

## Blogging from the Democratic Convention

Starting Monday, Becky Updike blogs every day from the Democratic Party Convention in Denver. She's got her ticket and will report back from inside.

Greetings from Denver!

The delegates and media are swarming the city for the Democratic National Convention. We are excited to host such a landmark political event in Denver. As for Every Child Matters in Colorado, we hope to hear candidates speaking specifically about making kids a national political priority. I'll be blogging on what it's really like inside the Convention every day.

—Becky Updike, Director of Every Child Matters in Colorado

Day 4 - Thursday 8/28

I can't believe it's the 4th and final day! I was just getting good at this!

Today was all about packing 80,000 people into Invesco field, which takes some time, especially due to all the street closings. I along with Matt Elder, ECM Colorado Field Director, and Bob Cooper, CEO Tennyson Center for Children, headed to Invesco just after noon. The line was already growing for Barack's the 8:15 pm speech. Security began in the parking lots, where we walked in with our Every Child Matters stickers and fans. It took us about an hour to cross all the security hurdles, the final one being just like airport security complete with metal detectors. The waiting was made easy thanks to the live music, free water bottles, and the anticipation building within the crowd.

Once past security, we spent an hour in front of the stadium, offering free Every Child Matters fans and lapel stickers. (For the record, the fans were a 5 to 1 favorite.) The crowd was comprised of people from all over the nation, and several children attended.

Once our ECM stuff was all distributed, we headed inside where our tickets allowed us into three different parts of the stadium. I was honored to be a guest of friends in the front row of section 311, which is the first balcony on the 50 yard line—aka killer seats. The stands were about 20% full when we settled in at 3pm. My friend and I went into the stadium for a final t-shirt run, and passed Spike Lee, Ted Koppel and a few elected officials.

The session was called to order at 4 pm, and time flew from that point on. We enjoyed speakers and musicians including Stevie Wonder, Sheryl Crow, Michael McDonald, Al Gore, a group of military generals and several others. Just before Obama was due to speak, a group of six "regular folk" took turns speaking about their life stories and why they supported Obama. The stadium was mostly full when they spoke, almost fell silent during their stories. They were normal people with real stories: one woman talked about her loss of health insurance causing loss of life savings in North Carolina; a man told about the plant closing in Indiana leading a whole town to financial despair; a woman from New Mexico explained that her grandmother had encouraged her to do her homework and engage in school, and she realized in the 3rd grade that her grandmother could not read. The support and encouragement she received from her grandmother inspired her to earn a doctorate in education. Their stories were compelling because they were about real issues of hardship and success—and are directly impacted, whether we realize it or not, by public policy and the policy makers.

You probably saw Barack Obama's speech and know that it took place on the 45th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's historic "I have a dream" speech. I think all Americans of all political affiliations are proud to be in a country where Dr. King's dream is being reached, as an African-American man runs for President. It was also a time when Hillary Clinton's mother did not have the right to vote, and her own daughter Chelsea, just 2 generations later, was able to cast a vote for her mother, a Presidential candidate. We should remember those stories when we lose faith and interest in government and in the system because they really are spectacular achievements. And they should fuel us to push ahead to make our country a place where no children should have compromised health because they can't access care, and where no child should go to be hungry or in fear of the next incidence of abuse.

The speeches were amazing, as were the celebrations. It all finally did end though, and Speaker Nancy Pelosi adjourned the convention session. So all of us, with our CHANGE signs and flags in tow, worked to exit the building and find a way home. My colleagues and I decided that walking back to Denver via Colfax Ave was our best (and only) option. Colfax is a huge 6-lane street that was closed for this event. I've never traveled that street any slower than 50 mph, and would normally never consider setting foot on it—let alone walking to Denver on it. So this walk was a strange treat. We hailed a cab, and were lucky enough to land a Black Car. (I used caps on "Black Car" because it's the kind that hauls the officials and dignitaries. We just got lucky as the driver was cruising town to make a little extra dough.) The driver told us he'd just driven Katie Couric, and she was very nice but exhausted. I sympathized with her, as I held my CHANGE sign and flag on my lap and looked out the windows at the celebrations and beautifully dressed people. What a week. I am honored to have been a part.

Day 3 - Wednesday 8/27

Long lines, a new meaning for the term "back stage", and why I'm too short for Hillary Clinton... the best day yet. (and I captured some video...coming soon.)

It's Day 3 for the DNC and I'm finally getting the hang of this. Thanks for all who have expressed concern about my feet—that's a sentence I never imagined writing. I now carry my high heels in my fashionable and only slightly practical bag, and wear flip-flops to motor through crowds most of the day. Then I do a 15 second shoe-switch before entering places. (My girlfriends out there totally get this, and I am sure some guys, including my big brother, are rolling their eyes at the very notion).

Today was the most crowded day yet. More vendors moved in, so sidewalks are basically lined with all things Obama,

mixed in with random vendors selling over-priced water, newspapers, fake designer purses, and even oxygen. Yes, oxygen. Denver's altitude is a real issue for some folks who arrive here from sea level, but most don't really need oxygen in a can. (But then again who am I to judge?—see shoe issue above.)

The Convention center was abuzz with more caucusing and speakers. My colleague and I met two young ladies from England who are traveling through Denver toward DC, where they will begin internships next week. They are University students in England and have both worked for the Labor Party there, and are amazed with, and taken in by, the manner in which America hypes elections and politicians. "Politicians are like celebrities here—it's not that way in England," they said. We stopped at a CNN booth to record a 40-spot on my opinion of Hillary Clinton's speech in exchange for a free t-shirt, and kept noticing the sound of Hillary's voice in the background. I assumed it was a recording of last night's speech. I soon realized that Hillary was actually speaking in a room below us. We got in for the tail end of her speech, which was more like a pep rally. After she finished, we tried to get close enough for a photo, but despite best efforts and lifting my camera as high as I could, I only captured the 500 other people who were doing the same thing. The gals from England were right about the celebrity thing, and we were in the thick of it.

As we left the Convention center, we spotted Terry McAuliffe, former Chair of the Democratic National Committee, political strategist, author, and most recently, Hillary's campaign chair. We spoke with him briefly; he was funny and most gracious. We had camera troubles and somehow I ended up with a kiss on the cheek from him.

I was fortunate to get an invitation to a reception for Senator Frank Lautenberg (New Jersey) at the Brown Palace Hotel, which is where the Clintons and other high-level dignitaries are staying. There was a large gathering of about 100 people outside the main entrance of the hotel, all waiting with cameras, ready to catch the who's-whos as they were leaving the hotel to get to the Pepsi Center. The reception for the Senator was small enough that he didn't need a microphone to thank the guests and speak on some of the most critical issues in this election—children's health care and addressing the oppressiveness of poverty. He spoke candidly about his frustration with the veto of SCHIP (federally funded health care for low-income children). I thanked him for his support of SCHIP and encouraged him to keep fighting the fight against poverty. He commended Every Child Matters for our work for kids.

On to the Pepsi Center for the speeches. I passed the following people in the crowded halls leading into the arena: Forest Whitaker (actor), Madeleine Albright (US Secretary of State during Clinton administration), Gayle King (Oprah's best friend), Dee Dee Meyers (White House Press Secretary, Clinton Administration), Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper (who was basically doing laps in the building), Chevy Chase (comedian), and Tom Brokaw (newscaster).

Despite my former luck getting a decent seat—none were to be had this evening due to the record crowds. Every entrance was blocked, with all seats full. Several folks were resigned to watching the speakers on the monitors in the hallways, but I kept looking for a seat. Security guards opened entrances to the top level seats behind the stage (giving a whole new meaning to "back stage") which is where I ended up—five rows from the top of the Pepsi Center. This area had been closed and was being used for storage of signs from previous nights. There were countless black trash bags filled with the long, skinny signs bearing the words "UNITY", "HILLARY", and "MICHELLE". The security guards let us take some of the signs, which was like a consolation prize for our weird seats in the rafters. We could see the speakers on big screens, and actually had a cool birds-eye view of the crowds, delegates and media.

It was quite a sight. I literally could not spot an empty seat, and know that countless folks were in the halls staring up at monitors. The speeches were fantastic. The tribute to our soldiers left no dry eyes in the house. Barack's surprise appearance had the crowd going wild and anticipating Thursday night at Invesco Field.

Until then&hellip;

Day 2 - Tuesday 8/26

If you are not a delegate or a Democratic superhero of some description, you have to get a new credential every day. So I worked my way back down to 15th and California again to get my 2nd credential early this morning. I spent another hour in a long line in the sun awaiting my chance to enter (in groups of 15) into the non-descript door that leads down 2 flights of stairs to a basement, where we wait in another line to get to one of 8 or 10 ticket windows, where we show our driver's license in exchange for a credential.

The highlight of today's credential line was the young man in line behind me. We struck up a conversation, and I learned that he is a native of Michigan, and a junior at Harvard. He volunteered for the Hillary Clinton Campaign, and flew in yesterday to crash at his aunt's place, in hopes of getting a ticket into something. Anything. He contacted everyone he knew from the campaign, and checked his i-phone every minute or two to see if anyone had responded with a lead. He waited in the hot sun for an hour with me and others, knowing he probably wouldn't get a credential, but he tried anyway. When I left, he indeed did not receive a credential, and I wished him luck.

The day unfolded with a trip into the convention center, where the hustle and bustle continues. Outside, there are even more vendors, protesters and security than yesterday. The vendors have everything you can and can't imagine— from t-shirts to buttons to the most unusual novelty for today: "Barack in A Bottle" (a water bottle with a plastic statue of Barack inside and instructions to "Break bottle in the event of an emergency").

The protestors are protesting the war among other things, and the police seemed to outnumber protestors all over town. The police are wearing full riot gear, and appear most capable of anything. I requested a photo with a group of them today, which they graciously granted. An AP photographer also snapped the photo and asked me my name, so who knows if that photo may show up someplace. It started a trend, as several women asked for a photo with them also, which they seemed to enjoy. I admit that if they decided to publish a calendar, it would fly off the shelves.

The highlight of my day was attending a reception for the Louisiana delegation, sponsored by Oxfam America. The reception was held in a suite atop the Denver Public Library (where the G-8 Summit was held in 1997). The reception took place mid-day, featured live music and beautiful food and drink, and was attended by Oxfam's numerous partners in LA, who continue to collaborate to help rebuild the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The room featured easels holding large photos of Katrina survivors, depicting a range of emotions and conditions. I spoke with a woman who works to connect displaced families with affordable housing. She said that in the area where she works, a 30-foot wall of water washed in during the hurricane, taking away homes, cars and everything but concrete stairs. In many places, those stairs and porches are the only things still standing since the 2005 storm. What is still missing are the homes and playgrounds and schools, where children and families should be thriving, yet continue to just survive and struggle. These folks do heroic work, and much remains to be done in that part of our country. Every Child Matters is honored to have an office in New Orleans, working on these causes and others.

As guests trickled in (numbering 25-30 total), I spotted actor Sean Penn, who has famously assisted in Katrina relief efforts. He made his way to the patio to get some air. He later graciously granted a photo for me and some colleagues. I grew up on his movies (OK, I admit I love Fast Times at Ridgemont High), and today found myself admiring his willingness to endure the photos and fans, all to support such a worthy cause.

Finally back to the speeches at the Pepsi Center, with more security, media and crowds—the energy is palpable. Here's what happens during the commercial breaks you see on TV: music and dancing; candid photos of people dancing and seeing themselves on the screen then looking embarrassed; distribution of signs for the next speaker (the signs

travel almost as fast as "the wave" does during football games); and random speakers on stage, telling their quick and real stories. I ran into and got photos of Colorado State Treasurer Cary Kennedy and Indiana's 9th District Congressman Baron Hill. (Shout out to Indiana: I grew up in his district and worked every election day since 3rd grade carrying signs for Congressman Lee Hamilton, who held that seat for 30+ years. I was honored to work for Hamilton in his DC office for a year, and met Baron during that time.)

I am elated to hear candidates making the correlation between investments in children and a thriving economy, which was a recurring theme from several speakers this evening. Gov. Warner (Virginia) talked about quality education, after school care and health care, and stated "...if those kids do better, we all do better." If we could bottle and sell Sen. Hillary Clinton's vision for improving health care for all&mdash;while raising the quality of life for children and families via access to quality health care, education and the elimination of poverty&mdash;the world and this country would be a better place. No matter your party affiliation, tonight's speech, her efforts, and this election season have made history, and we are all better for it. And I think she launched the terms "green collar jobs" and "sisterhood of the traveling pants-suits" tonight. Bet both catch on like wild fire.

Tonight in Denver there are lots of who's-whos entering private parties and attending music and media events. There are lines at parties everywhere. I, however, look forward to kissing my daughters goodnight, good sleep, and strong coffee in the morning. Until tomorrow...

Day 1 - Monday 8/25

Okay, now that I've officially finished my first official day at my first official convention, I'm going to start with a few pearls of wisdom that I picked up along the way:

- 1) Don't re-hash everything that can be seen on TV or online. This is an attempt to give a bird's-eye view into one person's experience of living in a democracy.
- 2) Bring a digital camera or your own personal film crew&hellip;do not rely on your Blackberry camera.
- 3) High heels are pretty...and really weren't created for human feet or conventions that require a lot of walking.
- 4) Always have something amazing to say in five seconds or less in case you find yourself face-to-face with Maria Shriver.

First things first. My day started with walking the kids to school then driving downtown for the convention. The downtown commute that typically takes 7 minutes took about 18 minutes today, which wasn't bad considering the extra 50,000 people in Denver this week. I made my way to the credentialing headquarters, which is located on the 16th Street mall in downtown Denver. You can probably picture it now: I spot the address&mdash;1585 California Street. I spotted it because of the line of people standing in front of it, and they spanned the half block that I could see, until I turned the corner and saw the other half of the line, rapidly filling the next half-block. I grabbed a spot in line and found myself in a conversation with the gentleman behind me. Our hour together in that line revealed many admirable and interesting things about him, including the fact that our ancestors are from the same part of Italy, and his wife was the former Attorney General of New Mexico, and would be speaking at the DNC in the evening. He was there to get her credentials, his, and those of her staff. So this line wasn't just for the rookies like me.

Once past security and into the Convention Center, there were many things to see and do. Several groups were holding caucuses, which to my surprise, were open to the public and available by just signing in. In addition to the caucuses were several booths: a Congresswoman signing her book; vendors giving away free stuff; official Obama booths selling, well,

Obama stuff; and no shortage of people wearing red, white, and blue stuff from head to toe, and most wearing several campaign buttons. A few even had interesting hats to accent the look. My favorite was a 3-D depiction of the Mackinac Island Bridge—all in colorful felt. (Mackinac is in northern MI—it's lovely. Go there sometime.)

The next step was a move to the Pepsi Center for the 4 pm start of the evening ceremonies. The streets were all blocked off for the blocks surrounding the area, so folks either walked or rode in rickshaws. The long walk culminated in a security line, much like airport travel. The guy in line behind me had some sacred tribal drumsticks in his bag that he carried for good luck. It took about four security guards to determine that his drumsticks were harmless and would be permitted in. Luck, perhaps.

The Pepsi Center is the home of the Denver Nuggets and the Colorado Avalanche, and I've been to see the Avalanche play hockey there a few times. The number of people there tonight may have more than tripled any crowd that has been there before. I decided to walk around as much as possible, in hopes of seeing some of the who's who. Within minutes I saw Dan Rather, and got his photo. Seconds later, Caroline Kennedy casually passed by. I passed the camp of every media outlet imaginable including NPR, YouTube, Fox, CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS, BBC and more. I saw lots of people whose names escaped me. I recognized some folks from the Jon Stewart Show, taping a skit, and also Gayle King (Oprah's best friend), Gov. Janet Napolitano (AZ), and Bill Richardson, Governor of New Mexico and former Presidential Candidate. Gov. Richardson was kind, as he noticed that I was trying to snap his photo on my tippy-toes, from behind a crowd of people. He stopped walking, reached out and shook my hand, and asked if I got a photo. I shook my head yes, thanking him, but to my later disappointment, the photo was blurry.

The closest brush with fame all evening came in a small hallway on the second floor of the Pepsi Center. The crowd had bottle-necked, and I realized why when I saw Maria Shriver at the center of the crowd. I would have to pass her to get through. I quickly tried to snap a photo, but it too was blurry, so in my last seconds before passing her, I grabbed the last Every Child Matters fan from my purse and handed it to her.

Me: "Maria, here's an Every Child Matters fan for you. Thanks for all you do."

Maria: "Thank you" she said, accented with her huge, beautiful trademark smile.

I wished I'd said something more profound, but those moments come quickly.

The remainder of the evening was spent watching historical speeches. Senator Ted Kennedy made a surprise appearance, which had the entire stadium of people on their feet, and several in tears. His speech centered around his sense of new hope for our country, despite his diagnosis of cancer about which he did not speak. As people waved signs bearing the single word "Kennedy", I jotted down his words about his brother: "when John Kennedy thought of going to the moon, he didn't say it was too far." I likened that to the ECM aspiration that all children in our country might someday have access to quality health care, education, and abuse/neglect prevention. Michelle Obama's words capped off the evening well, "All of our children's future is my stake in this election." I hope that is indeed the case for whoever enters the White House in January.

Overall it was a long but exciting day at the DNC. Tune in tomorrow, for more inside scoop, and this time, with better photos and comfortable shoes. Until then.... sweet dreams and bright awakenings from Denver.