

Jonathan Schechter “Corpus Callosum” Column
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In my last column, I wrote about my desire to see a “Statement of Ideal” incorporated into the upcoming revision of the Town and County’s Comp Plan. In that column, I described the concept in broad strokes, and planned to use this column to amplify my remarks.

However, I’m going to put that follow-up column on hold for two weeks, and write today about last Saturday’s Teton County Democratic convention. I’m doing this in part because it was such a striking event that it’s worthy of some comment and analysis, and in part to show my skeptical editors that, at least once in a while, I can actually write about something topical. With luck, I’ll also be able to use this column to help set the stage for next time’s “Statement of Ideal 2.”

Before I get going, one other note. Today is my mother’s 78th birthday, and unfortunately she’s celebrating in the hospital, recovering from a difficult and painful surgery. Any success I’ve ever had with these columns is a direct result of all that I’ve received from my parents: their values and perspectives; the upbringing they gave my siblings and me; and the support and unconditional love they’ve always provided. Implicitly, everything I write and do is a testimony and way of saying thanks to them; in today’s column, I’d like to make that explicit.

Saturday’s Democratic convention was the most extraordinary political event I’ve witnessed in Teton County. In part this was due to the number of attendees; in part it was due to their enthusiasm; in part it was due to the sheer, stunning contrast between Saturday’s event and the moribund quality that has typified other Democratic gatherings. Other local conventions and caucuses I’ve attended – both Republican and Democrat – have felt like just what they are, gatherings of the faithful. In contrast, Saturday’s Democratic caucus felt more like a community-wide celebration, a party or concert that just happened to involve politics.

Over the long term, whether this bodes well for the local Democratic establishment is open to debate. What can’t be argued, though, was the power of the event: It was remarkable having around one-tenth of Teton County’s adult population in one place at one time; it transcended remarkable to have 1200+ people come together because they were all supporting something. In that sense, the contrast to the community’s typical political gatherings – e.g. land use debates – couldn’t have been more complete.

My other observations about Saturday’s Democratic convention fall into three categories.

You could see it coming 1

I’ve been able to find Teton County presidential voting records as far back as 1952. For at least 50 years, Teton County was a bastion of Republicanism – in particular, before 2004, no Democratic presidential candidate ever received a majority of Teton County’s votes (Clinton won Teton County in both 1992 and 1996, but in both cases received fewer votes than the Republican and third party candidates combined). In 2004, however, John Kerry won 53 percent of the county’s votes, culminating a political shift that had been underway for about a decade.

Two other factors complement this point. The first is Teton County’s slowly eroding Republican registration figures: Although still a majority, at 51 percent the party is at its all-time registration nadir. The other is President Bush’s deep unpopularity: Nationally, he’s less popular today than in 2004, and there’s no reason to expect the situation to differ in counties – like Teton -- which didn’t support him four years ago.

As a result, it wasn’t surprising that local Democrats should see an all-time record turnout for their 2008 convention. What was surprising – stunning actually – was the size. In 2004, local Democrats amazed themselves by attracting 200 people; Saturday they drew not just six times that figure, but roughly six times the figure who

attended January's Republican convention. To the best of my knowledge, this marks the first time turnout at the local Democratic convention has ever exceeded that of its Republican counterpart.

You could see it coming 2

As special as Teton County is, we're really not that special. In fact, looking at the other major resort counties I study regularly – Eagle, Pitkin, Routt, San Miguel, and Summit in Colorado; Blaine Idaho; Nantucket Massachusetts; and Summit Utah – each has become increasingly Democratic in the last 15 years or so, so much so that only Summit UT voted Bush/Cheney in 2004.

Looking at these counties in advance of Teton County's Democratic caucus, the trend was pretty clear: Each of the eight held their Democratic caucus or primary before we did; each had high turnout; and each voted overwhelmingly for Senator Obama. (Tables 1 and 2)

On the Republican side, all but Blaine ID have had their caucuses or primaries to date, and in each, the Republican turnout has been well below that of the Democrats – overall in the A9, only about half as many Republicans have participated in this year's caucuses and primaries as have Democrats. Interestingly, every one of these major resort counties – including Teton – favored Governor Romney over Senator McCain. (Table 3)

What have you done for me lately?

The Democratic convention was a two-stage event. During part one, attendees used paper ballots to vote for the candidate of their choice; during part two, attendees broke into two groups – one for Obama, and one for Clinton – to select delegates. By then, although most of the convention-goers had left, there were still a couple of hundred attendees interested in being delegates or helping select them. It was during this process that, for me, the event's most poignant moment occurred.

Befitting Senator Obama's 80-20 percent margin of victory, a far larger group of attendees took part in the Obama delegate selection process. This group was, in essence, a smaller version of the overall convention: large numbers of both men and women, a broad mix of ages, an unmistakable air of youthful energy and idealism – these 200 or so folks were the true believers.

In contrast, perhaps 40 people caucused for Senator Clinton. There were few men (when I counted, there were 5 men and 31 women), and few of those in the room were under age 50. Equally striking was the tone – Senator Clinton's local backers exhibited a deeper, more somber passion than I sensed among Senator Obama's supporters.

In the delegate selection caucuses, anyone who wanted to be a delegate was offered a chance to give a one minute talk saying why they wanted to represent a given candidate. Where those looking to be Obama delegates tended to talk about how much he inspired them, the Clinton supporters I heard tended to talk about how her experience had been their experience: how much they identified with her, and how much they admired what she had done on behalf of all women.

It wasn't until I became a parent that I realized how much my parents have given to me. And it's only since I became a parent that I have begun to really get all those stupid jokes about ungrateful kids who don't appreciate their parents.

I mention this because that was the sense I had observing the Clinton delegate selection caucus – her supporters, particularly the women, were like parents whose kids didn't understand all they had been through, who didn't understand the difficulties their parents had faced, and in particular didn't understand the sacrifices their parents had made on their behalf. As a result, the parents were befuddled when their children made choices far

different from those they would have made, and didn't really understand how the younger generation could have such a different set of values.

For women of my mother's generation, basic women's rights and gender equality were, at best, theoretical notions. Today, thanks to the decades-long struggles of women's rights activists, these issues are nearly moot, particularly for younger women and particularly in places like Jackson Hole. Does this mean this war has been won? No, of course not. But it does mean that, in the past 20 years or so, the sort of battles fought by Senator Clinton and the women who, on Saturday, were speaking so eloquently and passionately in her behalf no longer resonate, having been replaced by a new, subtler, and more pernicious set of challenges. As a result, the kinds of accomplishments achieved by women of Senator Clinton's generation are not dissimilar to the kinds of gifts given by parents to their offspring – something deep and profound and only fully appreciated well after the fact.

These rapid and profound changes in women's rights are similar to others our community wrestles with today: economic and demographic; political; and in our sense of character. Rapid and profound change can be exciting and wonderful; it can also be upsetting and confusing. Most critically, because neither conventional wisdom nor conventional approaches are very good at dealing with rapid and profound change, communities undergoing such change need to think in new and different ways if they hope to successfully address the future. Statements of Ideal are one such tool, something I will talk more about in my next column.

Happy birthday, Mom; get well soon.

Table 1
 "A9 Counties"
 2008 Primaries and Caucuses – Votes Cast by Party
 (Source: CNN.com)

		Total Votes Cast, by Party				
County	Known for	Democrat	%	Republican	%	Total
Eagle CO	Vail	573	55%	471	45%	1,044
Pitkin CO	Aspen	555	83%	115	17%	670
Routt CO	Steamboat Springs	564	65%	310	35%	874
San Miguel CO	Telluride	387	81%	89	19%	476
Summit CO	Breckenridge	586	71%	245	29%	831
Blaine ID	Sun Valley	1,197	100%	0	0%	1,197
Nantucket MA	Nantucket	2,340	71%	974	29%	3,314
Summit UT	Park City	3,783	58%	2,775	42%	6,558
Teton WY	Jackson Hole	1,150	100%	0	0%	1,150
Total		11,135	69%	4,979	31%	16,114
Total w/o Blaine & Teton		8,788	64%	4,979	36%	13,767

Table 2
 "A9 Counties"
 2008 Primaries and Caucuses – Votes Cast for Major Democratic Candidates
 (Source: CNN.com)

		Total Votes Cast, by Candidate						
County	Known for	Obama	%	Clinton	%	Other	%	Total
Eagle CO	Vail	414	78%	150	26%	9	2%	573
Pitkin CO	Aspen	431	72%	124	22%	0	0%	555
Routt CO	Steamboat Springs	428	76%	128	23%	8	1%	564
San Miguel CO	Telluride	333	86%	52	13%	2	1%	387
Summit CO	Breckenridge	365	62%	221	38%	0	0%	586
Blaine ID	Sun Valley	984	82%	178	15%	35	3%	1,197
Nantucket MA	Nantucket	1,395	60%	893	38%	52	2%	2,340
Summit UT	Park City	2,601	69%	1,156	31%	26	1%	3,783
Teton WY	Jackson Hole	919	80%	231	20%	0	0%	1,150
Total		7,870	71%	3,133	28%	132	1%	11,135

Table 3
 "A9 Counties"
 2008 Primaries and Caucuses – Votes Cast for Major Republican Candidates
 (Source: CNN.com)

		Total Votes Cast, by Candidate						
County	Known for	McCain	%	Romney	%	Other	%	Total
Eagle CO	Vail	147	31%	247	52%	77	16%	471
Pitkin CO	Aspen	47	41%	47	41%	21	18%	115
Routt CO	Steamboat Springs	110	45%	113	36%	87	28%	310
San Miguel CO	Telluride	30	34%	30	34%	29	33%	89
Summit CO	Breckenridge	88	36%	122	50%	35	14%	245
Blaine ID	Sun Valley	NA (Idaho's Republican primary to be held in May)						
Nantucket MA	Nantucket	427	44%	454	47%	93	10%	974
Summit UT	Park City	463	17%	2,122	76%	190	7%	2,775
Teton WY	Jackson Hole	NA (Wyoming's Republican results not released at county level)						
Total		1,312	26%	3,135	63%	532	11%	4,979