis. I urge you to check it out by clicking on Comments, below.*

FDR, LOST JOBS, RACISM, TRICKLE-UP, TWIN CRISES, VOLUNTEERS

Plunging Into the Cross-Currents

In Democrats, deregulation, financial meltdown, jobs, Political activism, UAW, unions on

October 8, 2008 at 2:46 pm

Mansfield, Ohio

The Obama staff got me into a Democratic lunch in Mansfield, about 80 miles north of Columbus. The party central committee has taken out a mortgage on an old building on the town square and the building trades unions donated time and material to fix it up.



Obama's magnificent volunteers! The woman in the background had not worked in a campaign until this one.

Now the Richland County Democrats have a spiffy headquarters with a kitchen and dining area and full basement and they strut their stuff with an attractive green canopy on the front. They make money by renting the hall out to the community

Local Republicans are *very* annoyed.

In my remarks, I stated my view that the country has not been in such an economic and military crisis since FDR, that to get out of this mess will require Barack Obama, a trickle-up Democrat who'll regulate the high rollers on Wall Street who played with other people's money and lost over \$2 trillion of our savings and retirement funds in 15 months—a leader who will reject the “ready, shoot, aim” military policies of Bush and McCain.

Most of the 40-person audience were seniors except for some loyal labor guys. One woman was pleased with Obama's lead here but gave me a rueful look and said, “Opinion in this state can turn on a dime.”

Outside, one of the labor guys was verbally handling a man who ranted that he wouldn't vote for Obama because he (Obama) "won't say if he's black or white, and he's gotta be one or the other."

"He's the most capable candidate," the UAW guy replied, ignoring delirium.

"But he's one or the other," the thirtysomethng guy said, "and he refuses to say!"

This morning's news carried another factory closure, this one in Ashland, Ohio, 20 minutes away from Mansfield. One hundred jobs vaporized overnight. Management would not let workers in this morning to clean out their lockers and desks.

We dropped by the Obama headquarters before leaving town, one of 70 in the state. Volunteers were inputting responses from last night's telephone bank. Obama volunteers have reached 43 percent of Ohio's registered voters. Nearly 700,000 new voters have been registered this year.

HEALTH CARE, ORATORY, REREGULATION, RFK, WALL STREET, YOUNG DEMOCRATS

Fairfield County Dems 'Got Game'

In Democrats, deregulation, financial meltdown, Political activism, second debate on

October 9, 2008 at 8:59 pm

Lancaster, Ohio

In downtown **Lancaster** tonight, Fairfield County Democrats took over the old Elks Lodge on Main Street for a fundraiser with foot-stomping music, wallet-emptying auctioneering, and red meat oratory.

If McCain has to come through here to take battleground Ohio, it'll run into potholes, barbed wire, traffic bumps and a pitchfork brigade of Democrats who "got game" and are tired as hell and aren't going to go softly into that dark neocon night. They include Larry Blair, one of the key event coordinators, whose birthday, we discovered, is the same as mine this month.



Les, Ami Williams, and The Next President Of The United States

Young people were in good numbers with the middle aged and seniors—a good sign. Ami Williams was typical of the younger set. She’s president of the Fairfield County Democratic Club, and, at twenty something, reminds me of the energetic late Sixties firebrands who founded Oregon’s DEMOFORUM and went on to dominate Democratic politics for a generation.

My message came out of the Bobby Kennedy/Cesar Chavez playbook: “In this country, we don’t have a man on a white horse to get it done for us. Here, the people do the work.”

Which means, in the next 26 days, instead of watching football and taking in movies, we all need to knock on 50 more doors, phone 100 more people, give ten, 20, 50 dollars more to stop the hijacking of our country.

I said Obama would reregulate high rollers on Wall Street that McCain voted to deregulate and as a result of his vote, the “Masters of the Universe” lost 2 trillion dollars of our savings and retirement funds.

I closed with a little noted moment from Debate #2. Tom Brokaw asked the candidates if they thought affordable health care for Americans was a right or a responsibility. McCain, the owner of 11 homes and too many cars to count, said, “responsibility.”

Obama said it was a birthright of every man, woman and child in America. We’re Americans, after all. We take care of our own. Joe Klein of *Time* said the answers may will well turn into the **defining moment of the campaign**.

CINCINNATI, EDUCATION, GOP TURF, HEALTH CARE, TED STRICKLAND, TURNOUT

Live, Together: Jerry Springer And Me

In Democrats, Political activism, Southeastern Ohio on

October 10, 2008 at 10:08 pm

Mason, Ohio

While you can find yourself in ... unusual ... situations when you’re trying to elect a president of the United States, I did not imagine that I’d share a microphone with TV talk show host **Jerry Springer**.

That happened **here last night** at the annual dinner of the Warren County Democrats.



Springer

I was the undercard. Controversial Springer, the main event.

In fairness, Springer has a law degree and was at 33 a popular mayor of Cincinnati. He campaigns tirelessly for Democratic candidates, especially in his home state, Ohio. Last night, a cystic fibrosis patient in a wheelchair wanted to meet him. As soon as Springer was told this, he was out of his chair, asking, "Where is he?"

He also made an impassioned speech for universal health care and education.

Warren County, north of Cincinnati, is hard-rock Republican. Democratic chairman Jeff Leis and other party leaders have dramatically increased the party vote from the 2004 Kerry campaign and the 2006 election of Governor Ted Strickland. Last night, they packed 180 stalwarts into a banquet room, no small feat in an area where folks live their lives in a Republican echo chamber.

My message, in addition to the issues, was urge them not to be discouraged if they cannot carry Warren County for Obama. They won't. Instead, their job is to do their part to maximize Obama's statewide margin by delivering every possible Democrat in the county.

CHRIST, DEPRESSION, FDR, HEALTH CARE, JFK, NEOCONS, RFK, SUPERRICH

Advocacy On An Appalachian Afternoon

In A Better Deal, deregulation, financial meltdown, Political activism, Southeastern Ohio on

October 11, 2008 at 8:24 pm

Guysville, Ohio



Les, giving a hoot and a holler for Obama and Biden

The host of today's Barbecue For Obama, said to me, "Push the economic issues."

You bet. I can do that.

Then on the two-hour drive to this Ohio/West Virginia border area, what Ted Bernard meant dawned on me. **Appalachia**, one of the poorest regions of the country, has been responding for years to the Republican siren song of guns, god, and gays while the GOP serviced the superrich at their expense.

So, with everyone's political sensibilities shaken by deregulated robber barons, I tried to push the issue hard, starting with health care.

McCain, in response to a question by Tom Brokaw, said affordable health care is a "responsibility." Code for, "It's up to you, Jack. And if you can't cut it, tough." Obama,

bless him, said, “It’s a *right*.” The god-given right of every American man, woman and child to have health care at least as good as John McCain gets as a U.S. senator.



Bakin' for Obama: Working for change, one cookie at a time. By WORD (Women Openly Reclaiming Democracy)

Thanks to the mainstream media, the chasm between the candidates has barely been noticed. But every time I mention it, I get an overwhelming response.

If Obama breaks through in Ohio’s part of Appalachia—a broad geographic and hard-scrabble cultural region stretching from southern Pennsylvania through West Virginia, eastern Ohio, Kentucky and beyond—it’s lights out for McCain, Palin, and the Republicans.

However, it remains a very open question. Maybe we’ll take Ohio anyway. Yet, I remember Bobby Kennedy, damnit, and I want to make inroads into this region because my blood boils when I see neocon manipulation. (You can still find a picture of JFK, RFK and Jesus Christ on the walls of a lot of homes in the region. In the old days, it was just two, Christ and FDR.)

Give a President Obama four years, I say, and he'll transform this region for a generation.

I told this audience that the financial and economic crisis was the gravest since FDR, caused by a get-government-out-of-the-way credo championed by Bush and McCain and the Republicans, and that it'll take a re-regulating "trickle up" Democratic president, not a trickle-down Republican, to set things right.

But my words paled compared to a local party leader who followed me to the mike. He told the crowd that we had returned to 1932, the year he was born, the year FDR beat Hoover. "I didn't live through the Depression," he said, "but I lived through the effects of it."

His family of eight wore shoes only to go to church and to school and got a new pair once a year. "Thanks to Bush and Cheney and McCain," he said, "we're on the edge of the cliff again."

I was sitting on a folding chair, speech done, listening to bluegrass, when Kari Gunther-Seymour came up with a basket of cookies. Kari is a person you always hope to know.

The communications director of a reject Republican organization called WORD (Women Openly Reclaiming Democracy) in Albany, Ohio, she and her colleagues founded *Baking For Obama: Working For Change, One Cookie At A Time*. With their sales proceeds, they fund Democratic action.

"One of many things Appalachian women are good at is cooking," said the mother of an Iraq war veteran serving his second tour. "And here in Appalachia, lots of things get decided at the kitchen table."

If you think you have courage, try operating a WORD bake sale on the steps of an Appalachian courthouse. Kari is an inspiration. If the rest of us had an ounce of her determination, this election would be over.

We won't carry Appalachia, but if we increase the Democratic vote beyond Kerry's, it'll help us take this state. A change of only nine votes per precinct here in 2004 would have meant the end of George W. Bush.

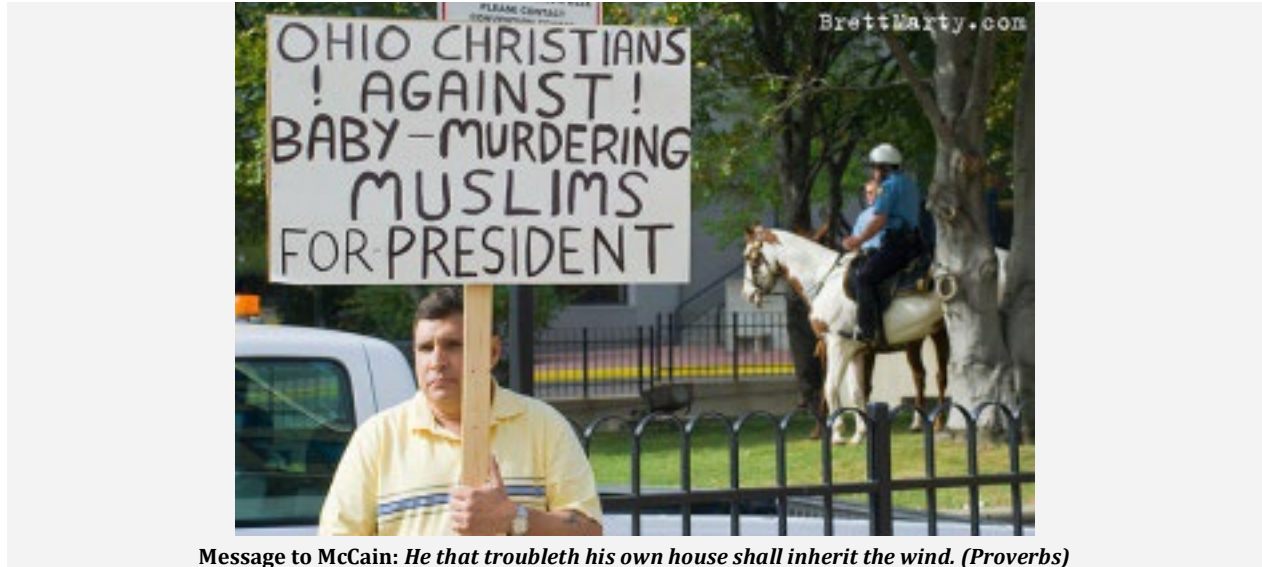
APPALACHIA, BLUE STATES, GOP SUITS, LEAGUE OF DEMOCRACIES, MARIST POLL, POLLS, RASSMUSSEN
POLL, TRUTHOUT, VOTER FRAUD

Pale Blue And Tense

In Battleground States, Biden, Southeastern Ohio on October 14, 2008 at 6:06 am

Columbus, Ohio

Campaigning in Ohio isn't for the faint of heart.



Message to McCain: *He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind. (Proverbs)*

Though it has been a good week for Obama nationally and polls show him, remarkably, ahead in four of five battleground states (Ohio, Florida, Missouri and Virginia) and tied in North Carolina, Ohio's shade of blue is too pale for comfort.

The latest Marist poll has it 49-45 for Obama here while Rasmussen makes it Obama, 49-47. In and of themselves, it's arguable that such margins would withstand a eighth inning charge by McCain, should it occur.

Meanwhile, Truthout reports that Republicans are doing what they can to disenfranchise likely Obama voters. [When McCain talks about his "League of Democracies," why doesn't he include Ohio?] The latest moves here include lawsuits that invoke the specter of voting fraud.

Ohio's weeklong period in which new voters can register and immediately cast a ballot was ripe for voting fraud, the Rs say. The state's method of verifying voter registration information? Insufficient, they claim.

Voter fraud was a buzz phrase for the Ohio GOP when it pushed voter identification requirements through the state Legislature in 2005. It's now a driving factor behind a flurry of GOP lawsuits leveled against Democratic Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, seeking either to

restrict early voting or mandate how voter information should be checked. [[Click here for more](#)]

Here on the ground, our schedule is full this week, taking us back to Athens County abutting the Appalachian region of Ohio toward the end of the week. Biden is in the same southeastern region this week, following Obama's well-received swing last week.

Tonight, Newark, Ohio, and the Licking County Democratic Club.

BILL AYERS, HOOVER, JIM CROW, JIMMY CARTER, MARION OHIO, MCCAIN DONOR, MCKINLEY, OBAMA MUSLIM, POLITICAL DISHONESTY, REPUBLICAN BRAND, SOCIALIZING RISK, SURROGATE DEBATE, UNITED CONSERVATIVES OF OHIO, WALTER ANNEBERG

Jim Crow, In Midwest Wing Tips

In Battleground States, campaign smears, deregulation, financial meltdown, McCain, Obama, Uncategorized on October 17, 2008 at 12:10 pm

Mason, Ohio

Ten minutes before the presidential surrogate debate at Ohio State University-Marion, the local late-arriving state senator—past winner of the United Conservatives of Ohio Man of the Year award—approached me for the obligatory handshake.

While he looked me over, I measured him. *Six-foot one—about my height. Combed over red hair. And a thin smile that didn't reach his eyes.* My synapses connected with my Army days in 1960s Tennessee, where I'd met Jim Crow. Here he was again, I was sure of it, but in Midwest wing tips and a Brooks Brothers suit.

As students filed in, I began to understand the setup. A conservative local legislator representing McCain, a conservative town, scattered McCain-Palin tee shirts in the audience and none for Obama-Biden. Plus a conservative college administrator who ruled out candidate introductions, which worked against the one debater nobody knew—me.

You can just tell them about yourself in your remarks, sir.

But that would take time out of my message, ma'am.

Oh, congressman, this is merely a student event!

All right, then. If the fix was in, I'd at least make 'em squirm over the vacuity of the Republican brand.

So, we went at it, me first:

LA: "Are you and your family better off today than eight years ago? Despite the meltdown made possible by Bush and McCain's get-government-out-of-the-way philosophy? Are your jobs more secure? Your parents' retirement funds? Are they more able to keep you in college and pay the fuel and medical bills? If so, and you want more of the same, John McCain's your man. If not, if you want a fundamental new deal from government, then you should vote for my candidate, Barack Obama."

R: "Our problems began when Obama's cronies, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, took over Congress two years ago. And when Rep. Barney Frank and Sen. Chris Dodd took over the banking committees. They and Obama will raise your taxes, increase the deficit and create socialism."

LA: "Um, senator, your president's reckless binge of borrow-and-spend has created the largest deficit in history and he has just nationalized banks. He and McCain have no problem with socialism, it's just a question of for whom they want it. They like to privatize profits and socialize risk. They socialize risk by putting the failures of private enterprise on the backs of taxpayers."

R: "Character is the single most important issue in this election. John McCain is a war hero, a POW, [blah, blah, blah]. Obama has Muslim ties and worked with Bill Ayers, a domestic terrorist who bombed the Pentagon [blah, blah, blah]."

LA: "Students, your local ... representative ... knows, or should know, that Obama was eight years old when Ayers committed his crimes, which Barack has denounced. Obama didn't come in contact the man until some 30 years later, when Ayers was a Distinguished Professor of Education at the University of Illinois and Chicago's Citizen of the Year whose reform of Chicago public schools was funded by the Annenburg Challenge. That organization was created by Walter Annenburg, one of Ronald and Nancy Reagan's best friends, and on whose board sits a major McCain donor, Arnie Webber, a former Nixon assistant secretary of labor."

R: "Obama and the Democrats will take us back to Jimmy Carter, when interest rates reached 20%, inflation, 12%, unemployment, nearly 8%, and the deficit out of control ..."

LA: "... Or, more likely, to Bill Clinton, who gave us a budget surplus Bush and McCain and the Republicans squandered." [I should have added, "If presidents who've been out of office for some 30 years or more are an issue, let's have my learned opponent defend Herbert Hoover or William McKinley, the former of The Great Depression, the latter of the Teapot Dome Scandal."]

R: "Obama lied about his religion, in fact was a Muslim from birth and continued to be a Muslim until his wife made him change."

"LA: Support that! What's your source?"

"The web site, [www-dot ...] I've got a transcript. The students can read it for themselves after we're done."

LA: "**Name** the author."

R: A black radio talk show host in Los Angeles."

LA: Right. A black host, "authentic" because he is one of Obama's "people." I walked out into the audience with the mike and turned back to the man:

"You call yourself a former 'educator?' I taught at Southern Oregon University for eight years, students; if any of you turned in a paper with such flimsy, propagandistic sources instead of authoritative ones, I'd have given you and 'F.' [Turning again to the state legislator] And that's what you've earned here, senator. Shame on you. Shame on you!"

"Are you voting for Obama When it was over, the president of the campus Republicans came up to me to apologize for what happened. I told him he had nothing to apologize for, that he, the student, was going to be all right, but that I hoped he'd learned something about honor and intellectual honesty.

As I left, another student approached, introducing himself as a Republican. "Senator Mumper thought this was going to be a turkey shoot," he said. "I'd say instead he walked into a swinging door."

I asked, who you voting for?"

"I was for McCain," he said. "But I want to think it over."

ADAMS COUNTY, ALLEN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, STARK COUNTY, THIRD DEBATE

Three-City Blur

In Already Blue & Going for Indigo, Turning blue on

October 17, 2008 at 3:15 pm

Lima, Canton and West Union, Ohio

Wednesday, Thursday and Friday were a blur, covering three cities from the central west to the east, the south, and back again to Columbus, our home base, in the center of the state.



Neighbor versus neighbor! / S. AuCoin Photos

Lima:

Cautioned that Allen County (pronounced like the bean, mind, not the capital of Peru) was Republican country, we went slack-jawed at the sight of some 500 Democrats packed into the American Legion Hall with the local high school band playing and later serenaded by a woman whose voice was touched by an angel.



Sisters & Democrats to a one S. AuCoin Photos

Rick Sifred and other party leaders tipped the registration advantage to the here they're determined to pick up seats "from the White House to the state house to the court house." The annual Democratic dinner even attracted the local TV and radio station and a reporter from the daily newspaper.

The audience trickled off even as the door prizes were raffled. Nobody seemed to want a prize or a table setting if it meant missing the third presidential debate at nine o'clock?

We got a motel room so we could watch the debate rather than listen to it on our car radio. Great that the instant polls gave it to Obama, now three-for-three but, damn, I wish he would have thrown a right cross to the jaw on the Ayers thing!

Canton:

U.S. 32 seemed endless the next day en route to Canton. But the Stark County Democrats, led by Johnnie Maier, a former five-term member of the Ohio House, bucked us up with a confident, upscale dinner, complete with dance combo and open bar.



Happy Days Are Here Again

They turned this county blue in 2004 for John Kerry and they are now looking to turn back the clock. Their trick was simple: recruit good candidates and leave no Republican unchallenged on the ballot.



Les meets force-of-nature, Chairman Johnnie Maier

Couple that with serious leadership in the party. Hillary carried Stark County, if not every county in Ohio, in the primary but there are no divisions in *this* party—none.

West Union:

In Adams County, along the Kentucky border, a lot of Ohioans speak with a drawl, and it is red, red, red.



Mother holding what the election is all about

“We have our list of Democrats,” Linda Stepp, a Democratic official said, and we’ll turn them out quietly. Don’t want to stir up the Republicans!”

"FOG OF WAR", AMERICAN FEDERATION OF
TEACHERS, CANVASSERS, CLEVELAND, IMPROVISATION, OBAMA, UNIONS, WORKING AMERICA

Hurly Burly In Cleveland

In jobs, Palin, Political activism, Uncategorized, unions on

October 18, 2008 at 1:29 pm

Cleveland, Ohio



Spirited canvassers from the American Federation of Teachers / S. AuCoin Photos

It was one of those days when a schedule goes screwy but improvisation makes it better than you planned. We were going to meet members of the American Federation of Teachers at their lunch break from a day of professional training and go on to a gathering of canvassers for Working America, an AFL-CIO affiliate.

But the Working America office here didn't get the message (chalk it up to "the fog of war") and the AFT lunch would occur an hour later than scheduled.

No problem for Wyn Antonio, our host, a AFT retiree, a union organizer in Mississippi and veteran of more campaigns you can count. We'll use the time for *other* things!



The remarkable Wyn Antonio w/ Les & the Obama van

First, we're off to the labor hall in her car, after she has cleared campaign paraphernalia, empty coffee cups, phone bills, Kleenex boxes and sandwich wrappers off our designated seats. We arrive in time to give an impromptu pep talk to a group of AFT members, fresh off the bus from Buffalo, New York, for a weekend of canvassing.

Cut it, Les; Gotta split!

Next stop: a tailgater for AFT canvassers in a parking lot downtown. We arrived to find bratwurst and chicken smoking on grills, country music on a CD player, and a gaggle of bushed but satisfied workers milling around and sitting on lawn chairs.

You're on, Les! I start riffin' on the spot, telling them they embody the spirit of Bobby Kennedy and Caesar Chavez, who used to say, "In this country, there's no man on a white horse to get it done. Here, the *people* do the work."



Riffin' on the spot

And I assure them that that's how we're going to win this state and take the country back—one person talking to another person, one at a time.



The canvassers tell Wyn they can't believe a former congressman from Oregon would drop in on them out of the blue in downtown Cleveland to pump them up, and they all gathered round for photographs.

Off again, this time to pick up the hot lunch for the other teachers. We pull into an Italian restaurant that's the traditional site for Democratic fundraising events. The food

is brought out by the owner, a portly guy with a cuban cigar, who was introduced too fast for me to catch his name, and one of his chefs.

Back now at the Carl and Louis Stokes Academy (Lou Stokes and I served together in Congress; his brother, Carl, was mayor of Cleveland). Wyn isn't satisfied with my introduction so she gives a peppier one of her own. I speak and we try to leave, but Wyn will have none of it. Gotta eat first.

She accompanies us to the car and we see her walking back as we pull out of the parking lot, seemingly lost in thought. We can only wonder what she'll conjure up next.

Sue and I love these guys. Sarah Palin, if you want "pro-America," here they are.

Debate At An Evangelical College

In 12478889. Battleground States. campaign smears. jobs. McCain. Obama on October

21, 2008 at 3:54 pm

Columbus, Ohio

My wicked scheduler (at this stage of a campaign, you get dark thoughts about them!) put me into a joint appearance at Capital University, an evangelical Lutheran school in Bexley, a Columbus suburb.

Why do I take these assignments? First, I will not let conservative evangelicals think that the Obama campaign is afraid of them. Secondly, *a la* "President Jed Bartlet," I'm prepared to debate them, scripture for scripture.

I arrived on campus to discover that former Attorney General Betty Montgomery had cancelled out. *Damn!* I had Googled a quote from her about an opponent that I was eager to use:

"We can't just put up anybody who is not qualified because they could get elected."
(Darned well said, Betty; now come on over to Obama-Biden!)

Montgomery's stand-in was the president of the campus conservative club. This would make it harder for me to give the full-throated counterattack I'd planned against McCain and his loathsome campaign.

So, I decided to largely ignore the student and speak to the audience, for whom I'd gathered up Biblical passages to support my case:

"I've never seen a more mean-spirited, more dishonest campaign than the one John McCain's running. Exodus 20:16 tells us, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." You recognize the scripture: it's the 8th Commandment. By not telling the truth about Obama, John is "bearing false witness." If he has a scintilla of honor left, he'll regret it the rest of his life.

"John says Barack will raise your taxes. Wrong! Obama will give a tax cut to every American who makes less than \$250,000.

"McCain says Obama is for socialism because he'll repeal the Bush tax break for the superrich and cut taxes for everyone else. But if that's "socialism," so is the Gospel of Mark: "What you do for the least of these, you do unto me."

"Moreover, McCain himself opposed that tax cut in 2001! He flip-flopped for this campaign. John was right 2001, and Obama is right today.

"I have to say, the vilest thing McCain and Palin are saying is that Barack "pals around with terrorists" — a charge than has been shot down as false again and again, most recently by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, who has endorsed Obama.

"John needs to read Mark 8:36: "For what doth it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

"In this election, the country stands at a crossroads. One path, Obama's, points to change. The other, McCain's, is more of the same.

"More trickle down.

"More wars of choice.

"And more trade policies that ship jobs overseas.

"I'm asking you to vote your hopes on November 4th, not your fears. I'm asking you to vote Obama."

Postscript:

It turns out that Capital University's student body is not monolithically conservative or evangelically Christian. (The young conservative club president was actually Jewish.) And we walked out with some votes for Obama.

Which turns out to be not a bad way to spend my 66th birthday.

Children, With Terrorists On Their Mind

In [12478889](#), [Battleground States](#), [campaign smears](#), [McCain lies](#), [Terrorism on](#)

October 23, 2008 at 11:12 am

St. Paris, Ohio

The first child to ask a question looked to be in the sixth grade: "Is it true that Barack Obama is working with the terrorist, Bill Ayers?" the boy asked.

"How many of you have heard this rumor," I asked the students of [Graham Digital Academy](#), a wonderfully innovative school northwest of Columbus.

Almost every hand shot up. Of some seventy young people, perhaps eighty percent had been infected by John McCain's poisonous, loathsome campaign.



At Graham Digital Academy faculty and local residents, with a blue ribbon for GDA students: Who You Are Makes A Difference Photos: S. AuCoin

Earlier—before I had spoken and before the question—the principal, Dr. Marcia Ward, opened the assembly by calling on a young man to explain what they had been studying about government. “George Washington,” the young man reported. “And the importance of honesty.”

I turned to respond to my young questioner. His face seemed guileless but genuinely concerned. I wanted to say, *That’s just shows how John McCain has sold his soul*, but I didn’t. “That ... falsehood ... is being spread by John McCain,” I said, “who knows it’s not true.

“Bill Ayers was a terrorist when Barack Obama was an eight-year-old boy. You’ve been studying the presidency and honesty. How can McCain honestly link Obama to Ayers’ past—a past that Obama condemns?”

“Forty years later, Ayers has rehabilitated his life and become a distinguished professor of education at the University of Illinois and Chicago’s citizen of the year for his work in reforming Chicago’s public schools. Only then did Obama meet him, and only fleetingly.

“And what Mr. McCain won’t tell you is that Ayers’ work on school reform was funded by a foundation set up by one of President Ronald Reagan’s best friends, a conservative named Walter Annenberg, and that one of his, McCain’s, major donors worked with Ayers on that project.”

The students seemed satisfied. But driving back to Columbus, my blood boiled at the political pollution McCain, Palin and the Republican National Committee are belching out not only to voters but innocent children.

Upon our return to Columbus, we got the news that McCain and the RNC have begun to paper battleground states with a new flyer. The heading on the cover reads, in fonts that look cut from newspapers headlines, “Terrorists Don’t Care Who They Hurt.” Inside is a photo of Obama and another headline below that reads, “Obama: Do We Really Know Who He Is?”

At Graham Digital Academy, I was presented a plaque and a ribbon that had a message for GDA students: *Who You Are Makes A Difference.*

It applies to politicians too.

Who are *you*, John McCain?

Raising The Roof

In Battleground States, debates, High Expectations, Obama, Political activism, unions on

October 28, 2008 at 8:48 am

Marietta, Ohio



Real plumbers for Obama / Photo: S. AuCoin

My job at the Washington County Annual Democratic Dinner—as with all such partisan dinners in the run-up to the election—was to stoke the fire, raise the roof and inspire the faithful to reach down deep into themselves for that something extra in these final days.

You can't read such a speech. You've got to riff, based on a central message you've thought through. This affords you direct eye contact with the audience, with no piece of paper between you and them.



Two to one! Sounds right to us. / Photo: S. AuCoin

Success depends a lot on the energy you draw from the audience, which in turn often depends on the use of a couple of “claptraps” (i.e., guaranteed applause lines)—preferably funny and pointed—at the outset.

I’ve had nights when I was disappointingly flat, as in Newark, when nothing I tried seemed to rouse the crowd. (I think it was the steak dinner with Jerry McLaughlin and a few other Licking County Democrats immediately before going “on.” On the other hand, hard as it is for me to accept, I’m actually not god’s gift to public speaking.)



Proud members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, ready to canvass for Obama / Photo: S. AuCoin

But at last Saturday's Washington County dinner in Marietta, the sun, stars and moon seemed in alignment. I started having fun at the microphone and the crowd was having fun with me. If we were playing baseball, the ball would have cleared the upper deck—socked out of the park not just by my oratory but by fabulous candidates and hard-charging union and party volunteers, who have blood in their eye and intend to kick ... ankles ... next Tuesday.

My schedule this week, thin and spotty even in draft form, became utterly empty when two events fell through, including a joint appearance of surrogates at Mt. Vernon Nazarene College on Monday. (The school heard that the Obama campaign was dispatching a former congressman and pulled the plug on me; the program would be “unbalanced.”)

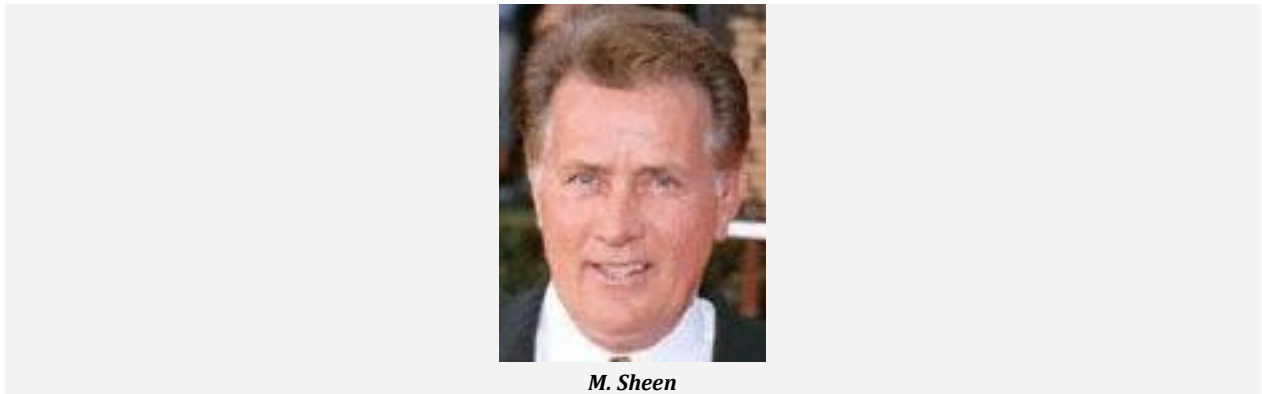
So, we will have been idle for five days by the time I give my last Democratic dinner speech Thursday night in Mentor at the Lake County Jefferson-Jackson Dinner. Thanks

to some rogue scheduling by a savvy Democratic operative, I'll speak at a big AFL-CIO bash on Friday and a get-out-the-vote rally Saturday morning in Claremont County.

Then the time for speeches will be over. And with our car pre-packed and ourselves checked out of our apartment in Columbus, we will start our return trip to the West. We'll set a more casual pace on our return—no pedal-to-the-metal like we did in our rush to get here—and we'll pull into a good motel somewhere in South Dakota to watch Obama win on Tuesday night.

Jed Bartlett Backs Obama

October 29, 2008 at 6:52 am



For a long time, “President Jed Bartlett” was the only president we had. [Here he is now](#), discussing Obama, who’ll be a real president of whom we will be proud ...

Breaking Camp, Heading Southwest

In [Already Blue & Going for Indigo](#), [Battleground States](#), [Democrats](#), [Obama](#), [polls](#), [unions](#) on

October 31, 2008 at 10:02 am

Mentor, Ohio

We broke camp today in Columbus having returned around midnight last night from Mentor, Ohio, on the shore of [Lake Erie](#), part of the congressional district held by my

friend, former Congressman Dennis Eckart, who played Dan Quale in Lloyd Bentsen's 1988 VP debate preparation.

Next stops: Dayton tonight, for a speech at a big labor hootenanny, then a get-out-the-vote (GOTV) rally in [Batavia](#), just east of Cincinnati.



Obama's Ohio surrogate schedulers, who sent us all over the Buckeye state (L to R: Degee Wilhelm, (unidentified), Les, Elizabeth Scott, and Sue

Then, with the time for speechifying done, we'll pull away in our pre-packed car and begin our trip westward, toward home.

We'll find a motel with a big king bed and Internet connection somewhere en route and pull in early on Tuesday to watch the returns come in. Our TV will give us the national numbers, my laptop will track the Ohio counties we've worked for the last month.

[McCain is making a ninth inning charge here](#) to take Ohio back, but we have had a good feeling for the past week; McCain's pushing back hard, probably because his people share our impression. Can Obama's +5 to +7 lead absorb the counterattack? I think so. Democrats we've met at every annual dinner—even in Republican counties—have fire in their eyes and report record party registration. My message has been to spend every ounce of energy to *get that vote out!* Ohio will go to the campaign with the best GOTV operation.



Obama's Ohio war room / Photo: S. AuCoin

We couldn't leave Columbus without paying a visit to the state Obama headquarters and thanking the surrogate schedulers who worked our ... rear ends ... off. (See their photo above.) The whole Ohio "war room" is in the basement of the Ohio Democratic Party building on Fulton Street, and you've not seen a more organized operation.

Desks are clustered in pods—for mainstream media, scheduling, policy, alternative media, field operations by region, and more.

Last night in Mentor, the Lake County Democrats paraded another first rate slate of office-seekers to the microphone. I've been struck, wherever we've gone, with the values these candidates express. None of the snarly cynicism, the Big Lie technique or questioning the patriotism of the other party—Republican staples. Rather, a passionate determination to restore government leadership that works to better the community, be it national, state or local.

A Servin' O' Political Red Meat

October 31, 2008 at 4:30 pm

Dayton, Ohio

When you're four days out from Election Day and you have an audience of maybe 300 trade unionists and it's your last big speech of the campaign, it's time for red meat.



We're gonna toss out the horse thieves! / Photos: S. AuCoin

I started with the story of the union man who slips into a Republican meeting and repeatedly interrupts the emcee: “I’m a unionist and a Democrat! I’m a unionist and a Democrat!”

The frustrated emcee tells the man to stand up and explain himself.

The union man says, “My grandfather was a unionist and a Democrat, my father was a unionist and a Democrat, and I’m a unionist and a Democrat.”

“Well,” the emcee huffs, “if your grandfather was a horse thief and your father was a horse thief, would you be a horse thief?”

“No sir,” he man replies. “Then I’d be a Republican!”



Good job, Bill!

The crowd loved it. I plunged forward:

“In four days, with your help, we’re gonna throw a bunch of Republican horse thieves out of office, from the White House to the state house to the courthouse—and kick ’em straight into the outhouse!

“I’m not going to tell you that this election is for all the marbles. You know that.

“I’m not going to tell you that your right to organize is at stake. You know that too.

“I’m not going to tell you that this is about the future of the middle class and keeping union wage jobs in Ohio. You also know that.

“I’m just going to tell you this: the election will probably decide whether we in our lifetime live to see accessible, affordable health care for all Americans.

“John McCain, who has had government-financed health care all his life, opposes Barack Obama’s plan for universal care. I just heard another deceitful McCain ad that

stated Obama will coerce Americans into a 'government run' plan in which 'bureaucrats' would make medical decisions rather than doctors.

"That's like saying when Eisenhower created the Interstate Highway System, the Secretary of Transportation hopped on a caterpillar and bulldozed the roadbeds, that GS-16s left their desks and poured the asphalt, and bureaucrats are the only ones who can drive our cars on the freeways!"

I fished out my Blue Cross-Blue Shield card (government-wide plan) and held it aloft. "This is my health insurance card," I said. "John McCain has one just like it but he won't talk about it. Every other member of congress and every retired member of congress has one too.

"Blue Cross-Blue Shield isn't the government. It isn't 'government run.' It's a private company the government pays to insure our health. I get to choose my doctor.

"Because the risk pool is so huge, my costs are incredibly low. A couple of years ago, I paid \$400 for a \$16,000 operation on my leg!

"Barack Obama says the rest of America deserves what he and John McCain and I enjoy.

"Obama won't force it you; the Double-Talk Express is lying about that. Anyone can keep their current insurance if they want. But if you join this plan, with an even larger national risk pool you can save an estimated \$3 thousand a year, and that's just if your health is normal."

I threw in a lot of applause lines to have some fun all around. In return, they came to their feet, stomping, three times and gave an ear-splitting ovation at the end.

As any old war horse will tell ya, it feels damn good to kick some ... ankles ... on the stump.

Especially for me, in the last big speech of our Ohio odyssey.

A Fitting End–And An Ugly Reminder

November 1, 2008

Cincinnati, Ohio

We rose early in a Dayton suburb, giddy, still, about last night's labor rally, and drove our pre-packed Trailblazer to Batavia, an eastern suburb of conservative Cincinnati to give a pep talk to canvassers at the Democratic headquarters—the very last event on our Ohio schedule.

Once again, we were in ruby red territory. Once again, Democrats were energized and on the attack.



Democrats stocking up on ammo / Photos: S. AuCoin

The Cincinnati Enquirer sent a reporter-photographer team for a story on Democratic “passion and excitement.” [[Click here for it.](#)]

(Clermont County Democratic Chairman Dave Lane was steamed when he emailed me to tell me about the piece. “The reporter called Sue, ‘Sarah’,” he fumed. “Of all things, Sarah!”) I could almost hear him spit out the word.

From there, we made a sentimental journey to the home of Mark Schmidt, a wonderful former staffer who I had not seen in twenty years. I had called Mark out of the blue about housing in Ohio and he came through for us brilliantly. (Once an AuCoin staffer, always an AuCoin staffer!)

Mark is an avid reader of this journal and joined us in Dayton for my labor speech and the next morning in Batavia. The 26-year-old kid I’d hired to straighten up the books at my congressional office is now a 46-year-old owner of a successful paving company with seventy employees, a husband, and a father of a lovely daughter.



*With Mark Schmidt, of Cincinnati: Once an AuCoin staffer, always an AuCoin staffer /
Photos: S. AuCoin*

We enjoyed a light brunch with his wife, Christy, and daughter, Ann, and a few neighbors and friends, most of them Democrats eager to discuss the race and excited by the prospect of an Obama presidency.

Yet even here, a reminder of right-wing bigotry bubbled up. One of Mark and Christy's neighbors, a woman who had a huge Obama-Biden sign in her yard, arrived with a copy of *The Enquirer* clutched in her hand and folded to an article about a local hardware store owner who has put a despicable race-baiting, anti-Obama sign in his shop window. "We've got to organize a boycott!" she declared.

It was a sobering contrast to the small gathering in the Schmidt family room, which included two of Mark's friends from boyhood—they had never lost touch with one another. One of them had driven Mark to Washington all those years ago in Schmidt's blue pickup.

We felt the warmth of lifelong familiarity and friendship and I told Mark as we left that we could not let another twenty years pass before meeting again. Mark handed me Yahoo-downloaded driving instructions to take us through Cincinnati and I-74 West.

Still the staffer. Forever a friend.

"When Tomorrow Comes ..."

November 3, 2008 at 8:30 pm

Pierre, South Dakota

"Do you hear the people sing, singing the song of angry men?"

"It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again;

"When the beating of your heart echoes the beating of the drums,

"There is a life about to start when tomorrow comes ..."

—Do You Hear The People? (*Les Miserables*)



Messaging, 'til the last dog comes home / Photo: S. AuCoin

Our minds are on tomorrow as I write this during a punishing, eight-hour haul from Waterloo, Iowa, to South Dakota's capital. (They knew what they were talking when they named this the Great Plains; My god, it's endless!). It helps to have set off this morning knowing that Obama could lose every toss-up state (OH, MO, NC, IN, FL, NV and VA) and still take the big enchilada.

And that there's no way in hell he'll lose 'em all.

We've got the volume up on music from *Les Miserables*, *The Man from La Mancha*, and Anthony Newley's, *Once In A Lifetime*, and we're singing along at the top of our lungs as if the lyrics had been written for Obama and us.

Damned odd not to be campaigning, though.

Several miles back, I started doodling something called the *Low-Downest Post-Campaignin' Blues*. Relax, it's never going to be published, much less sung!

While we're here bouncing along on I-90W, Obama's get-out-the-vote volunteers are out in force across the country—including Stacy, our daughter in Bozeman, who seems to have made it her personal responsibility to turn Montana blue.

Well, if you can't give a speech or phone a voter, you do the next best thing. Noting that our Blazer's rear window was bare, we opted for some Interstate freeway advertising. We painted the glass: VOTE OBAMA!

A driver just pulled alongside to see who was behind the wheel of this rolling billboard. Spotting two gray heads, he sped on. Other than that, our impromptu promotion is bringing no responses.

I should call the Gallup people and advise them there are no undecideds left.

President GoObama!

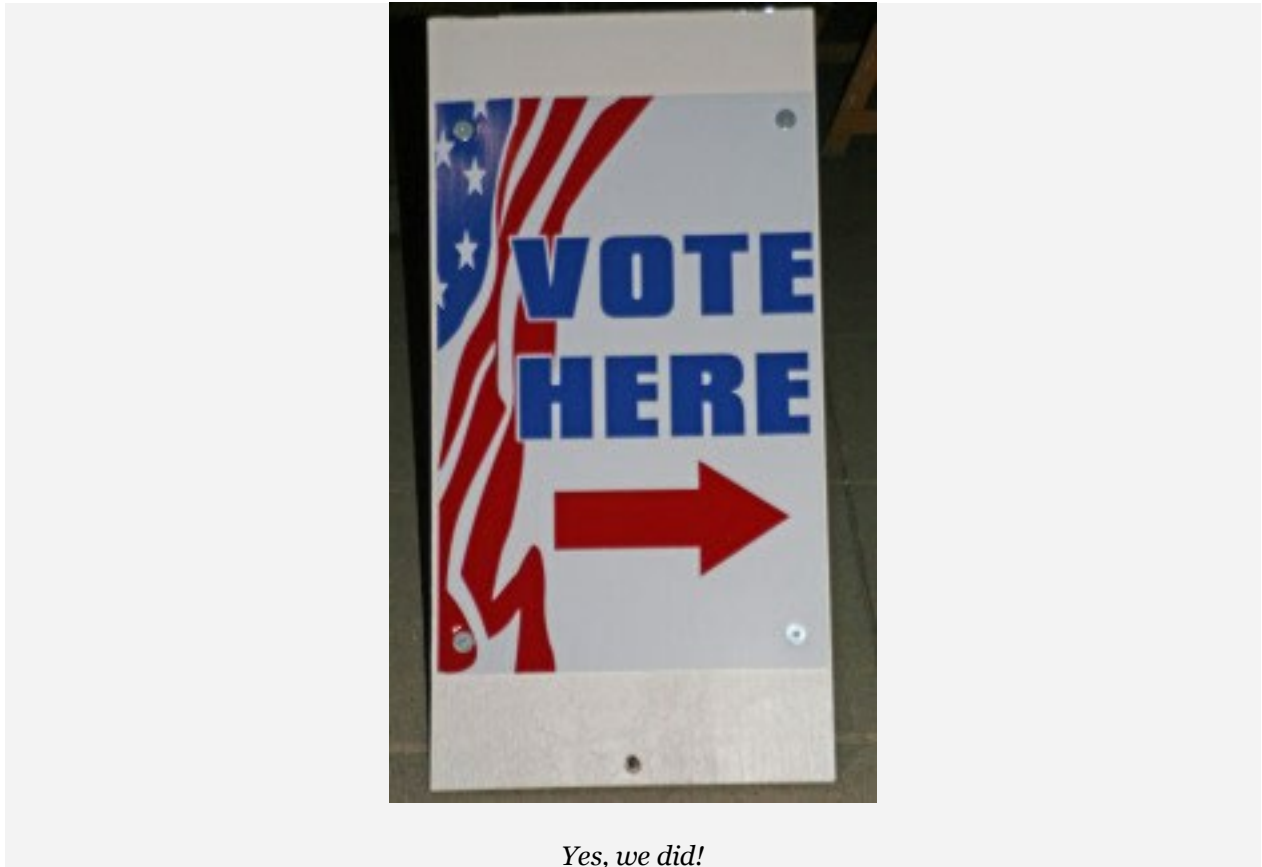
November 4, 2008 at 2:53 pm

Spearfish, South Dakota

Live blogging through Election Day (and night):

We can't remember anything like this.

My political involvement began with black voter registration in Nashville, Tennessee, and fighting the electrical violence of lunch counter sit-ins.



And now this.

We've been laughing through our tears since he went over the top.

Not because he is black. But because he is a magnificent political talent who happens to be black.

(Note to John McCain: You were way off base in your concession, speaking about what Obama's election means to blacks. The point is how he has liberated *whites*.)

Now we're waiting for The Speech. And we'll bawl like children. And go to sleep. And wake up in the morning to find the world covered with dew again.

7:38 P.M. (MST): YEESSS! Ohio goes blue!

6:15 P.M. (MST): CNN just released the first trickle of returns from Ohio. Obama had 67 percent of those returns. Sue and I did a quick calculation. Those votes came from every county we stumped in. Right.

4:01 P.M. (MST): CNN just broke a report that the McCain Campaign is robocalling bile in Cuban precincts in Florida, telling voters that *Fidel Castro* has just endorsed Obama. The calls were not made by an independent "swift boat" campaign, or the Republican National Committee, but the McCain-Palin campaign! "Country First," John? "Straight Talk Express?" Sit down.

3:48 P.M. (MST): I'm so fidgety, waiting for the first returns from Indiana, I went to the Obama website and started calling voters in Missouri and North Carolina to remind them to vote and give them their polling place.

Amazing political use of the Internet. I get the email "Action Alert" with a map of key state. I click on one and a list of names and phone numbers and ages comes up with the address of the voter's polling place. Once done, I indicate if the voter has voted, if the line is busy, if the number is wrong, and so forth.

A woman in North Carolina gasped when I introduced myself as a former congressman from Oregon.

1:40 P.M. (MST): One smart aleck-my former congressional chief of staff, Bob Crane-wanted to know why we are heading West before the returns come in, suggesting that the post Baby Boom Obamaiaacs had no need for a gray beard in the clutch.

In fact, that's about the size of it. After Saturday, there were no speaking further opportunities to fire up these Obama volunteers. They were "pre-fired" and too busy working on get-of-the-vote to listen to a speech (except that of their candidate, who wowed a crowd of 90,000 last night in Manassas, Virginia.

Um, Sarah Palin, that would be in your "pro-America" part of Virginia.

So, we are back here again in Spearfish. (Careful readers of this journal will remember Spearfish, South Dakota, as the location of our first overnight stop en route to Ohio. I still can find no spears here, or fish.)

Over at FiveThirtyEight.Com, Nate Silver, has aggregated the last of the national and state polls and, on the strength of them, projects a [349-189 electoral vote landslide](#) for Obama.

More later.

Epilogue

November 23, 2008 at 4:20 pm

Ashland, Oregon

It has been 28 days since we pulled up stakes in Ohio for the ride home, and 55 days since we first arrived in the Ohio to begin our Last Hurrah on the political stump.



We savored every minute to help elect someone who excites us more than any candidate since JFK.

It seems like a year ago and yet like yesterday morning.

On election night, when Pennsylvania went blue, we leapt to our feet and Sue wept for joy: McCain's last, improbable path had been blocked. From that point on, we were lusting for a landslide and, out of pride, for Ohio to be painted indigo blue.

Our actor son, Kelly, performing at the Yale Repertory Theater, placed repeated backstage calls to us and his sister, Stacy, between scenes of the U.S. premiere of Happy Now? Kelly would give and get state-by-state updates, then ring off to run back onstage. (How could he remember his lines for godssakes?)

When Ohio went for Obama, Stacy called. She had organized local newspaper ads in Bozeman (signed by more than 800 residents) and canvassed for voter registration and get-out-the-vote. Whatever she said was drowned out by the din at the Bozeman headquarters. Everyone knew what Ohio meant.

When the West Coast came in, CNN threw the results on the screen with Barack's photo. Each of us felt a spinal jolt as the historic thing we helped cause sunk in. He'll take the oath in the 200th anniversary year of Lincoln's birth, in an Inauguration with the theme, "A New Birth of Freedom." Gives me gooseflesh thinking of it.

Next, the hard part:

The young political phenomenon faces two wars and an economic crisis, the depth and length of which Americans are only now beginning to fathom. The solemnity of the acceptance speech at Grant Park suggests that he appreciates the gravity of his challenge, and the nation's. This isn't a naïf from Plains, Georgia, who I watched stand on a chair at Blair House to tell Democratic congressmen that he'd personally return their phone calls. Nor is the man's subtle, nuanced mind likely to produce the economic non-sequiturs of Gerald Ford.

Against partisan foes, Obama's rhetorical skills may give him an aerial capability at least equal to Reagan's.

His grassroots network may give him a ground army to go with it. If so, it would be an advantage than few other presidents have had.

He'll need it all and then some.

Team of rivals? God, I hope it works! With due respect to Doris Kearns Goodwin, it didn't pan out so well for Lincoln. Yet I feel optimism. One of my heroes, Vaclav Havel, defined optimism as "orientation," not "prediction." The president-elect likely would have his own term: Audacity.

As the eight-year hostile occupation of America comes its end, I'll cling to that, too.