



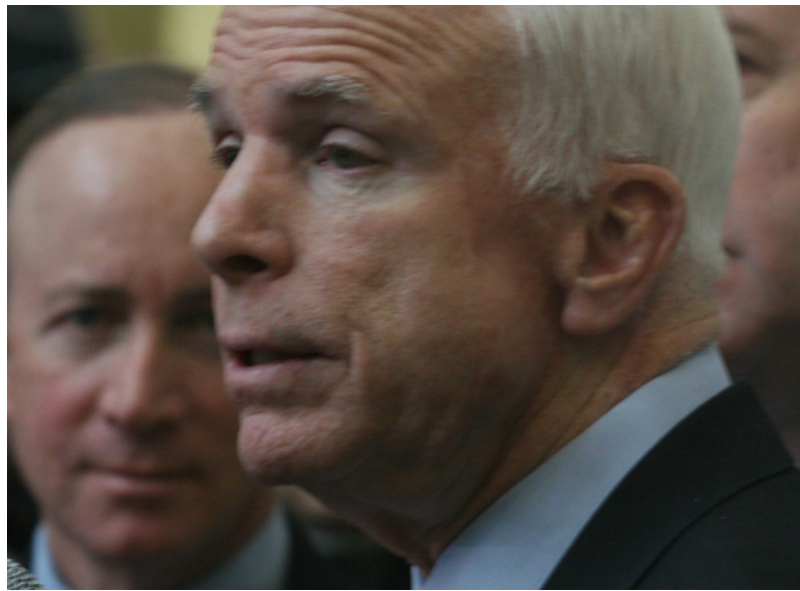
Howey-Gauge: Prez Barnburner

Daniels maintains big lead over JLT

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS - Hoosiers are likely to find themselves at the American political epicenter over the next 60 days as the latest Howey-Gauge Poll shows Republican John McCain with a 45-43 percent lead over Democrat Barack Obama. The companion race shows Gov. Mitch Daniels maintaining a significant 53 to 35 percent lead over Democrat Jill Long Thompson. Libertarian Andy Horning came in with 3 percent and 9 percent were undecided.

The survey of 600 likely registered voters took place on Aug. 29-30, some 20 hours after Obama gave his Democratic National Convention nomination acceptance speech in Denver, and five hours after McCain stunned the political world by selecting Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin to be his run-



Sen. John McCain with Gov. Mitch Daniels at a town hall meeting last February in Indianapolis. (HPI Photo by A. Walker Shaw)

ning mate. Virtually every respondent of the poll was aware of both events. Luke Messer, who heads the McCain campaign in Indiana, had expressed reservation about the poll occurring before the Republican National Convention. The poll's timing was scheduled to coincide with the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce's

annual Hobnob tonight at the Indiana State Museum. But

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Blink, stand and deliver

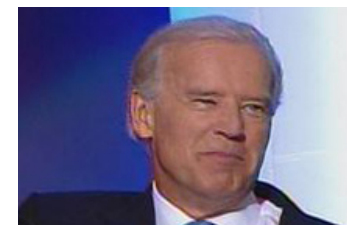
BY **MARK SCHOEFF JR.**

WASHINGTON - In his best-selling book "Blink," consultant and acclaimed big-thinker Malcolm Gladwell posits that people make their best decisions by not over thinking them--essentially, by going with their gut instincts.



Perhaps the biggest "blink" in Sen. John McCain's life, selecting Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his running mate on the GOP presidential ticket, looks like a good call after Palin's rousing speech on Wednesday at the Republican National Convention.

By all accounts, McCain settled on Palin as his choice just a few days



"If there has been a basis upon which you can pursue someone for a criminal violation, they will be pursued."

- U.S. Sen. Joe Biden, on possible Bush Admin war crimes



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before introducing her to the nation last Friday. Controversy is now swirling about the extent to which McCain vetted Palin. After a barrage of negative press coverage -- about a brewing political scandal in Alaska and the pregnancy of her teenage daughter -- and rising doubts about her qualifications to be vice president, Palin stood and delivered in St. Paul.

Under extraordinary pressure, she simultaneously electrified and relieved the GOP delegates gathered in Minnesota. She demonstrated maternal warmth, steely resolve, empathy, charm, toughness and confidence.

With Palin, McCain's chances of becoming president moved from "probably not" after Democratic nominee Barack Obama's historic acceptance speech in Denver last week to "maybe" today. Two white males once again gracing the GOP ticket would have doomed it to a double-digit loss in a year dominated by "change."

Palin shakes things up. She showed particular fluency on one of the top issues in the campaign -- energy policy. She highlighted the understanding she's developed by dealing with the topic as governor of Alaska.

But probably the most startling dimension of the speech was the alacrity with which she went after Obama. Palin, and her advisers, must have decided that the best defense against charges that she's not qualified to be vice president is by going on offense and asserting that Obama lacks the background to be president.

In one of her most memorable lines of the evening, she said, "I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a 'community organizer,' except that you have actual responsibilities."

She has great stage presence and is a quick study. She looks as if she'll hold her own in media interviews and in her upcoming debate with Obama's running mate, Sen. Joe Biden, who called her "formidable."

The question is whether she'll be able to help McCain reach beyond

the GOP's conservative, small-town base. Will she be able to connect with blue-collar voters? Will she be able to attract suburban women who are not avid supporters of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton but who could relate to this Alaskan governor who is trying to balance work and career?



One of the most popular adjectives supporters use to describe Palin is "authentic." Certainly, she embodies a biography that many Americans can relate to -- from being a parent to running a business to being involved in the PTA to dealing with family health care challenges.

But what Palin didn't do on Wednesday was answer the most devastating attack Obama launched in his acceptance speech last week. He said that McCain "just doesn't get it" when it comes to understanding the economic suffering gripping the country.

Palin didn't lay out a coherent plan to revive the economy. She warned that Obama would usher in an era of higher taxes and activist government. But maybe those are the answers that Americans in desperate straits seek. Obama certainly thinks so.

It's up to McCain to lay out a compelling alternative economic plan tonight. Despite the help he's getting from Palin, it's a job that only the person at the top of the ticket can do. ❖

Schoeff writes for Howey Politics Indiana in Washington, D.C.



Howey-Gauge, from page 1

Palin's selection was widely seen as a successful McCain campaign strategy of limiting the Obama post-convention bounce. "Here at the convention Republicans are excited about Sarah Palin," said Luke Messer, who heads McCain's Indiana campaign. "The race has already kind of bounced back. When Barack picked Joe Biden, it had little effect. It will take some time to deal with the Palin effect. What we do know is the Republican candidate for president does about 8 to 10 percent better in Indiana than the national polls."

The poll's makeup included 36 percent Republican and 32 percent Democrat. Add in the "independent" Democrats and Republicans and that split was 48 percent Republican and 43 percent Democrat. "Completely independent" made up 9 percent. The poll had an 8 percent African-American sample, 1 percent Hispanic, and a 51/49 female/male split. The margin of error was +/- 4.1 percent.

In the presidential race, McCain slightly underperformed the GOP base. Both McCain and Obama have near universal name recognition at 99 percent. McCain's 55 percent favorable recognition was up 8 percent and his unfavs stood at a relatively low 27 percent. Obama's favorables have been on a steady increase from 41 percent in the April Howey-Gauge Poll to 56 percent in this survey. His

negatives fell from 34 percent in April to 27 percent in August. Hoosiers having a hard opinion of McCain increased from 72 percent in April to 82 percent. "The positive movement for Obama is significant," said Gauge Market Research pollster Holly Davis. "At the end of the day, we'll have to

wait and see if Obama's impact is larger than that of Palin's. We will see if the new voters that were registered before and after the May Democratic primary out-weigh the renewed excitement social conservatives have for Sarah Palin."

The level of interest in this election is reflected in the fact that there are 400,000 new registered voters.

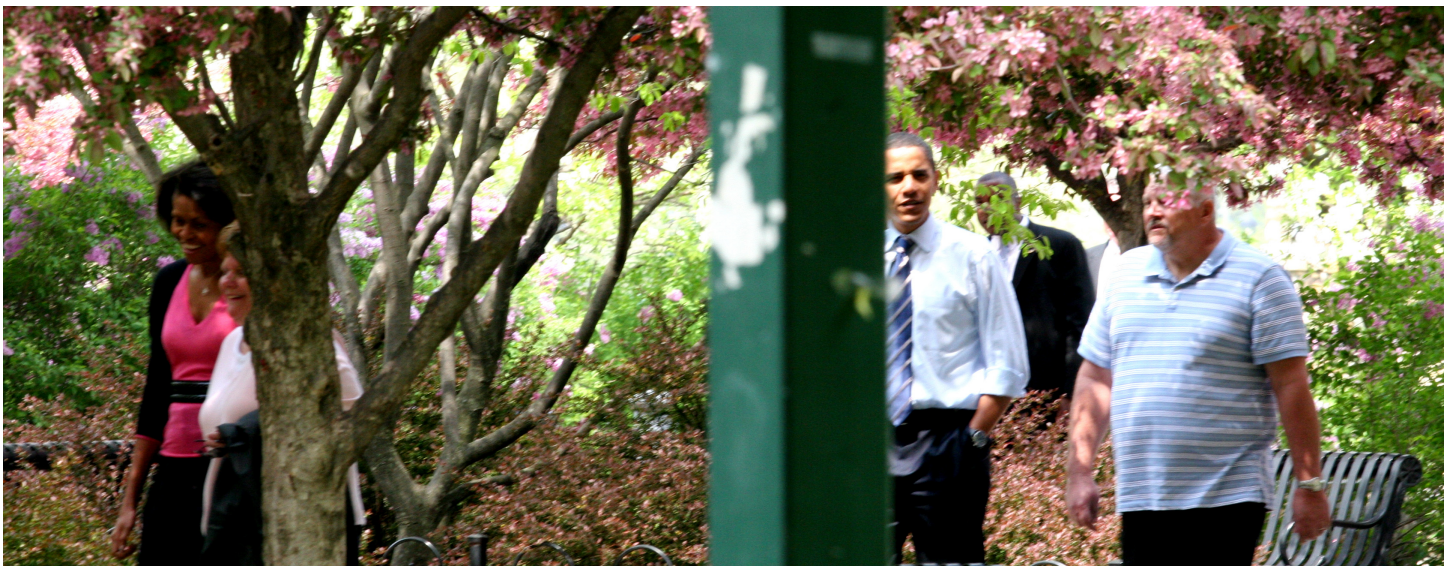
Almost 90 percent of the poll respondents rated their level of interest in the Obama-McCain race as between 8 and 10.

Recent polls by SurveyUSA and Rasmussen had McCain with a 6 percent lead, but those occurred before Obama's acceptance speech that reached 40 million TV viewers and an unknown number on the worldwide web. The Obama campaign clearly believes Indiana can go Democratic for the first time since 1964. Echoing Barack Obama's comment last April that Indiana could be the "tie-breaker," his national and Indiana campaign said Wednesday the state could decide the presidential race on Nov. 4. "If we were to win every John Kerry state plus Iowa, we'd have 259 Electoral College votes," said deputy campaign manager Steve Hildebrand. "Indiana has 11 Electoral Col-

In a General Election for President held today, which candidate would you favor between (ROTATE ORDER) Barack Obama, the Democrat, or John McCain, the Republican? (IF UNDECIDED, ASK...) Even though you are uncertain about your vote, which candidate would it be if you had to say (ROTATE ORDER) Barack Obama or John McCain?

PRESIDENTIAL TRIAL HEAT

	Aug 29-30
John McCain	45%
Barack Obama	43%
Undecided	11%





lege votes. Indiana could put us over the top.”

Hildrebrand added, “If we didn’t think Indiana was competitive, we wouldn’t be spending millions of dollars running TV ads for nine weeks. We wouldn’t be running 31 offices in Indiana.” Indiana campaign director Emily Parcell said Wednesday that Obama has 31 offices open in Indiana and will run door-to-door campaigns in all 92 counties.

Messer told HPI from St. Paul, “We’ve got a job to do here in the next 48 hours. We have to do the same thing the Democrats did at their convention, which is to make the case to the people. If this race continues to stay tight into the fall, there will be a large push and great resources to win. Republicans don’t intend to lose Indiana for the first time in 40 years. I don’t have any trouble saying that McCain has said he will be backed. Palin will be well-received in Indiana.”

To date, Obama has run three TV ads in Indiana over the past nine weeks and Obama has been here dozens of times. McCain has been in Indiana once since the primary for a July fundraiser and a sheriff association event and has run no TV. Messer and Jennifer Hallowell told HPI last month that the McCain campaign is relying on an “old-fashioned” model of working through the Indiana Republican Party and its vast network of party organizations.

Some Democrats believe that the entirety of Obama’s support isn’t showing up in polling, believing he may out-perform conventional polling by 5 to 6 percent. New York Times columnist Frank Rich observed, “All bets are off when it comes to predicting this race’s outcome. Despite our repeated attempts to see this race through the prism of those of recent and not-so-distant memory, it keeps defying the templates.”

Thompson’s Recognition Problem

In the gubernatorial race, Democrat Jill Long Thompson faces a dilemma similar to what she faced in the primary. Her total awareness stood at 77 percent, up from 41 percent in February and 59 percent in April. While that number increased, her favs and unfavs both increased 10

percent from 22/9 in April to 32/19 in August. On the re-elect question, Gov. Daniels has improved from a troublesome 41 percent in February during the heart of the property tax crisis, to 47 percent in April a month after HB1001 passed the Indiana General Assembly and 48 percent in August when more than half of Hoosier homeowners saw their property taxes reduced. Forty percent responded by saying “elect someone new” and 12 percent were undecided. “In this environment, 48 percent is OK,” said Davis. “If that number was still in the low 40s, the governor would be in trouble. On the right track/wrong track question, 47 percent said right track (compared to 37 percent in February, 39 percent in April). The wrong track numbers have declined from 40 percent in February, 41 percent in April and 35 percent in August.”

On the question of support for HB1001, 59 percent favored the plan and 25 percent opposed.

Daniels’ 53-35 percent lead is good news for his re-elect on a number of fronts. It’s over the magic 50 percent mark out of a three-candidate field, though down from a 23 percent margin he had in February and 19 percent in April. “He is a well-defined, well-known incumbent candidate,” Davis said. “Thompson’s recognition rose from 42 percent to 77 percent and yet she’s only gone from 33 percent to 35 percent. That’s not good.” On a question of “If I have a hesitation of voting for Jill Long Thompson,” 31 percent said they were not familiar with her and 11 percent said she lacked experience.

Thompson has yet to unify the Democratic Party. She only mended her relationship with the UAW and

In an election for Governor held today, which candidate would you favor (ROTATE ORDER) Jill Long Thompson, the Democrat, Mitch Daniels, the Republican or Andrew Horning, the Libertarian? (IF UNDECIDED, ASK...) Even though you are uncertain about your vote, which candidate would it be if you had to say (ROTATE ORDER) Jill Long Thompson, Mitch Daniels or Andrew Horning?



GUBERNATORIAL TRIAL HEAT			
	Aug 29-30	Apr 23-24	Feb 17-18
Vote Mitch Daniels	50%	52%	52%
Lean Mitch Daniels	3%	3%	4%
Vote Jill Long Thompson	33%	34%	30%
Lean Jill Long Thompson	2%	2%	3%
Vote Andrew Horning	3%	NA	NA
Lean Andrew Horning	0%	NA	NA
Undecided	9%	10%	12%

If an election for Governor were held today, would you want to see Mitch Daniels re-elected Governor or would you prefer that someone else be given a chance to do better?



MITCH DANIELS AS GOVERNOR			
	Aug 29-30	Apr 23-24	Feb 17-18
Re-Elect Mitch Daniels	48%	47%	41%
Elect Someone New	40%	41%	43%
Uncertain	12%	13%	15%



AFSCME in early August, but was never endorsed by her primary opponent, Jim Schellinger. Howey-Gauge shows that nearly a quarter of Democrats - 24 percent - are supporting Daniels. Eleven percent of Republicans are backing Thompson. Another 27 percent of Obama's support is coming from voters who say they will also vote for Daniels

With this snapshot, there is no gender gap for Daniels: Male voters support Daniels over Long Thompson 54-35 percent; and he leads among females 52-35 percent. Daniels is also getting 27 percent of African-American voters, compared to 51 percent supporting Thompson, and a big 22 percent are undecided. White voters are backing Daniels 55-33 percent.

Thompson needs a significant event - a campaign-changing scenario - to cut into Daniels' margin if she is to close the gap and ride Obama's coattails. She has yet to focus her campaign on the "change" argument, instead assailing Daniels on jobs. Clearly, pocketbook issues have the potential to drive this race. Sixty percent of respondents cited jobs and wages (30 percent), taxes (18 percent), the economy (4 percent) and gasoline prices (8 percent) as driving their decisions. But to understand why Daniels' lead is so solid is to look at the property tax issue. It was rated the top issue by 38 percent in February during the unre-

As I read a list of names, please tell whether or not you are familiar with each name. If you have never heard the name just say so. (ROTATE ORDER) The first/next name is Jill Long Thompson. (IF RECOGNIZE, ASK...) Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of her?

JILL LONG THOMPSON NAME RECOGNITION	
	Aug 29-30
No Recognition	23%
Favorable Recognition	32%
Neutral Recognition	26%
Unfavorable Recognition	19%
Total Awareness	77%
Hard Opinion Recognition	51%
Ratio Favorable/Unfavorable	1.7:1

solved tax crisis, 23 percent in April after the General Assembly passed HB1001, and 18 percent in August after many homeowners received their tax bills. Gas prices went from 1 percent in February to 12 percent in April after the gas shock hit, and now is 8 percent.

If there is a silver lining for Thompson, it's on the jobs and wages question, which polled at 14 percent in February, 19 percent in April and skyrocketing to 30 percent in August after the July jobless rate increased to 6.3 percent. Both campaigns have been active on the jobs front. Thompson has been showing up in cities with plant closings in Elkhart, Fort Wayne

and Richmond, commiserating with unemployed workers, while Daniels has been announcing new jobs in cities like Clermont, Anderson, Ligonier, Carmel, Indianapolis, Plainfield, Fort Wayne, Austin, and Jeffersonville since Aug. 1 when the campaign promised a "monster" jobs creation month.

Daniels had TV advertising by himself for almost three months. Democratic sources tell HPI that with Thompson now advertising in several state media markets, combined with the rise in the July jobless rate, there is an opportunity for her to close the gap. "These voters who switched to Daniels in the summer are the easiest to get back," one Democrat told us. "Daniels is not out of the woods yet." Traditionally, campaigns try to close the gap into single digits by Labor Day. Democratic sources tell HPI they believe that Thompson can get up to 90 percent of undecideds - currently at 9 percent - in this unsettled environment.

How can Jill win?

So the scenario for Thompson tightening the race would include:

1. A continued rise in the Indiana jobless rate.
2. Winning back voters who were attracted to Daniels' response to the June flooding.
3. Picking up 90 percent or more of the undecideds.
4. Working with Sen. Bayh to bring





home some of the 24 percent of Democrats backing Daniels.

5. Piggybacking on any momentum the Obama campaign can generate with its netroots and 92 county get out the vote effort.

6. And a lucky break: a scandal or meltdowns at the Hoosier Lottery or Family Social Services Administration or some other unforeseen event.

Thompson noted another spate of plant closings in the opening days of September. Yet Daniels has some pluses that could mitigate any movement by Thompson. The new Colts Stadium opens Sunday and he will get credit for pushing through most of the financing that included a food and beverage tax in eight counties surrounding Indianapolis. He will promote the U.S. 31 freeway and breaking ground on I-69. The U.S. second quarter growth rate was a mildly surprising 3.3 percent, which cuts into the recession. Oil prices are falling and, with the national dynamic, the news out of Iraq is as good as it has been since 2004. He can also rightly claim the "agent of change" moniker with Obama. And if Thompson begins cutting into the lead, there are several key issues (like suspending the gas tax) where Daniels and Obama have taken the same stance that the Republican will exploit.

It's worth noting that in the April Howey-Gauge Poll, Thompson had an 18 point lead (45-27 percent) a little more than two weeks prior to the May primary. We noted then that Schellinger could get back into that race with a surge of Republican voters in the presidential primary. With these voters, as well as inroads made by targeting female voters, Schellinger was able to close to within a little more than 1 percent.

Howey-Gauge reflects similar margins in recent SurveyUSA and Republican-oriented Bellwether and Target Point Polls. Another poll conducted for Democratic Kokomo Mayor Greg Goodnight in mid-summer revealed that Daniels had a 58 percent approval rating there. Howard County is seen by HPI as a bellwether county that went for Daniels in 2004 and Gov. Frank O'Bannon in 2000.

But there is no question that this is a dynamic political sequence in which the template has often been broken. There is no way to gauge Obama's use of the internet and eventual turnout and how this could impact the gubernatorial race.

LG Name Recognition

On recognition questions for Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman and Democratic nominee Dennie Oxley II, only 51 percent had awareness of Skillman and only 30 percent

had a hard opinion. Skillman's fav/unfavs stood at 25/5 percent. Those recognition totals were only slightly higher than similar polling in 2002 on then-Lt. Gov. Joe Kernan, who polled in the 40th percentile despite being widely considered as the heir apparent to the Bayh-O'Bannon Democratic dynasty. Skillman's low name ID raises interesting scenarios over how the post-Daniels era of Republican politics will shape up. A number of observers don't see Skillman as a political force who would "clear the field" the way John Mutz (1988), Frank O'Bannon (1996) and the more complicated Kernan scenario that played out between 2002 and 2003 after the death of Gov. O'Bannon.

In the this Howey-Gauge survey, 67 percent of those who participated in the May Republican primary recognized Skillman and her fav/unfav amongst those stood at 39/4 percent, or a 9.8:1 ratio.

Republicans expected to consider a 2012 gubernatorial run besides Skillman include Republican Chairman J. Murray Clark, Senate President Pro Tempore David Long, House Minority Leader Brian Bosma, U.S. Rep. Mike Pence and Secretary of State Todd Rokita. Not getting ahead of ourselves, but looking at 2012, if the Daniels-Skillman ticket wins in November and should Skillman want to run for governor, she is very well positioned in that she is well-known and well liked among GOP primary voters.

Oxley isn't famous at all. His total awareness number stands at an anemic 17 percent with a whopping 83 percent having no idea who he is. Only 7 percent have a hard opinion recognition. His fav/unfavs stood at 5/2 percent. This could, in part, be due to Thompson's decision to campaign with her running mate in tandem, as opposed to standard gubernatorial campaigns which have split the ticket seeking to hit twice as many cities and events.



View Howey-Gauge Toplines

The complete Howey-Gauge Poll Toplines will be posted on the Howey Politics Indiana website at www.howeypolitics.com at 5:15 p.m. today. To find them, look for the Indiana Polling Center category on the right side of the page.

Next Howey-Gauge Poll

The final Howey-Gauge Poll will be conducted during the third week of October and will be presented at a briefing at the Barnes & Thornberg Auditorium on Thursday, Oct. 23. In this final poll, HPI will survey the presidential, gubernatorial, 9th CD and several competitive Indiana House seats. ❖



Questions remain after Obama's big speech

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND - The Democratic National Convention is over, even as the stirring rhetoric of Barack Obama still echoes from the Rocky Mountains. Many questions remain.



Q. Did Democrats get that big bump in approval needed for Obama to win the presidency?

A. Probably not. Certainly not yet. There may be a bump up in poll standings _ indeed, there better be for Obama's election prospects _ but with Republicans seeking with some success to rain on Barack's parade and with their own convention beginning this week, any suggestion that Obama has it won is way, way premature.

Q. But did Democrats leave Denver united?

A. Yes. Those in Denver were united. Whether Democrats elsewhere throughout the nation are solidly for Obama is a question that won't be answered fully until Nov. 4.

Q. How about the speeches of Hillary and Bill Clinton? Did they do what was needed to get all those people who voted for her in the primaries to vote now for Obama?

A. Their speeches were superb. Just what was needed for unity. But their all-out support was belated. Their seeming reluctance and the drama about what they would do left too much focus on them at the start of the convention, when focus should have been on the Obama vs. John McCain contrast.

Q. What do you mean that Republicans tried to rain on Barack's parade?

A. It used to be that the party holding its convention had the national stage to itself. The other party was pretty much quiet, assuming that it would be neither wise nor even possible to jump on stage to challenge for publicity. No more. Republicans held news conferences in Denver. McCain spoke out to question Obama's credentials for president. And McCain sought during the convention and right after to steal news coverage with speculation over his choice for vice president.

Q. Did the effort to rain on Barack leave him all wet?

A. No. It may have left him with less of a bounce in polls than would have come if there had been no effort to blunt the lofty rhetoric and tough talk by Obama in his speech. But Obama offered a blueprint of what he means

by change and signaled that he will not fold under pressure as did the hapless John Kerry four years ago.

Q. What was Obama's toughest challenge to McCain?

A. When he took on the one issue most harmful to Obama, concern over whether he would be tough enough as commander in chief of the armed forces. He did so in declaring: "If John McCain wants to have a debate about who has the temperament and judgment to serve as commander in chief, that's a debate I'm ready to have."

Q. Was that a reference to reports of McCain's occasional loss of temper?

A. Clearly.

Q. Did Obama refute the McCain ridicule that he's just a celebrity, with credentials for president as vapid as those of attention-getters like Britney and Paris?

A. He tried. "This election has never been about me," Obama contended. "It's about you." He sought as best he could to keep Republicans from making him the issue and to focus attention instead on all the issues about which voters are shown to be more in favor of Democratic rather than Republican approaches.

Q. What is the effect of McCain's pick for vice president?

A. Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin is a gamble, obviously aimed at trying to win over women who were supporters of Hillary Clinton. It might work. Or it could throw away the experience issue and make Obama's selection of Joe Biden to be a heartbeat away to look even better.

Q. Do Republicans this week have unity problems of the type that beset the Democrats?

A. They have unity problems, but not of the same type, not from primary nomination opponents.

Q. What's their problem?

A. The biggest problem is the White House. President Bush and Vice President Cheney, both very unpopular with many voters McCain needs in order to win, are scheduled to speak at their party's convention. McCain strategists no doubt would like to schedule them for 3 a.m. But they can't. The challenge for Bush and Cheney will be to minimize harm and solidify support for McCain from the party's right wing.

Q. Talk about raining on a nominee's parade, will Hurricane Gustav hurt McCain?

A. Anything reminding the nation of the Bush administration response to Katrina is not helpful for McCain. He will seek to separate himself from Bush on hurricane response as well on other issues on which Obama has linked McCain with the unpopular president.

Q. OK, despite any cowardly caution in making a political prediction, climb out on the limb. Who will be elected as the next president?

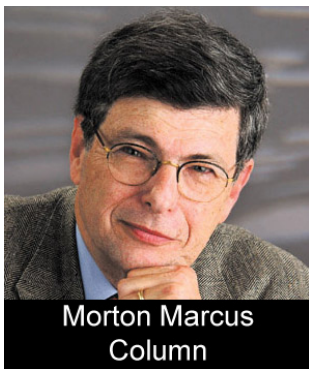
A. A United States senator. ❖



Too much government

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS - Have you read the Kernan-Shepard Report? Don't feel guilty, few have. Its more formal name is "Streamling Local Government, We've got to stop governing like this." It's a very strong, readable statement for reforming local government. Unfortunately it does not get to our root problem: local governments are creatures trained for obedience by their master, the Indiana General Assembly.



Morton Marcus
Column

Although the report does not say it, there will be no reform at the local level unless the General Assembly adopts the Kernan-Shepard recommendations into legislation. What has been done thus far is only the partial elimination of township assessors, an easy target.

But what about school consolidation? Is the General Assembly ready to

tackle that one? Even further, the Kernan-Shepard report did not dare go. There is no discussion of the consolidation of counties or the elimination of cities and towns.

Indiana has 92 counties and 567 cities and towns. Are they efficient or meaningful units of government? Let's start with Marion County. Why do twelve cities and towns continue to exist in and around Indianapolis in a county that supposedly has Unigov? Is there a reason for the continued existence of Homecroft (population 741), Meridian Hills (1,734), and Rocky Ripple (706)? The last is not named for, nor has it inspired, an ice cream.

If the Kernan-Shepard commission recommends consolidation of school districts that are too small to be effective, why not apply the same idea to other units of government. Indiana has 452 cities and towns with 5,000 or fewer citizens. Some may have good reason to exist, but which could be eliminated with what benefits for efficiency?

Is there a reason for the existence of Riley (155 persons) in Vigo County? How about Darmstadt (1,500) in Vanderburgh County? Clifford (304) in Bartholomew County?

There is no suggestion here to wipe these places off the map of Indiana. Rather, the idea is to examine the justification for governmental units that may serve little, if any, purpose. Size alone is not the issue. Some of our towns are nothing more than residential enclaves that seek

to escape the taxes of adjacent cities. If we can force consolidation of school corporations, surely we can do the same with parasitic housing developments.

At the county level, how do we justify the continued existence of Ohio County? This smallest of the state's counties has fewer than 6,000 persons on just 87 square miles. Why not combine Ohio with either Switzerland or Dearborn counties?

Benton County has 8,800 people while adjacent Warren County has 8,500. The Kernan-Shepard commission recommends intergovernmental compacts for the joint provision of services. That's a charming idea, but it does not resolve the underlying issue. We have more counties than we need, just as we have more cities and towns than we need.

If we are to reform local governments, they truly must be formed differently. But does the Indiana legislature have the courage to make changes that are really significant? There is no evidence that our representatives and senators can be expected to make meaningful changes, except to subsidize special interest groups like home owners.



If we are to reform local government, it will take the bold leadership of an innovative governor to propose and champion radical reform. It will take citizens who are serious rather than parochial to support true reform. ❖

Mr. Marcus is an independent economist, speaker, and writer formerly with IU's Kelley School of Business. Contact him for speaking engagements at mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com or 317-626-8853



The conditions are right for a political tornado

By **DAVE KITCHELL**

LOGANSPORT - Maybe the arrival of Hurricane Gustav as the timely transition between the two major party national conventions was symbolic of what's to come in the weeks ahead.

Gustav didn't turn out to be the perfect storm, but it's apparent the winds of change are blowing. Even as Americans were learning more about Sarah Palin every day in the last week, the Gallup Poll showed Barack Obama widening his lead over John McCain.



Hoosiers may not have to worry about hurricanes, but we do relate to tornadoes. The worst come about four or five times every century, which is just about as often as Democrats carried the state in presidential elections in the last century.

If anything, Indiana is experiencing the political equivalent of a tornado watch. We haven't sighted a tornado of change on

the horizon yet, but to paraphrase the mechanical voice of the National Weather Service warnings, the conditions are right for a tornado to occur.

Yes, even in Indiana. We've heard murmurs nationwide and in the *Howey Politics Indiana* that Indiana could turn from a red state into a blue one in presidential politics this year. Some observers have described states with our trendlines as "purple states" - meaning we've been one color traditionally, but we may not be this time.

What conditions are "right" for a political tornado, i.e., a Democrat presidential candidate winning Indiana, to occur? Here they are:

1. Primary presence. Obama and Clinton combined spent more time in Indiana during the primary than any Democratic presidential candidates since at least 1968, and probably longer. Voters in this state have reacquainted themselves with the idea that Democrats can care about them and the party does care about the state. For many years, that was not the case.

2. Congressional majority. For the first time in years, Indiana has a Democratic majority in its congressional delegation. Granted, it's only 6-5, but it shows how successful the national party has become in making inroads in the state.

3. Proximity. Indiana voters can probably relate more to a Midwest senator like Obama than an Arizonan

like McCain. It's a Big Ten kind of thing, but secondarily, Hoosiers are Upper Midwest, Great Lakes state types. And the last time an Arizonan was on a presidential ticket was also the last time Indiana went donkey in a presidential election.

4. Early decision. Obama does not have the election won yet, but McCain has been able to muster little but statistical ties with him for months. Given the latest polls, fewer Republicans may go to the polls in Indiana this November if Obama has it all but wrapped up and the Sarah Palin effect doesn't produce the bounce McCain needs.

5. Nonpartisan issues. So many times, politics boils down to partisan positions. But when problems such as mortgage foreclosure, a less than robust economy and fuel prices cut across demographic and political lines, partisan politics tend to go out the window, and the winds favor challengers over incumbents.

6. New voters. Demographics of Indiana voters have changed. In 1964, thousands of railroad employees who happened to be Democrats were still employed in the state. As the railroads vanished, so did Democratic hopes, though auto workers carried the water for the unions in the state for the most part. But now the Republican voters, many of whom were farmers during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, are dying off. The average age of a farmer is the oldest it has ever been, but no one lives forever. Many of the voters replacing them are first-time voters who have been exposed to an historic primary in the state, and have to feel the energy of what's happening.

Mind you, I'm not predicting a tornado will occur, but there is a watch in effect. ❖

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Doug Ross, Times of Northwest Indiana:

Doug Ross, Times of Northwest Indiana: Next Friday, I plan to listen to evangelist Joe Kernan preaching in Gary. Kernan, the former Indiana governor, plans to tell the Northwest Indiana Quality of Life Council about streamlining local government. It's a subject he knows well. Kernan, a Democrat, is a co-author of last December's report from the Indiana Commission on Local Government. When Gov. Mitch Daniels -- the Republican who defeated Kernan four years ago -- met with The Times editorial board on Tuesday, I tried to gauge his sentiment toward that issue. Trust me, it's strong. "If I'm rehired," Daniels said, "one of the first things I will do is sit down the leaders of both parties and say, 'OK, we've had a year to reflect on it, the citizens have had their say, the newspapers, what do we like most on it?'" The commission, headed by Kernan and Indiana Chief Justice Randall Shepard, made 27 recommendations, three of which have already been implemented by the General Assembly as part of this year's property tax reform. One of them, taking child welfare support off the property tax rolls and putting the onus on the state where it belongs, "is a major benefit, a huge benefit for Lake County," Daniels correctly noted. Some remaining reforms should be relatively easy to implement, like holding elections only in even years instead of three out of four years. That will shave election costs. Others, like merging library districts and smaller school districts, will be infinitely more controversial. That's where the property tax caps come in. Tax caps, Daniels said, "I believe will force people to consider reform that they probably should have done long ago but could postpone as long as they could just increase your tax bill." I hate to keep bringing up the failure of the effort to merge fire protection in Highland and Munster, but that shows how much people in Indiana have dug in their heels. But the tax caps might change their minds. "It's really, I think, the anvil of reform against which possibly some breakthroughs can occur that have just sat there for decades," Daniels said. "I think the Indiana public -- quite an overwhelming majority -- wants to see change occurring. That's different in the abstract from saying, 'How about this change, this change ...,'" he said. The bottom line is Indiana has "way too many politicians, way too many jurisdictions, way too many everything." There are more than 80 layers of government in Lake County alone. Daniels feels so strongly about this that he is going to push hard to bring those numbers down, even though he acknowledges that of the 11,000 or so elected officials, "probably 70+ percent of them are from my own party." I'll be asking Daniels' opponent, Democrat Jill Long Thompson, these questions when The Times editorial board meets with her again. But I won't make you wait for my answer: Indiana needs a radical new structure for local government that allows for less expen-



sive, more efficient, more nimble service to the citizens. ❖

Stephanie Salter, Terre Haute Tri-

bune-Star: I can't repeat both the words I uttered when I heard about John McCain's choice for vice president. But the second word was "genius." If the most adroit political talent scout had been given the assignment, if all the data on all the potential running mates in the universe could have been fed into the highest state-of-the-art computer -- if the boys and girls at Pixar had been ordered to generate the animated super hero to relegate all other super heroes to the shadows -- no one could have come up with anything better than Sarah Palin. As network anchors and reporters scrambled Friday morning to compile biographical information on the governor of Alaska, the news scene began to look like a sketch from "Saturday Night Live." (That Palin strongly resembles SNL alum Tina Fey only added to the environment.) Can she get any closer to conservative GOP perfection? She loves guns and uses them to hunt. Ferociously anti-abortion, she is 44 and the mother of five. The eldest of her children enlisted in the Army last year -- on 9/11 -- and next month on 9/11 will deploy to Iraq. Her youngest child is but a babe in arms, born in April -- with Down Syndrome. ❖

Sylvia Smith, Fort Wayne Journal

Gazette: Here's this year's magic number: 11. That's the number of electoral votes Indiana has. For the first time in two generations, they might be up for grabs. At least that's what Barack Obama's campaign thinks -- and wants to make John McCain a believer, too. The image of Indiana as a swing state is hard to credit. After all, the Hoosier electoral votes have been delivered to the Republican presidential candidate every year since 1964, when LBJ beat Barry Goldwater among Hoosiers as well as across the country. All Indiana's electoral votes go the presidential candidate who wins the most votes in the state. (Only Nebraska and Maine don't use the winner-take-all method.) That means it doesn't matter how close the loser comes; if the other candidate gets one more vote, it's game over. So in the elections since LBJ won Indiana by nearly 260,000 votes, Democratic contenders largely have ignored the state as not being a cost-effective place to spend time or money. Both are in short supply during a presidential campaign, and candidates are unlikely (not to mention stupid) to devote their treasure to an almost-certain lost cause. That pragmatic decision by Democrats allowed the GOP ticket also to bypass the state in its campaigning. As a result, Hoosiers have seen presidential candidates in. If Obama does not win, we'll look back on Denver and say Bayh started his 2012 presidential campaign in those 7 minutes at the Denver podium. ❖