

## Shadow Convention

Thank you very much. *Public Funding*

I cannot properly convey to you how wonderful it is to walk across America, and how interesting Americans are in every town along the way. I enjoyed every day of it while I was out doing it, and I am enjoying the reliving of it as I go through my journals, ~~and finish a book of memories about it.~~

The other day, I was remembering ~~and writing~~ about the part of my walk that took me through Arkansas.

On the bridge over the Red River, as I left 800 miles of Texas, a middle-aged woman stood at the halfway point of the bridge to welcome me to Arkansas. She had read in the newspaper that I was coming. As she and I walked across the bridge together, she said the old river might be dredged someday for the big boats, which would give the town an economic revival. "It might be a busy city again if they do that," she said. She was hopeful and yet resigned to the idea that it would probably never happen. If she only owned a senator or two, I thought!

In the days ahead, I walked through the friendly town of Hope, which, as you know, is famous for its watermelons. I spit seeds in the seed-spitting contest

they have every summer at their watermelon festival. Everyone in that town has become quite good at spitting.

Several days later, I walked into Arkadelphia through sweltering 105-degree misery. But here was heaven: a beautiful town with an historic main street and lovely shops and homes. We had lemonade and hamburgers at Percy Malone's drug store.

The central part of Arkadelphia's downtown was flattened by a tornado in 1997, only two years before my walk. It was rebuilt to beautiful standards, and in record time. The center of the damage was Percy Malone's drug store, which has been rebuilt from scratch. I don't know how Arkadelphia got such quick and first-class disaster relief from the federal government, but they did.

In other news, Percy Malone is one of president Clinton's oldest and best golfing friends. Percy's computer's housed the all-important "Friends of Bill" mailing list. Moments after the tornado, Percy got a call from the White House to ask how everybody was doing--and the computer, Percy? How's the computer? Well, it was fine.

Now, the fact that the leaders of Arkadelphia knew the president may or may not have helped them get faster and better assistance from the government. I think the government should have helped them quickly, and I'm glad they did. But it may be a case study to demonstrate that access is important in politics. We need to look at how people get that access. Friendships and loyalties and long histories will always provide access, and that is fine. But just being a citizen in a district should come with access to the elected representatives of that district.

Giving large campaign donations cannot help but translate to access. It is a natural thing, even though it is wrong. The public official who provides special access to his or her donors is stealing that access away from the citizens of the district, to whom it rightfully belongs. As long as there are big political donations, there will be that sale of stolen goods.

It was interesting that this case study in access should come just as I was walking with John and Mary Rauh of my home state of New Hampshire.

After lunch at Percy's, John sat down with me and with the others walking with us and made the argument that the passage of the McCain-Feingold bill to get corporate and union money out of politics

is important, but that the deeper solution is the public financing of campaigns. The way that works is that the candidate gets a certain number of qualifying signatures and small contributions, in the five to fifty dollar range, from people who live in the district. When you get enough to prove that you have a base of support, you receive clean, no strings attached campaign funds, from the state election fund, if you agree to not raise or spend any other money. That neatly removes fat cats and out-of-district contributors from our elections.

At that time, John was helping to manage the Bill Bradley campaign in New Hampshire, and he had strongly urged that Senator Bradley come out in favor of full public financing of campaigns, though I think Bradley has been a believer for some time. John said I should start talking it up, too.

I am from New England and John is from New England, so I told him I would think about it, as it would be rude to just give in and not show the proper amount of obstinacy. I knew in my heart that what he was saying made sense.

That evening, my new friend Percy Malone invited the mayor and a few dozen people from Arkadelphia to come into his drug store for a special picnic dinner

and discussion. He moderated a wonderful brainstorming session on campaign finance reform. Believe me, the people who are closest to the system know it needs fixing. I thought this would be a good group to test the acceptability of the idea of using government funds to finance political campaigns. There was a great mix of people there from the left and right side of politics, and I expected to see some serious resistance from somewhere. Not a bit: nearly everyone agreed that public financing of campaigns is what needs to happen.

As we were wrapping up the evening at Percy's, I gave John Rauh a wink to let him know that he had made the sale with me.

Now, let me say how all that fits into what we are doing here today.

Friends, we are at that difficult time when we try to decide whether to support candidates who may not represent all our reform goals, but who may have a chance of winning and representing at least some of our goals.

That is a difficult choice for many people. I take the view that you should always vote your heart, whether your heart is with a major party candidate or a third

party candidate, and let the chips fall where they may. See your vote as a long-term investment in the direction of America and the world, not a short-term investment in the political winds of the day. Every vote counts; every vote shapes the political landscape of the future. The only wasted vote is the vote not cast.

However we may vote, there is something we can all agree on, and something we can all do together over the next four years, regardless of who wins.

We now have public financing of campaigns in four states. That leaves forty-six others, plus the District of Columbia, where we must fight and win great battles together.

Each of us must help two ways. We must be mobile volunteers, and we must be check writers. It takes money to get money out of politics. The campaign in Arizona cost nearly a million dollars, but the success of that campaign is pushing fat cat interests right out the door, and the human scale is returning to campaign politics in that state, as it is Massachusetts, Vermont and Maine.

We need to generously support the reformers in those states who need our financial support. We need to

financially support the organizations that send the majority of the money we give them to those state campaigns.

That must be our common agenda for the coming four years. It is a people's revolution, and we simply must succeed if human values are to prevail against corruption and selfishness.

The American reform community is split into two factions. They all agree that a monster is stalking the land and crushing the position of the individual. But if you set down these reformers with a police sketch artist, half the reformers will describe the giant as the multinational corporation, and half will describe government itself. What we reformers share in common is the defense of the position of the human scale in politics, and that means we can work together and we must. Certainly, the same corporate contributions that disturb some reformers because they damage the social and physical environment, disturb other reformers because those contributions translate to a larger government with more tax breaks for special interests. We do indeed share a common agenda.

With the fat cats kicked out of our political parties through public financing, it will again be possible to

focus our efforts on other reforms from within the ranks of our parties. That is where we should be, not across town in this hall, but on the floor of the major party conventions, voting and making a difference on the policy planks and candidates that will directly move America into a better future. We must get big money out of our way before we can do that, as you very well know.

Let us meet again in four years, not here, but in the conventions of the four parties, and there let us toast each other across the barricades for moving at least five to ten more states into public financing. If you promise to do all that and to be there, then I promise to do all that and to be there with you, if I have to walk to get there.

Thank you very much.