

After Celebratory Convention, Dems Begin Hard Work of Pursuing Victory

August 23, 2024 **by Dan McCue**



Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris and running mate Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz arrive during a campaign rally at Desert Diamond Arena, Friday, Aug. 9, 2024, in Glendale, Ariz. (AP Photo/Julia Nikhinson)

CHICAGO — The balloons have dropped, thousands of delegates have cheered themselves hoarse, and Vice President Kamala Harris has formally accepted the Democratic nomination for president.

But on Friday, as the party's national committeemen and women convened for the business meeting that always closes the party's quadrennial convention week, there was a palpable — if also happy and energized — feeling in the air that the hard work of securing victory in November has only just begun.

“The nightly convention broadcasts are largely a production for you guys in the media, and for television in particular,” Hank Chamberlain told The Well News during a shuttle ride to the United Center convention site this week.

Chamberlain, who at 79 just got elected to a new four-year term as national committee person for the Kansas Democratic Party, went on to explain that the DNC meeting is where the real party business gets done.

“What that entails this year, I don’t know, and that’s not to diminish what we’re experiencing this week,” he said.

“There’s nothing wrong with the convention being a big TV show, or with all of the speeches and receptions and parties and photo ops and balloon drops that delegates and TV viewers have come to expect of these things,” Chamberlain continued.

“It’s just that there’s more to all this than that,” he said.

Taking stock of the moment, Chamberlain recalled how only a month ago he was coming out of a state party gathering in Johnson County, Kansas, when a local television reporter “stepped up and stuck a microphone under my nose.”

“He wanted to know how I felt about the Harris candidacy, which had then just been announced, a few days earlier. And I said, ‘Well, I go back a long way, and I can’t recall a serious candidate getting into a presidential contest this late.’

“‘On the other hand,’ I said. ‘I don’t recall this much enthusiasm for the start of a campaign, so I feel pretty good,’” he said.

“There’s been an immense amount of enthusiasm, and an immense amount of fundraising, and a tremendous response from people wanting to volunteer, and with that, I think we can

sustain a campaign.
That said, the reality
is there's still a lot of
work to do," he
added.

A moment later, the
shuttle came to a
stop short of its final
destination at the
United Center.

A shudder went
through the bus.

A day earlier, a
Bloomington,
Indiana, police
officer who was
riding with the
delegates — every
shuttle bus had an
armed officer on board — announced the group would be
standing pat for a while.

Hank Chamberlain, national committee
person for the Kansas Democratic Party.

(Photo by Dan McCue)

A group of protesters had pushed down a section of the security
fence at the United Center, and officers at the scene were
responding to the situation, he explained.

"I don't know if we'll be five minutes or five hours," the officer
admitted. "Try to make yourselves comfortable."

Ultimately what should have been a 15-minute ride took 90
minutes.

Some of the people on that bus where riding on this one. This time, however, the stop was due to some minor rush hour traffic congestion that quickly dissipated.

With that, the conversation with Chamberlain continued.

Recalling the days before President Joe Biden announced he was withdrawing from the race, Chamberlain said, “My email, text messages, voicemail and everything just jammed up.

“Most of my responses were pretty brief,” he said. “To those who were upset about the president’s pending decision, I simply said one of the most futile endeavors in this life is wishing that things were somehow different than they are, and avoiding change, resisting change, in the hope things will be different.

“I said in this case, as in many other situations in life, delaying change would just prolong the agony,” he added.

“The public could not unsee what they saw during the presidential debate in Atlanta, and the Republicans were never going to quit running clips from that debate that made President Biden look bad,” Chamberlain continued.

“It was just not going to go away, so at that point, you had to make a change,” he said.

Judy Daubenmier, chair of the Livingston
County Democratic Party in Michigan,
with her husband Mike. (Photo by Dan
McCue)

Chamberlain then switched gears and began talking about Harris and the convention, which at this point, was all of two days old.

“I think, so far, the most important part of the message I’ve heard is that it’s okay to be reasonable again. We don’t need to tilt to the extreme. This country doesn’t have to be ‘great again,’ whatever that means.

“We can have a government that operates on reason and affords all Americans a sense of stability,” he said.

“You know, I’m not one who ever got caught up in the ‘philosophy’ of one party or another. And if you look at history, governments founded on a particular philosophy or dogma to the exclusion of others have always been a bad thing,” Chamberlain continued. “And if a party has a litmus test for acceptance, that’s a sure sign they’ve got a dogma.

“There’s no inherent merit in small government or big government,” he said “What does have merit is efficient, effective government. The scale of the government program should be appropriate to the scale of the problem it’s trying to address.”

Chamberlain, a successful businessman when he first became involved in politics, recalled that back in the day, Kansas Republicans and Democrats disagreed on all sorts of issues.

“But you know what they did, they went out to lunch or dinner and they talked through issues not as enemies, but as colleagues

who respected each other. Their goal always being, let's see if we can reach a compromise that everybody can live with.

"I think that's what we can have again with a Harris administration," he said.

On another shuttle, The Well News ran into Judy Daubenmier, chair of the Livingston County Democratic Party in Michigan, and her husband Mike.

Like many delegates, Daubenmier said she loves President Joe Biden and said she was excited as she planned to travel to Chicago as a Biden delegate.

"Now, we're very excited to have the opportunity to make a historic nomination with Vice President Harris," she said.

"But while that's exciting, in and of itself, we know that this election is so very important and we want to take all the enthusiasm we're experiencing here, and share it with our volunteers and use it to sign up new ones," she said.

One way the Daubenmiers were doing that, even as they were riding from the Chicago Hilton to the United Center, was through posts on their social media pages and text messages to friends and fellow politicians back home.

"We're sharing every picture we can on social media so they can feel a part of what's going on here," she said.

"There's so much networking going on, and a lot of hearing from elected officials, and you're always trying to listen for something new," she said.

As an example, Mike Daubenmier pointed to a talk by Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes at McCormick Place, scene of many caucus and other daytime meetings during the convention.

“He said, ‘Tell your business friends that supporting a Democratic ticket is a sound business decision ... because there’s never been an autocratic government where small businesses and innovation and creativity flourished.’

“These are the kinds of tips you look for,” Judy Daubenmier said.

“At the same time, events like the secretaries of state event we attended make you feel a part

Robert Camacho, a delegate from California. (Photo by Dan McCue)

of the larger picture,” she said. “I mean, here they are, these secretaries of state — and other elected officials — talking to us, directly, showing us that they appreciate us.”

Mike Daubenmier mentioned Democratic vice presidential nominee Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz “just kind of popped in the door during a meeting of the Native American Caucus” at McCormick Place.

“He had about a dozen Secret Service guys following him around, but he was there, making personal, direct contact with the people who are going to go home and work for the ticket.”

“Mingling like this is very leveling, in a way,” Judy Daubenmier said. “We’re all just people who share a common goal.”

Robert Zimmerman, a longtime Democratic insider from Long Island, New York, also spoke of the importance of the convention as an educational tool.

“This is important because today we get to educate America,” he said in a crowded hallway inside the United Center.

“Today we get to introduce America to Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, and their message for the future, their message of opportunity. It’s such a dramatic contrast to the gloom and doom and the vicious extremism of Donald Trump,” he continued.

Longtime Democrat operative Robert Zimmerman, of New York. (Photo by Dan McCue)

Zimmerman, who ran for Congress in 2022 against the now disgraced former Rep. George Santos, said the excitement all around him in the large hall was stoked by a general feeling that “the future of America really begins with this election.”

Asked how Harris managed to become such a sensation among the party faithful so quickly, Zimmerman gave a nod to Biden, “who laid the groundwork.”

“He chose her to be vice president and then assured people that she was the candidate who could unite our country behind a

vision of a positive future for our country and defeat Donald Trump,” he said.

“Not enough people talked about how serious a threat Donald Trump was in 2016, and they only started realizing how truly dangerous he was after the 2020 election. Among all the other things Harris and Walz represent is the sense that we’re not going to move backward as a country, we’re moving forward,” Zimmerman said.

Down on the floor of the convention, Robert Camacho, a former candidate for Concord City Council in California, was showing off a flashy red, white and blue ensemble that included miniature Harris and Joe Biden figures in his breast pocket.

Asked how he was feeling, he said, “I couldn’t be more excited. I’m fired up.

“We don’t have any weirdness going on,” Camacho added, a reference to Walz’s description of Ohio Sen. JD Vance, the Republican vice-presidential nominee, during a recent interview.

Of course, with all the excitement inside the convention, it was inevitable that some of that enthusiasm would spill out into the street.

That’s where we found Minneapolis, Minnesota-based artist Kii Arens, who

Kii Arens, of Minneapolis, displays the poster he was giving away during the Democratic National Convention. (Photo by Dan McCue)

was posting an original Harris poster he'd designed near the Michigan Avenue river crossing.

"What brought me here? Well, Kamala, of course," he said as he affixed the poster to the wall.

"And of course, Gov. Tim Walz is my homeboy," he added.

Arens said Harris' ascension to the top of the Democratic ticket was a source of instant inspiration.

"I mean, first of all, she's going to be the very first Black female president. That's about as good as it gets, right there," he said.

"Plus, we're all just so tired of having these 70-plus-year-old men running the country," Arens continued. "I mean, I think former President Gerald Ford said it best when he suggested, 'Once a woman becomes president, look out, it may never change.'"

"I mean, serious, it's about time," he said, pausing from his work. "The dudes have been screwing up for way too long."

Asked about the poster itself, Arens said he based it on a picture he found online by Florence Ngala, the photographer and photojournalist.

"She took it for Rolling Stone and I just thought it was awesome," he said.

"I particularly loved the white suit Harris was wearing," he continued, adding, "I added the faint paisley and flowers here and there, and, to harken back to my Minneapolis/Prince vibes, threw on a splash of purple."

"Harris' nomination is just such a total flip of the switch," he said. "All of a sudden, the world is feeling joy, right? We're

relieved. So vote joy, basically. That's the message of this work.”

Arens said he was not selling the posters, but instead was intent to give them all away before the convention ended.

“I’m just finding the right people with the right spirit, and I’m handing them out for free all over town,” he said.

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