



Obama's Morning Meeting

According To New Book, Questions Obama For America Staffers May Ask At Their Morning Meeting

WHY IS DEBBIE CALLING AGAIN?

How Do We Keep Our Least Effective Surrogate From Going On TV?

Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Obama's Pick For DNC Chair, Became A "Headache" For The Campaign. "Another headache hidden behind the no-drama veil soon cropped up, in the person of the Florida congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Obama's choice to head the Democratic National Committee. After a long internal debate in early 2011, Obama's team had picked Wasserman Schultz on her strengths as a battleground-state surrogate and fund-raiser. She was chosen over the former Ohio governor Ted Strickland, but the decision was a close one." (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

- **Wasserman Schultz "Grated On Chicago."** "From the start, Wasserman Schultz grated on Chicago. She insisted the DNC hire a handful of her top congressional aides. While she was a tough and effective cable warrior and a serious fundraiser, she tended to do better on MSNBC and struck too harsh a partisan tone when she crossed over to the Sunday shows, they thought." (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

A Focus Group Commissioned By The Obama Campaign On Surrogate Effectiveness Ranked Wasserman Schultz "Dead Last." "She won the skirmish but lost the war— eventually becoming marginalized. Her fate, to be fair, has been shared by many a party chief in an election year, but by spring some in Obama's orbit were openly speculating about how much better things might have been under Strickland or Villaraigosa. No sooner had that speculation died down than Wasserman Schultz called Chicago to ask why her national TV appearances, especially on the Sunday shows, had dropped off. The campaign dropped a bomb on her. A focus group, secretly conducted by Binder's company, was commissioned by the campaign to rank the relative effectiveness of various in-house Obama surrogates. The results, which were made available to me, placed Robert Gibbs at the top. Cutter was second (a later version of the poll placed Jen Psaki, who was soon to return to the fold as Obama's traveling press secretary, third). Axelrod did pretty well. Plouffe and Press Secretary Jay Carney, not so much. Wasserman Schultz ranked dead last." (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

HEY, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THAT HOPE AND CHANGE WE RAN ON IN 2008?

Has Obama Signed Off On More Negative Ads That "Kill Romney"?

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Democratic Strategist: “Unless Things Change And Obama Can Run On Accomplishments, He Will Have To Kill Romney.” “‘Unless things change and Obama can run on accomplishments, he will have to kill Romney,’ said a prominent Democratic strategist aligned with the White House. The strategy came down to proving Romney was unfit to govern, a phony, and ‘weird.’” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

Obama Did Not Have Reservations About The “Kill Romney” Strategy And “Personally Signed Off On All Of His Campaign’s Paid Advertising.” “If the outside world found that approach jarring, Obama didn’t. In interviews with two dozen current and former Obama advisers, not one said he expressed reservations— at least in the beginning— about the ‘kill Romney’ strategy, and he personally signed off on all of his campaign’s paid advertising, although he often toned down the very harshest attacks.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

Obama Relies On “Going Negative,” Which Is “Very Different From The Formula” He Used In 2008. “‘Obama and his advisers fell back on the timeless method that has essentially become the default option for presidential reelection campaigns, despite his promises to change the process. They prefer to talk euphemistically about ‘drawing the contrast,’ but everyone else calls it going negative. This was something very different from the formula that elected the country’s first African-American president, but it would have to do.’” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

When Will We Spend Another \$2 Million On Polling?

The Obama Campaign Spent \$2 Million A Month On Polling And Learned That Voters Did Not Want To Hear Obama Telling Them Things Were Getting Better Because They Didn’t Believe It. “At first, Obama’s political team knew only what not to do. The pollster David Binder’s focus group studies, part of a \$ 2 million– a– month polling operation that served up fresh data to Obama nearly every day, showed that voters were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. They didn’t blame him for the mess. They basically bought his assertion that he had ‘inherited’ the crisis. But they were happy, even eager, to punish Obama if he suggested things were getting better. Don’t tell us things are getting better, we won’t buy it, the people in the focus groups told Binder’s team.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

How Do We Avoid Running On The Economy Today?

Obama Adviser: “You Can’t Run On The Economy.” “‘You can’t run on the economy,’ one Obama adviser told me. ‘You can only tell people that you’ve saved them from something worse. That’s the truth, we did save the country. He did accomplish more than any recent president. But you can’t run on that.’” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

When Will Obama Call Republicans His Enemies?

During The 2010 Elections, Obama Referred To Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell And Then-House Minority Leader John Boehner As His “Enemies.” “Obama had also been eager to vent his frustration against the Senate GOP leader, Mitch McConnell, who had ticked off the president by openly admitting his top priority was making Obama a one-term president. So, as the midterm races heated up, Obama lit into McConnell and the House minority leader, John Boehner, soon to become Speaker, referring to them as his ‘enemies.’” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

Axelrod Was Concerned Obama’s Direct Partisan Attacks On The GOP Was Putting Too Much “Torque” On Obama’s Image. “The president’s direct attacks on the Republican leaders just put too much ‘torque’ on Obama’s core image, Axelrod told me. He felt that the year-end deal with the GOP would allow Obama to pivot back to bipartisanship. ‘We do have a greater opportunity in the next two years

because of all the work we've done in the first two years. We have a clear field in front of us,' he predicted." (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

How Do We Lift Our Spirits Today?

Obama's 2012 Re-Election Campaign Was "A Depressing Experience Compared With The Heady Days Of 2008." "That reluctance to fully commit to the grungier realities of 2012, said people around him, hinted at a deeper sentiment that he shared with his dispirited 2008 voters despite his surface bravado. The reelection campaign was, simply, a depressing experience compared with the heady days of 2008. 'We have got to stop buying our old bullshit,' one of Obama's state directors told me, summing up the opinion of a handful of top Obama advisers. 'We're our own worst enemy with this crap. This isn't 2008. We've got to accept that. So does he.'" (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

More Lobbyists At The White House?

In "Another Instance Of Obama Loosening The Hope-And-Change Straitjacket For The Sake Of Victory In 2012," Obama Allowed Biden To Select Steve Ricchetti, A Former Lobbyist, To Work In His Office. "Biden's second choice was more conventional— the Clinton White House veteran Steve Ricchetti. Plouffe and Axelrod, top Democrats say, vetoed that pick too. Ricchetti was widely liked and a known commodity, but he had once been a highly paid lobbyist for the likes of Fannie Mae, General Motors, and the drug company giant Eli Lilly. It would look bad for Obama's clean-hands image, they argued. This time Biden wasn't taking no for an answer. He was like a 'dog with a bone,' one observer noted, and made an impassioned case to Obama directly that he needed Ricchetti. 'Okay, okay,' Obama said— and overrode his advisers for the sake of internal harmony. It was yet another instance of Obama loosening the hope-and-change straitjacket for the sake of victory in 2012. It wouldn't be the last." (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

WHAT ARE AXELROD AND CUTTER GOING TO SAY TODAY?

So If We Lose, Is This Axelrod's Fault?

Obama "Frequently Expressed Frustration With The Axe-Run Communications Shop..." "The next part was tougher. Although he had never been publicly critical of David Axelrod, the rumpled messaging guru who could modulate from aspiration to kneecapping in a heartbeat, Obama frequently expressed frustration with the Axe-run communications shop, especially as he was being played on health-care reform." (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

A Reporter Admitted "He Softened His Stories To Avoid 'Hurting [Axelrod]'s Feelings' ..." "He may have yearned for his old stomping ground, but people around Axe— so well liked a reporter told me he softened his stories to avoid 'hurting his feelings'— knew that he enjoyed D.C. a lot more than he let on. He loved his walk-in-anytime access to Obama, valued his power, and had no immediate plans to ditch his Logan Circle apartment, the site of his 'Tuesday Meetings' with Democratic strategists over takeout." (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)

Axelrod Thought His Departure From The West Wing Would Be Gradual But Pete Rouse And Bill Daley "Made It Very Clear To Him That The Time To Go Was Now..." "Axe wasn't asking to stay— he was burnt out, too, and needed a break— but he was lingering on the threshold. He had assumed his tenure would overlap with Plouffe's for a short period of time in the West Wing. The handoff would be gradual and would probably last into the spring, he told reporters. Not so, decided Rouse and the incoming chief of staff, Bill Daley. Sooner would be better— for the sake of setting up the Chicago

campaign and the newer, calmer White House order. The end of January would do. ‘They made it very clear to him that the time to go was now,’ said one of several former staffers who confirmed that account to me.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

Axelrod Was An “Exponent Of The ‘Weird’ Attack” On Romney. “He [Axelrod] was an exponent of the ‘weird’ attack, a catchall dis that many Republicans saw as a veiled reference to Romney’s Mormon faith.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

Axelrod Said It Was A “Bullsh*t Notion” That Obama Ran A Strictly Positive Campaign In 2008. “Axelrod, who earned his stripes in the rough-and-tumble of Chicago politics before becoming brand manager for hope and change, scoffed at the idea that hitting Romney too hard would damage Obama’s main electoral asset, a plus-50 percent personal approval rating that had remained remarkably steady. It was a ‘bullshit notion’ that Obama ran a strictly positive campaign the first time around, he told me as the campaign heated up. Just ask Hillary Clinton and John McCain if they agree that Obama played patty-cake, he said.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

How Do We Make Cutter More Likable?

“Aggressiveness And Persistence Were Cutter’s Calling Cards. Even People Who Liked Her Found Her Tough To Work With In The Heat Of A Campaign.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

WHAT ARE AXELROD AND CUTTER FIGHTING ABOUT NOW?

How Do We Get Them To Stop Clashing?

Axelrod And Cutter – Two Of The “West Wing’s Biggest Personalities To Chicago” Clashed In An “Unexpected Scrap.” “The in-house argument about money was soon followed by an unexpected scrap between two friends high up in the campaign— prompted by the export of some of the West Wing’s biggest personalities to Chicago. The unlikely antagonists were Cutter and Axelrod, close friends and allies who ran the campaign’s messaging operation.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

Axelrod Felt Cutter Was Overstepping Her Authority As A Deputy While Cutter Was Frustrated With Axelrod’s “Elliptical Decision-Making Process And Tendency To Defer Tough Choices To Avoid Conflict.” “The conflict, ultimately, was less the product of any single incident than the cumulative effect of sixteen-hour workdays and the pressures of the campaign. Their respective strengths, their colleagues knew, were also their most aggravating weaknesses. Axelrod was creative but disorganized, which had driven colleagues crazy for years; Cutter was driven and efficient but undiplomatic, to put it mildly. Axelrod, according to several current and former staffers I spoke with, felt that Cutter was simply being too aggressive, overstepping her authority as a deputy— from managing the surrogates who represented Obama on TV to pushing her attacks against Romney in a way that sometimes boomeranged on the campaign. That view was increasingly shared by other top Obama aides back east, people close to the situation told me. On the flip side, it was no secret that Cutter, like others on the campaign, was frustrated by Axelrod’s elliptical decision-making process and tendency to defer tough choices to avoid conflict.” (Glenn Thrush, *Obama’s Last Stand*, 2012)

THERE GOES BIDEN AGAIN...

Do We Really Have To Let Biden Travel Today?

Biden’s Staff Was Always Eager To Send Him To “Critical Early Primary States.” “On scheduling calls

with staffers from the Democratic congressional and Senate campaign committees, Biden's representatives always seemed eager to deploy their boss in Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and Iowa—critical early primary states. 'They always wanted to know: 'Do you have anything coming up in Manchester or Des Moines?' It was pretty obvious,' said one Democratic consultant who works for a handful of House incumbents.'" (Glenn Thrush, *Obama's Last Stand*, 2012)