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## Making of a President: Candidates lean on Colbians in bids for the White House

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# THE MAKING OF A PRESIDENT

*Candidates lean on Colbians in bids for the White House*



BY ALLEN LESSELS

Senator Barack Obama, his ice cream-scooping duties complete, chats up the last of hundreds of supporters and tire-kickers who have come to see and hear him late on a Labor Day afternoon on a sunlit elementary school baseball field in Hudson, New Hampshire.

Mike Cuzzi '98, leaning against a chain-link fence, tracks the candidate's every move. And fields this question: Doesn't it seem Colby has an unusually large number of alums working behind the scenes in presidential campaigns, particularly in the 2008 campaign?

"It seems inordinate at times," said Cuzzi, the Obama campaign's No. 2 operative in the first primary state. "I'll tell you, when we were up here with Senator Kerry—Oh, I've got to go."

Obama had taken another step or two toward a gate in the fence, and soon he and Cuzzi, Secret Service agents, writer Joe Klein of *Time* magazine, and a few others were gone, moving quietly off through the woods, much the same way they had arrived a little more than an hour before.

Yes, Colby is overrepresented in the ranks of presidential campaigns. And, like all political campaign staffers, these Colbians are always on the move.



**I**t was a week later that Cuzzi found a few minutes to continue the conversation. He was in his office in Obama's Manchester headquarters, a sprawling space in a renovated two-story brick building that houses Queen City Dental out front. He said the most recent Obama visit to New Hampshire had been a success.

On Labor Day, after an appearance at an AFL-CIO breakfast, the senator had rolled out a new stump speech in a morning rally in Manchester. He paraded in a Labor Day gala in Milford. "It's something fun and different, and it's one of those things," Cuzzi said. "You can't be in New Hampshire on Labor Day and not be in the Milford parade. Every candidate who was in the state was there, and those that weren't still had a presence."

The ice-cream social in Hudson. A private dinner for raffle-winning donors, a roundtable discussion on government reform the next morning, followed by a house party.

"The traditional New Hampshire house party," Cuzzi said. "Retail politics at its best. ... People want to be able to look the candidates in the eyes and they want to ask them the tough questions and get a sense of who they are and what they believe."

Part of Cuzzi's role (he doubles as Obama's New Hampshire political director and deputy state director) is to get Obama in front of the people.

His job, in part, is to balance the house parties with the larger ice-cream socials and the even bigger events, like a rally at Dartmouth in late May that drew an overflow crowd at the college's Nelson A. Rockefeller Center courtyard. The campaign estimated that throng to be about 6,000 strong, and it makes a compelling photo on Cuzzi's ever-present BlackBerry.

A longtime admirer of Obama, Cuzzi left Tom Allen's U.S. Senate campaign in Maine and signed on early for this presidential run. He came down from Portland in February 2007, and the state's campaign began out of his small apartment in Manchester.

"No signs on the walls, no desks, just four folding chairs," Cuzzi said with a laugh. "Mostly it was getting here and initially trying to get

on the ground and build all of our political relationships. My role is just to make sure that the campaign is as engaged as possible with all the different groups and elected officials and party officials. And making sure that I'm constantly aware of any political news or situation or anything we need to be responsive to here."

And at times to keep Barack Obama on task.

That's why, while Obama finished up a pre-scooping speech on the ball field, Cuzzi gripped a set of supporter cards in his hand and made sure the candidate got sight of them. As he closed, Obama, on cue, urged all those in the crowd to sign up to help out.

Cuzzi chuckled about the reminder.

"It was just to prompt him," he said. "It makes a big difference. He moves the ball down the field and signs people up."

That's the goal, of course.

Moving people to action. Getting them to sign up. Getting them to come into the office at night and

make phone calls and mail postcards and cover the walls with posters and sayings and photos—all done to move even more people.

Moving them to donate cash and more time. Organizing them to knock on doors. Later, to make more urgent phone calls as election day approaches. Finally, to get out the people and move them to vote.

Specifically, to vote for Barack Obama, hope Cuzzi and fellow Obama staffers Emmett Beliveau '99 and Jean-Michel Picher '96.

To vote for Republican Congressman Ron Paul, hopes Patrick Semmens '05.

To vote for Senator John McCain, hopes Steve Bogden '05.

To vote for Senator John Edwards, hopes Katie Harris '02.

To vote for Senator Joe Biden, hopes Mark Paustentbach '01.

To vote for Senator Sam Brownback, hoped an alum who was in that campaign while it lasted.



*"You kind of get the itch. It sticks with you, and people keep coming back. A campaign is very addictive. ... I think I probably knew last summer [in 2006] that as 2008 was cropping up I probably had one more cycle in me. But do I think I'll still be doing it in four years? I'd probably say no. But one never knows."*

KATIE HARRIS '02

Not all these campaigners were able to talk to Colby about their experiences, but several did. And from both sides of the aisle they credited mentors at Colby.

Yes, getting back to that question at the Labor Day rally, it does seem that Colby—thanks to its Government Department and the likes of professors Anthony Corrado, Sandy Maisel, and Cal Mackenzie—does have more than its share of folks who cycle back into the passionate, adrenalin-fueled, and harried lifestyle of presidential campaigns, shaping and pushing the candidacies of those who would be the next President of the United States.

"I have always believed that the best way to learn about politics is by actually doing it," said Corrado, the Charles A. Dana Professor of Government, a widely respected expert on campaign finance and a veteran of four presidential campaigns (prior to his academic career) himself.

Maisel, Mackenzie, and Corrado are among the faculty who teach government courses that draw from real-life political experience—and ignite an interest in national politics, alumni say. Inspiration in the classroom is augmented by connections in the world of politics that lead to internships, Jan Plans, and in many cases jobs on campaigns.

And Colby alumni who work in national politics frequently turn to their former professors for students who are capable, enthusiastic, and interested in learning politics in the trenches.

"We just started building a network," Corrado said. That network has resulted in "a strong tradition" of Colbians working to elect presidents and other national politicians.

Sandy Maisel, the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Government and director of the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, said that, unlike some colleges, Colby encourages students to join political campaigns. Not only does political work fulfill the mission of public service that the Goldfarb Center supports, it also offers students and young alumni experience that is hard to match in other work environments.

"It is very difficult to find a job where one year out of college or two years out of college, you're given a huge amount

of responsibility," Maisel said.

When campaigners retire from what is acknowledged to be a young person's game, they have a plethora of transferable skills.

Five years ago, Katie Harris figured she'd someday take her degree in government to Washington. First she taught for a year in Colorado and Switzerland, then she started to network, chatting up Colby alums, friends, and others. "What kept coming back to me was, 'If I was a young person right now and Democrat-leaning, I'd get myself to New Hampshire or Iowa and get on a campaign,'" Harris said.

That was in late 2003, and soon, after checking in with Cuzzi, she was working in a Kerry field office in Nashua, N.H. When the senator won the nomination, Harris began doing advance work around the country, mostly with Teresa Heinz Kerry and Elizabeth Edwards.

"I can't even tell you the emotional roller-coaster ride it was," Harris said. "I'm such an advocate of getting on one of these. If you're willing to put up with these hours, it's totally consuming. And by the same token, if you're willing to get paid the token amounts you get paid—we're clearly not in it for the money—it's such an incredible experience. But in the election we were going a hundred miles an hour. And you hit a wall at a hundred and it's over."

After Kerry lost the election, Harris took a good job with a communications firm in the Washington area and wasn't sure she wanted to get back on the ride.

"But you kind of get the itch," she said. "It sticks with you, and people keep coming back. A campaign is very addictive. ... I think I probably knew last summer [in 2006] that as 2008 was cropping up I probably had one more cycle in me. But do I think I'll still be doing it in four years? I'd probably say no. But one never knows."

These days, she works out of the Edwards headquarters in Chapel Hill, N.C., as the scheduler for Elizabeth Edwards.

Her charge: "Keep the trains running."

She's always trying to think 10 steps ahead and to consider the worst-case scenarios, which is difficult, she said, because

she's an optimist by nature. "There's a lot of give and take," Harris said. "Everyone wants a piece of her time. We get pressure both internally and externally."

The press wants 20 minutes. The political team wants 20 minutes. Everyone wants 20 minutes. "And there are only twenty minutes so many times a day," Harris said. "Someone needs to say, 'We can't give you the full twenty minutes, but you'll get part of it. Yes, what you need is important, but this is also important.'"

As is typical in a campaign, Harris is basically on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "You have to be good at setting boundaries, taking an hour for yoga or whatever," she said. "But believe me, I've been known to be on the treadmill with my BlackBerry in hand, which is so lame. So it goes."

Katie Varney, '07, thought about it. But she couldn't get herself to jump into the presidential campaign this cycle. She didn't look forward to the crazy hours. Didn't look forward to eating fast food day after day. In short, she didn't look forward to the life of a campaign worker.

"I had no desire to get into that again," Varney said from the Washington area where she now works at The Reform Institute, the organization started by Senator John McCain. "I care a little more about my health these days. I enjoy eating and sleeping. [A campaign] completely consumes you. It's ev-

erything you do, everything you think about. ... I'd be working at seven in the morning to two in the morning, doing anything I possibly could. That's just the way it was. It was the way everyone was."

Varney worked on the George Bush campaign in 2004 as a college coordinator for the Republican National Committee.

She took the fall semester off and received academic credit for traveling the state, starting and organizing Republican chapters of students on various college campuses. Later, she was promoted to field coordinator of Waldo County and organized its get-out-the vote effort. And don't get the wrong idea. She doesn't regret the experience.

"Absolutely not," Varney said. "I just don't think I'm up for it. I think I'll always look back at that period as the time I lived off Mobil Speedpass."

There were positives. She didn't get sent off election night to help oversee a recount somewhere.

"We were at an election party at a hotel in Bangor and we sat there and desperately tried to keep our eyes open," she said. "Everybody had their suitcase and was ready to be shipped off to whatever state had a recount. It was a huge relief. We didn't need to go anywhere and could go to bed."

Most importantly, her guy won. "We absolutely had to," Varney said. "There was no other option. That was another reason I was a little hesitant this time. I only have experience

## TWO RACES, SIMILAR THEMES FOR COLBY CANDIDATES IN MAINE AND OKLAHOMA

For congressional candidates Adam Cote '95 in Maine and Andrew Rice '96 in Oklahoma, the run-up to the 2008 primaries has focused on hot-button issues of climate change, the oil economy, and the war in Iraq.

Deciding to run for Congress wasn't easy for Cote. As a U.S. Army reservist fresh from a tour of duty in Iraq (he was a platoon leader with Maine's 133rd Engineer Battalion from March 2004 to March 2005), Cote returned to Maine and was met with lots of encouragement to enter the political arena.

"I did not reach this decision casually," he said, "It's a big step for me, getting out there in front of the public,

but I was getting a sense that we need more people with real-world experience running for office."

Real-world experience is something Cote has. A native of Maine, he grew up in a working-class family and learned about "working hard and paying bills." He served in Bosnia in 1997 and 1998, returning stateside to attend law school at the University of Maine. He graduated *cum laude* and was hired by Pierce Atwood in Portland, where he has focused on real-estate law and renewable energy policies both here and abroad. He and his wife, Paulina, have three daughters under three years of age.

It won't be an easy road for Cote, a

candidate in the Democratic primary in Maine's First Congressional District.

"You look at this race and it's a Who's Who of Maine politics," he said. "Maine is like a small town and I'm coming into the race as an outsider candidate, a first-time Maine politician. The questions are, 'Can he raise the money and get his message out there?' I can't just turn to a group of people and say, 'Let's do what we did last time.'"

Cote has built a smart and effective campaign team led by Emily Boyle '06, and his messages seem to have some traction in an atmosphere of discontent stemming from the long, costly war effort in Iraq. Global climate change and

winning. I don't know what it's like to lose. I don't think that would be a lot of fun. I can't imagine putting in all the effort we did and having an election day be that awful."

So she'll sit this one out and doesn't know if she'll ever get as involved again.

If she had gotten into this race, it likely would have been with McCain. Instead, she'll continue working as a research and program associate involved in immigration, campaign finance, and election reform.

"I think my Dad would like to see me on some Republican campaign," Varney said. "But he's just as happy I'm working at a Republican think tank."

When *Colby* (winter 2001) did a story on *The Colby Reader*, a quarterly that Mark Paustenbach co-founded to cover politics along with social, cultural, social, and economic issues, he admitted to being a political junkie who read the *New York Times* online at 12:15 a.m. to stay ahead of the day's news.

Paustenbach is still a political junkie, but now he's the national press secretary for presidential candidate Senator Joe Biden, too, and it's no longer enough to stay up late and read the *Times* to keep current.

"The news cycle now is incredibly fast-paced," said Paustenbach from Biden headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware,

where he was outside tossing a Wiffle Ball in the air. It was the only exercise he would manage to get that day, he said.

It wasn't long ago that a campaign press secretary would be concerned mostly with a story or two on the TV news in the evening and in papers the next morning.

Blogs and the Internet have changed all that.

"And it's not just that people have blogs," Paustenbach said. "Every reporter from a major paper has a blog they have to post to in addition to filing a story for the next day's paper. Basically, they have to empty their notebooks for the blog. The speed that information travels is instantaneous now."

Paustenbach is up at 6 or 6:30 every morning, reading papers and monitoring news and information as news outlets put out political tip sheets and their reports.

"At the end of the day, there are two, three, four stories that are going to dominate the news that day," he said. "You want to get a handle on that in the morning and where things are going so you can be both responding and anticipating."

Paustenbach and others noted how campaign work is great for developing multitasking, writing, and interpersonal skills, time management and attention to detail, negotiating and the like.

They also all have memorable scenes—campaign snapshots, most committed only to memory.

Moments like Cuzzi's BlackBerry photo of Obama in Ha-



Emily Boyle '06, left and Felicia Teach '07 work on Adam Cote '95's campaign.

the country's reliance on foreign oil top his list. "I have a young, growing family and I'm frustrated with the course of the country right now," he said. "We need to step up to the plate with a fresh perspective."

L. Sandy Maisel, William Kenan Jr. Professor of Government, hears echoes in Cote's campaign. "The interesting thing about his campaign is that it has this sense of service and patriotism," he said, "and it's the same sense of service he had here as a student. He was a quiet and forceful leader here. That makes him attractive to a ton of people even though he is clearly not the favorite in this race."

In Oklahoma, State Senator Andrew Rice '96 (D-Oklahoma City) is running for U.S. Senate on some similar campaign

themes. "Oklahoma is an energy state and an environmental state," he said, "and the incumbent [Republican James Inhofe] here has a poor record in those areas. He also has somewhat rigid and misguided positions coming out of 9/11 and foreign policy issues."

Rice, who lost a brother in the 9/11 attacks (see "From the Ashes," *Colby*, fall 2005), is running in a race colored largely by the ongoing war in Iraq. "The climate is extraordinary," he said, "and people are looking for new direction and different approaches. The incumbent is telling people it's either his way or you're not a good American." —Stephen Heacock

For more information see [www.adamcote.com](http://www.adamcote.com) and [www.andrewforoklahoma.com](http://www.andrewforoklahoma.com).



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JEAN-MICHELE PICHER '96

nover. Another of Cuzzi and the candidate in a hotel room.

For Paustenbach it was a frenetic post-debate scene in a hotel room, cheek by jowl with media and campaign operatives. Or flying in a small plane with Biden. "In some respects, that was an 'Almost Famous' moment. You're with the senator and five aides and a reporter and you're in a small prop plane flying over a cornfield in Iowa. It's one of those moments you wish you could snap a picture without snapping a picture. One of those things you remember for a long time."

**I**n late November Patrick Semmens was about to take leave from his job at a Washington, D.C., legal defense foundation to join the communications arm of the presidential campaign of Republican candidate Rep. Ron Paul of Texas.

A surge in online donations had given the Paul campaign new grassroots-fueled momentum, and Semmens, a long-time Paul admirer, decided to jump on. Semmens, who had been considering volunteering at the Paul headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, said the office was bustling with new staffers and excitement was building. The New Hampshire primary was just six weeks away, and Semmens was eager to pitch in.

How long would he be away from his foundation job? "Hopefully, a long time," Semmens said.

**E**mmett Beliveau broke away from the political campaign life long enough to get a law degree. And Jean-Michel Picher is closing in on becoming a lawyer as well.

Neither could stay away from Obama's campaign, though.

Politics is in Beliveau's blood. His father, Severin, served in the Maine House and Senate and ran for governor. Emmett was a New England organizer for Democrats of America, a wing of the Democratic National Committee, while at Colby.

He worked on the Al Gore campaign in 2000 and was part

of the DNC recount staff in Florida. That provided encouragement to get a law degree, Beliveau said.

He joined Kerry's 2004 campaign full time after graduating from Georgetown Law and then practiced law in D.C. But Beliveau had spent a day with Obama and was impressed.

When the Obama camp called to ask if Beliveau would put together an event announcing his candidacy in Springfield, Ill., in early February 2007, he said it would be tough to leave his job for just a few weeks—but he would come on full time. He was hired.

As the campaign's director of advance, Beliveau travels a week or two each month and, from Obama's Chicago headquarters, coordinates advance teams around the country.

He selects and visits sites, meets with Secret Service and supporters and city officials, and lines up lights and sound and everything else needed to turn a ball field or a courtyard into a rock concert.

Each day from 3 to 7 p.m. is the time for "trip calls."

"It's the Chicago team checking with the New Hampshire team, the Maine team, the South Carolina team, the Florida team—wherever he's going to be in the future," Beliveau said. "It's their chance to report how the day went and what challenges they're facing, and a chance for headquarters to download information."

Events range widely in scope.

Beliveau was especially happy with one that came together quickly in Concord, N.H., to announce that Obama was receiving an endorsement from New Hampshire Congressman Paul Hodes.

The advance staff found a site, got the sound, and helped build a crowd through phone-banking, leafleting, and signs. The success of the event reflected the capabilities of a well-oiled machine—a professional campaign team that can pull off a big event in a little time.



Picher, also in advance, said they're still talking in Madison, Wisconsin, about an event the Kerry team put together a week before the 2004 election. Bruce Springsteen was a featured guest and the lawns of the state capitol were the site. Problem was, only about 20,000 people would be able to see Kerry and Springsteen, and the team Picher was on expected many more than that to come out.

So they negotiated with the mayor and city councilors and others and were allowed to move the stage and event six blocks, opening sight lines for the anticipated turnout. Picher said 100,000 people showed up.

"It was on the cover of most newspapers in America," he said. "It was everywhere. ... A week prior to the election, if you sent eighty-thousand people home without being able to see the guy, maybe you're not doing the campaign the greatest service."

Kerry won in Wisconsin.

From there Picher went to Boston to set up the victory event stage for what he and Cuzzi—also doing Kerry advance—and Beliveau and the rest of the Kerry campaign believed would be a victory gala. "My job was to map out where they were going to stand in celebration, waving, all that stuff," Picher said.

He and Cuzzi met outside the Union Oyster House at Faneuil Hall, a traditional stop for Kerry on election day, and soon the candidate's motorcade rolled up.

"It looked like we were well on our way to winning," Picher said. "You do your best to keep it in check, but when the folks who know, the ones who have the internals, start saying that and are confident, you let yourself start feeling pretty good."

They were feeling rotten later that night.

"Eventually, you pick up and move on," Picher said. "And you either go at it again or not."

Picher moved on to finish his law degree and M.B.A. He's now working at a Toronto law firm and will take the bar exam soon. He does plan to take a six-week leave to work for Obama—rejoining Beliveau and Cuzzi on the campaign trail. He knew he'd be back.

Picher, who can't seem to stay away from cam-

paigns, was on his way to being an English major at Colby. Then Professor Corrado provided a pivotal moment in Picher's career. It was 1995 and the professor had heard from Abigail Knapp '93, who was seeking interns for Kerry's senate race against former Massachusetts Governor Bill Weld.

Picher had planned to spend Jan Plan in 1996 working on Bill Clinton's campaign in New Hampshire.

"Corrado said 'every kid in America wants to be an intern with Bill Clinton,' and that I should work for John Kerry," Picher said. "If he hadn't walked up to me that day in Miller Library, my whole life might have taken a different track."

He's not alone. "I marvel at that," he said. "I remember one time Cuzzi and I ran the numbers. There was Katie Harris and Spencer Hutchins ['03] and Emily Boyle ['06] and Emmett Beliveau and Cuzzi and myself and two or three other people on the Kerry campaign. We tried to figure out how many Yalies and people from Harvard there were, and we realized we were probably the most-represented school in the whole campaign. It was informal, but that's the way it seemed. We had all these employees from a tiny, little school. I don't remember the Bowdoin kids, the Middlebury kids. They weren't there."

The switch into government paid off. "We had a talented group of professors at Colby," Picher said. "I credit Corrado for motivating me to do more and to figure it out more and get involved. And there's something about the fact there are Colby kids all over the 2008 campaign."

The Colby connections and extraordinary civic engagement opportunities that they lead to do not seem to be slowing. Two current students are on leaves of absence from Colby to sample the heady world of national presidential campaigns. Mark Jablonowski '10 of Anchorage, Alaska, and Matt Warshaw '08 of Wellesley, Massachusetts, worked for Obama as interns this summer. Both were hired on as staff.

Welcome aboard. The Colby campaign train rolls on.

