

## Kennedy Campaigns in Charleston as Supporters Tout SC as Key to Victory

August 17, 2023 **by Dan McCue**



Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., speaks at a campaign event in Charleston Wednesday, Aug. 16 2023. (Photo by Dan McCue)

CHARLESTON, S.C. — The line of cars extended three-quarters of a mile up Meeting Street Road, as the candidate strode into a side door at The Wonderer, the self-described “social and wellness club” that was the venue for the evening’s campaign event.

Dismissed by some of the mainstream media as a kook and conspiracy theorist for his very “anti” position on COVID vaccines, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. seemed anything but as he entered the suite of conference rooms populated by a few staffers and a smattering of early arriving reporters.

Trim and fit in a blue shirt and tailored slacks, he seemed the embodiment of quiet, solidly grounded equilibrium.

No glad-hander, despite his running for the Democratic nomination for president, Kennedy offered a quick wave to a reporter whose eye he caught as he entered. A moment later, after a brief stop in one of the side rooms, he reemerged to say a quick hello as he was ushered to a waiting TV interviewer.

“Hi,” he said, extending his hand. “I’m Bobby Kennedy.”

His grip was both firm and held for just the right length. His blue eyes made contact, seeming to express both empathy and intelligence at the same time.

And with that, he was off to do his interviews with a pair of local Charleston news outlets.

## **Betting All the Marbles on South Carolina**

“This really feels like the start of the 2024 campaign season,” a local reporter observed as the people lined up for admittance into the Kennedy event.



Campaign swag touting Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s run for the White House. (Photo by Dan McCue)

"Start!?!," said Kennedy 2024 Communications Director Stefanie Spear in response. "We've been at this, full-time, since April, when he announced his candidacy."

"Well, it's *still* early," the reporter responded.

"That's true," Spear smiled. "Sometimes you have to remind yourself there's still a long way to go."

It soon develops that the campaign sees South Carolina as playing a key, and likely pivotal role in that future.

"We think the election is going to be won here," said former representative and 2008 presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, who is now Robert Kennedy's campaign manager.

"We're going to break this election open here in South Carolina," he said with confidence.

Pressed to explain why, Kucinich, who campaigned in the state in the lead-up to the 2008 primary and appeared in a multi-candidate debate on the campus of South Carolina State University in Orangeburg in April 2007, said he believes the state is something of an Achilles' heel for the president.

"This is where Biden turned his primary campaign around in 2020; without South Carolina, there would be no Biden administration," he said. "The reason I think it'll be a critical turning point for us, is I think people here know what they did for Biden and now feel like he's taken them for granted."

"I mean, what has the administration really done for South Carolina?" Kucinich asked. "We're here to let people know that

they'll be able to rely on Mr. Kennedy, and that he's going to represent everybody. He's for all the people.”

As

Attendees heading to Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s campaign event. (Photo by Dan McCue)

Kucinich spoke to The Well News, a smattering of event attendees eavesdropped. Several held copies of books ranging from biographies of Kennedy's father, former Attorney General and 1968 presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, to the candidate's own 2021 tome “The Real Anthony Fauci: Bill Gates, Big Pharma, and the Global War on Democracy and Public Health.”

When it's noted that many in the 200–300 strong crowd that gathered for Kennedy mentioned his stand on vaccines as cause for their admiration — handily outdistancing his famous name and family — Kucinich deftly sought to move on from the topic.

“We're past the vaccine thing now,” he said. “What this race for the Democratic nomination is all about is the economy.

“You know, the prices people are paying for food and for energy and for housing — whether it be rent or mortgages — is unconscionable,” Kucinich continued. “Prices have gone up under Biden. The administration has failed to control inflation ... and inflation, as you know, is really an additional tax on the American people.

“So it’s been a rough couple of years for Americans, and now the Biden administration is out there saying, ‘Hey everybody, happy days are here again,’ and that’s just not true,” he said. “The truth is, a lot of Americans are hard pressed. Costs are going up. A lot of people are maxed out on their credit cards. ... We’re going to focus on those economic issues and we’ll bring it home on those economic issues too.”

Given  
his

Kennedy campaign manager Dennis Kucinich. (Photo by Dan McCue)

experience as a presidential candidate himself, Kucinich was asked what advice he has given Kennedy about the nature of campaigning.

“Me?” he smiled. “Listen, Mr. Kennedy is a natural. I mean, would you have to teach Hank Aaron how to hit a baseball?”

“This man understands government ... and he’s great with people. You watch how people listen so carefully when he’s speaking.

“No, I don’t presume I have anything I can impart to him,” he said.

Kucinich was about to walk away, but caught himself and turned to make a final point.

“I truly believe this campaign, this candidate ... has the broadest appeal of any candidate currently running for president,” he said. “You’ll see that at this event. There will be Republicans and Democrats and independents ... Libertarians ... people of every political stripe and persuasion.

“This is why Mr. Kennedy has a chance to win. He can win this election. That’s why I’m excited to be his campaign manager. And as I said, we’re taking a South Carolina approach to this thing. We’re going to break through here,” Kucinich said.

## **Two-Time Trump Voter Now Bobby-Curious**

Steps away from Kucinich, at a tall table near the stage, Sonya Hoffman was doing everything she could to keep cool as the early evening sun headed toward the horizon.

Originally from Orangeburg County, in South Carolina’s Midlands, Hoffman described herself as a “two-time Trump voter” who became disillusioned with the former president during the early weeks of the COVID crisis.

Hoffman said she didn’t feel Trump was being forthright about the efficacy of the COVID vaccine, and that she was drawn to

Attendees await the candidate's arrival on the stage. (Photo  
by Dan McCue)

Kennedy by his stance on the issue “even before he got into the political realm.”

Asked why she had come out on a Wednesday evening to see the candidate, she effectively said that without Trump to vote for, she's been feeling Bobby-curious.

“This is his first time campaigning in South Carolina and I wanted to be present, to be supportive, and to ask questions and see where the spirit leads,” she said.

In what likely would have been music to Kucinich's ears, Hoffman went on to say that while the vaccine issue put Kennedy on her radar, her interest in his candidacy has moved on to encompass other issues, including his positions on the U.S.-Mexico border and immigration, the environment and free-market capitalism.

“I mean, when you really listen to him, the things he's talking about and the solutions he's advocating are just common sense,”



she said.

“And then, of course, there’s his desire to heal the partisan divide, which is so important, whether you’re a Democrat, Republican, independent or whatever,” Hoffman said. “I mean — and this is based solely on my perception — I think Kennedy has an open ear and he’s willing to listen to anybody. I think he’s a great believer in people — even people who disagree — being able to talk to one another without erupting into a torrent of anger.”

Early arrivals gather for Kennedy’s appearance. (Photo by  
Dan McCue)

Lauren Brown, a transplant from Austin, Texas, who moved to Charleston just six months ago, said she was drawn to Kennedy because “he’s got a bone to pick with the government.”

“He is the anti-establishment candidate right now ... and I think he’s a genuine guy, unlike any other candidate that’s out there,” she said.



“I also think he’s unafraid. He doesn’t care what other people say about him. He stands by his own virtues and beliefs,” she said, adding, “Frankly, I’m surprised he’s running under the Democratic Party banner, but I see him as an old-school Democrat, very unlike the very big government Democrats we have today.”

That contrast — old school versus new school Democrat — came up a lot as one moved through the crowd, which seemed to have as many self-identified Libertarians and “recovering” Republicans in its ranks as dyed-in-the-wool Democrats.

Another attendee who spoke of that issue at length was L. Lloyd Laughlin, a retiree now living in Aiken, South Carolina, who drove two-and-half hours to attend the Kennedy event.

Asked to boil down his view, Laughlin said, “The difference comes down to the desire for complete control — which I think we have now — versus favoring positions. The ‘old school’ Liberal Democrats, for want of a better term, wanted programs. Yes, they wanted their day in the sun, but they weren’t out to fundamentally change America.

“Back in the day, people had respect for those they saw as opponents, as opposed to now, where if you disagree, you’re just an enemy. Progressives have enemies and want total control,” he said.

Asked why he was interested in Kennedy, Laughlin said, “It’s very simple.”

“Kennedy and [2024 Republican presidential candidate] Vivek Ramaswamy are the only candidates in the race for the White House that have fresh ideas,” he said. “And Kennedy is the only

Robert. F. Kennedy addressing event attendees in Charleston.

(Photo by Dan McCue)

Democrat that I think can win the election and have the country survive.”

Pressed to expand on his provocative statement, Laughlin said, “It’s because he’s not part of the cabal, the radical progressives, that seem to be running things under Biden and had been running things during the Obama administration.

“I mean, I hate to sound this radical, but I think we are kind of at the end of an evolutionary period or game plan,” he continued. “The bottom line is, if Kennedy beats Biden in South Carolina, it’s over for Biden.

“Half the country hates Biden and half the country hates Trump, right?” he added. “So we need something different, and Kennedy, on the Democratic side, is the only answer.”

## Kennedy Keeps Economic Message Front and Center

Kennedy took the stage at the outdoor event shortly before sundown, accompanied by his wife, the actress Cheryl Hines, perhaps best known for playing Larry David's wife, Cheryl, on HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

After smiling and waving to the crowd, Hines snapped a picture of the attendees with her cellphone, and then was cajoled by her husband to pose for his own cellphone picture of her with those gathered in front of the stage as a backdrop.

Hines then quickly exited the stage and Kennedy began a loose 30-minute stump speech that was as much a friendly stream of consciousness as it was a detailing of his agenda.

As

Cheryl Hines onstage with husband Robert F. Kennedy.

(Photo by Dan McCue)

Kucinich had promised, Kennedy keyed in hard on the economy, explaining he was running against two presidents who are

campaigning “on a record of bringing prosperity to this country.”

“Both [Biden and Trump] are saying this ... but as I travel across this country, I don’t see that prosperity, I see people living in desperation.”

“In the last two years, the price of housing has gone from [a] \$250,000 average, to \$400,000. Interest rates have gone up 20%, and we don’t need to have that happen. There are ways that the federal government can help people without driving up the debt,” he said.

Kennedy also promised the event attendees he’d be a uniter in Washington, focusing “on the values we share instead of the issues that divide us.”

His only direct pitch to South Carolinians came at the top of his remarks, as he worked out where to stand to best be heard by all attendees.

“You may know that I’ve written some children’s books,” he said.

He then reached over to the podium and held up one of them, about Civil War hero Robert Smalls.

Smalls, born into slavery in Beaufort, South Carolina, freed himself and several others in May 1862 by commandeering the USS Planter, a Confederate transport ship, in Charleston harbor, and sailing out of Confederate-controlled waters.

He then piloted it to a Union-controlled enclave near present day Hilton Head, where the vessel was outfitted to be a Union warship.

Smalls  
later

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on the stump. (Photo by Dan McCue)

personally convinced President Abraham Lincoln to accept African American soldiers into the Union Army.

“It makes a great Christmas gift,” Kennedy joked.

“And for a certain amount, I’ll even sign it,” he added, flashing a trademark Kennedy smile.

Despite ominous rain clouds that swept overhead during his remarks, Kennedy stayed onstage, answering questions for another 30 minutes.

During that give and take, Kennedy said that one of the biggest problems Americans have is that the federal government suffered from an “addiction to war.”

“President Biden went to Congress and asked for another \$24 billion for the Ukraine war. We’ve spent \$8 trillion dollars on wars since 9/11. If we kept that money home, we would’ve had child care for every American. We would have free college education for every American. We’d be able to pay for our social security system,” he said.

He closed by assuring attendees that he is “the only choice that is going to end the war machine, that is going to really focus on rebuilding the American middle class, taming inflation.”