

*Mike Berman's*

# WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 91

July 30, 2010

## STATE OF THE NATION

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## PRESIDENT OBAMA

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## THE CONGRESS The Clock is Ticking

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## RESTAURANTS

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Public opinion as to whether the country is headed in the right direction has shown little change in the last 4 months. The wrong track numbers continue to edge up in the NBC/WSJ survey, while the right direction number has not moved.

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u> <u>RD/WT</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u> <u>RD/WT</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u> <u>RD/WT</u>
June	29/61%	32/60%	----
March	33/59%	----	38/60%
February	----	33/62%	----
January 2010	34/54%	36/55%	37/62%
December 2009	33/55%	37/56%	xxxxxx
September	39/48%	41/53%	xxxxxx
June	42/46%	44/50%	47/50%
February 2009	41/44%	23/68%	31/67%

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Satisfaction with the way things are going in the United States is at 21% in July, only slightly better than the 19% recorded in early March. It did hit 27% in April.

It is no surprise that Democrats (30%) are more positive than Republicans (11%) and Independents (20%). Democrats hit a momentary high of 47% satisfaction in April, but it has fallen steadily since then. [Gallup]

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60% favor further stimulus spending to create jobs. [Gallup]

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Given their choice, 50% of Americans think that the first priority of immigration reform should be to halt the flow of illegal immigrants into the country. 45% would prefer to start with a plan to deal with immigrants now in the U.S. illegally.

50% also oppose the law suit brought by the Federal government against Arizona's new immigration law. 33% favor the law suit. [Gallup]

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The most important problems facing the country today are

- Economy in general 31%
- Unemployment/Jobs 22%
- dissatisfaction with government/Congress/  
politicians' poor leadership/corruption/  
abuse of power 11%

\* Only 5% of Americans oppose the National Day of Prayer that was designated by Congress in 1952.

\* By 47% to 45% the country is pro-life as opposed to pro-choice. From 1995 through May 2009, pro-choice always came out on top, even if only by a small margin. But since May 2009 the pro-life position has had the larger amount of support.

\* 45% say that the overall state of moral values in this country today is fair/poor, while 15% say they are excellent/good. 75% believe that moral values are getting worse.

\* 52% find gay/lesbian relations morally acceptable. 61% of Democrats and Independents share this view. 35% of Republicans hold the view. [Gallup]

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## THE PRESIDENT

Roughly speaking, President Obama's overall job performance rating is down slightly from where it was in January. He is in slightly better shape than Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton were at this time, and substantially ahead of where Jimmy Carter was at this stage.

The record is there -- the stimulus, healthcare reform, new financial regulation, and a number of other significant initiatives. The question is how these legislative successes will impact the 2010 elections.

Many Democratic members of the House of Representatives are angry with him for insisting, with the House leadership, that they take a series of difficult votes. Those votes have left many of them in trouble in their home Districts.

Further, many Members of Congress wonder whether he and his Administration really care whether they win or lose.

To make matters worse, Members are very much aware that there is an historical connection between the job approval rating of the President and how his Party does in mid-term Congressional elections.

Large parts of the business community, well beyond the financial sector, have come to believe that the President is disdainful or dismissive of the role they can play in the efforts to rebuild the economy.

The President is setting out to prove that both concerns are wrong. Time will tell whether he is successful. But this may be a case where first-class rhetoric and public appearances are not enough.

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>
	<b>Obama overall job approval</b>		
July 2010	----	----	50/47%
June 2010	45/48%	47/43%	----

March 2010	48/47%	49/41%	53/33%
February 2010	----	46/45%	51/46%
January 2010	48/43%	50/40%	53/44%
December 2009	47/46%	50/39%	50/46%
October	51/42%	----	57/40%
September	51/41%	56/33%	54/43%
August	51/40%	----	57/40%
July	53/40%	----	58/37%
June	56/34%	63/26%	65/31%
April	61/30%	66/24%	69/26%
February 2009	60/26%	62/15%	68/25%

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When matched against the approval ratings of the last 8 Presidents in July of the 2nd year of their initial terms in office, Obama is now 6th, just ahead of Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. [Based on Gallup surveys]

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Eisenhower	75	20-
GW Bush (II)	69	26-
Kennedy	66	23-
G Bush (I)	60	25-
Nixon	56	33-
Obama	44	47
Reagan	42	46-
Clinton	42	49-
Carter	39	44-

\* \* \* \* \*

Here is another cut at comparing Obama with the same group, this time based on their average approval ratings in the 6th quarter (April 20 - July 19) of their respective terms.

	<u>Average approval</u>
G Bush (II)	74.9%
Kennedy	71.3%
G Bush (I)	64.8%
Eisenhower	64.6%
Nixon	58.0%
Obama	47.3%

Clinton	46.1%
Reagan	44.2%
Carter	41.8%

\* \* \* \* \*

Americans are split on the two biggest legislative victories that Obama has achieved, healthcare reform and additional regulation of financial institutions.

49% disapprove of the healthcare reform legislation; 36% approve. Disapproval is slightly down from March, but slightly up from May. 48% say it will have no effect on their personal healthcare circumstances. Of those that have a view, 33% think it will hurt them, while 13% say it will help.

On the other hand, Americans are positive about the additional regulation of financial institutions. 57% support increased regulation, while 35% oppose it. [CBS July]

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Time is treating Bill Clinton very well. His favorable rating is 61%. George W. Bush is not faring so well. His favorable rating is 45%. And bringing up the middle is Barack Obama with 52%.

Shortly after Clinton left office his favorable rating was 39%. It hit 63% in 2007, and then fell precipitously to 50% during the 2008 Presidential campaign, ostensibly based on the nature of some of his comments while campaigning for Hillary Clinton.

Obama started his term with a favorable rating of 78% and has fallen steadily to the current level. But, then, the sitting President has to make hard decisions.

Bush finished his term with a favorable rating of 40%. He fell to 35% early in 2009, and has since risen to his current level. Early this year, he was seen as more responsible for the nation's economic stress than Obama. [Gallup]

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Michelle Obama has a higher favorable rating (66%) than Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton (61%), General Petraeus (56%), President Obama, and George W. Bush. [Gallup]

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Personal feelings about the President remains in relatively high positive territory, but here too, the period of the health care debate appears to have taken its toll.

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
June 2010	47%	40%
March 2010	50%	38%
January 2010	52%	35%
December 2009	50%	30%
October	56%	33%
September	56%	33%
July	55%	34%
April	64%	23%
February	68%	19%
January 2009	66%	14% [NBC/WSJ]

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### **Obama job approval/disapproval on the economy**

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>Wash Post/ABC</u>
June 2010	48/50%	----	43/54%
March 2010	47/50%	45/45%	45/52%
February 2010	----	42/52%	45/53%
January 2010	43/49%	46/48%	47/52%
December 2009	42/51%	47/43%	46/52%
October	47/46%	54/38%	50/48%
June	51/38%	57/35%	56/41%
February 2009	56/31%	55/24%	60/34%

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Here is how Obama is rated on his handling of the Federal budget deficit.

	<u>Approve/Disapprove</u>
July 2010	40/56%
March	43/52%
February	40/45%
January 2010	38/56%
December 2009	37/56%
October	45/51%
September	39/55%
August	41/53%
July	43/49%
June	48/48%
April 2009	51/43%

[WP/ABC]

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### **ABOUT THE POLITICAL PARTIES**

The following are the self-described Party identifications of Americans based on an average of results for WP/ABC, NYT/CBS, NBC/WSJ.

Democratic 33%                  Republican 25%                  Independent 36%

Using the same surveys as above, here are how Americans describe themselves on the philosophical spectrum:

Liberal 21%                  Moderate 38%                  Conservative 37%

49% say that the Democratic Party is too liberal, while 40% think the Republican Party is too conservative. 40% believe that both of the Parties are about right as opposed to being too liberal or too conservative. [Gallup]

There has been a semantic movement among some liberals to describe themselves as progressives. It turns out that a majority of Americans are unsure what the word means. Liberals are more likely to embrace it, while conservatives are likely to reject it. When compared to a profile of all adults, progressives are clearly more liberal and substantially less conservative.

	<u>Progressives</u>	<u>National Adults</u>	
Conservatives	22%	42%	
Moderates	32%	34%	
Liberals	45%	22%	[Gallup]

The NBC/WSJ survey shows 35% having positive feelings about the Democratic Party and 30% positive feelings about the Republican Party. There 44% negative feelings about the Democrats and 40% negative feelings about Republicans.

A recent Gallup survey recorded a 36% favorable rating for the Republican Party and a 43% favorable score for the Democratic Party.

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There are few major questions on which the differences between the Democratic and Republican Parties are better illuminated than on the question of the role of government.

Across the country, 53% think the government is doing too much. This includes 81% of Republicans, 58% of Independents, and 29% of Democrats.

On the other hand, of the 39% who think the government should do more, 63% are Democrats, 32% Independents, and 13% Republicans. [Gallup]

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Both Parties are rated negatively when measured by whether they "put country's interests ahead of political interests."

<u>Republican Party</u>		<u>Democratic Party</u>	
Good	Poor	Good	Poor
35%	61%	38%	58%

They are also rated negatively when it comes to "working with opposing Party to get things done."

<u>Republican Party</u>		<u>Democratic Party</u>	
Good	Poor	Good	Poor
33%	61%	38%	56%

[Pew Research]

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Over the last 6 years Hispanics have been increasingly identifying with the Democratic Party. In 2004 the spread was +22 points for Democrats. Today that spread is +26 points.

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
2010	58%	22%
2009	50%	19%
2008	57%	22%
2006	50%	22%
2005	48%	24%
2004	49%	27%

[NBC/WSJ]

Interestingly, Arizona's passage of its own immigration law has not changed the Congressional voting preferences of Hispanics or any other racial group.  
[Gallup]

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The Tea Party may, as a practical matter, be an organizational effort by conservative Republicans who are otherwise dissatisfied with the direction of the Republican Party.

Here is how Tea Party supporters identify themselves on the political spectrum

- 62% Conservative Republican
- 17% Moderate/liberal Republican
- 79%
- 6% Pure Independent
- 5% Conservative Democrat
- 10% Moderate/liberal Democrat
- 15%

55% of Tea Partiers are male, compared to 45% in the adult population.

Three issues which, in the minds of Tea Party supporters, represent an extremely serious threat to future U.S. well-being are Federal government debt (61%), terrorism (51%), and the size and power of the Federal government (49%).

If the 2010 election were held now, 80% of Tea Partiers would vote for the Republican Congressional candidate in their District. Conservative Republicans would give 95% of their vote to the same candidate.

84% of Tea Partiers have an unfavorable view of Obama, as do 88% of conservative Republicans. 85% have an unfavorable view of Nancy Pelosi, as do 90% of conservative Republicans. [Gallup]

The NBC/WSJ survey also shows 34% positive and 31% negative ratings toward the Tea Party from the public at large.

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## **THE CONGRESS**

There is no doubt that the Democrats will lose seats in the Senate and the House in November; the question is how many?

Those who follow the races most thoroughly (not including the various Party political committees) seem relatively confident that the Democrats will retain control of the Senate, but with a much reduced margin. What the margin might be depends on whether you assume both Independents now in the body will continue to caucus with the Democrats.

When it comes to the House, there is less certainty. What is certain is that the number of seats currently held by Democrats that are vulnerable far exceeds the number of current Republican seats that are vulnerable. Of course, the Democrats do currently have a 77 seat margin, 38 seats more than necessary for an absolute majority. There is also a consistent view that the Democrats will lose a large number of seats. It is there that consistency ends. The range seems to be 25-45 seats.

Democrats currently hold 80 seats won by George Bush in 2004 and 49 seats won by John McCain in 2008.

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73% of those surveyed in June by the NBC/WSJ and 70% of those surveyed by WP/ABC disapprove of the job being done by Congress.

Congress has hit a new low of 11% in Gallup's ranking of confidence in 16 American institutions. This is a drop of 8 points in the past year, and the lowest score ever recorded for the Congress.

At the top of the list, the U.S. military (82%). The Presidency and the Supreme Court rank 6/7 and are tied at 36%. Newspapers garner 25%, while television news comes in at 22%. [Gallup]

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In mid-June 2010, adults showed a preference for a Republican-controlled Congress by 45% to 43%. But 50% of registered voters would vote to replace the entire Congress if given an opportunity to do so on the ballot. [NBC/WSJ]

However, in a mid-July Gallup survey, Democratic candidates as a group, who had been doing badly since April, opened up a 6 point spread over the Republicans by 49% to 43%. The following week the spread was down to 4 points.

For the last several months the intent of Independent voters has been to vote Republican in 2010. An 8 point advantage in March grew to a 12 point advantage in June.

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With the good news above, comes a little bad news for Democrats. 51% of Republicans are very enthusiastic about voting this year, something that is said by only 28% of Republicans. [Gallup, July]

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60% of registered voters say they are inclined to look around for someone other than their current Representative when it comes to voting in November. 25% say they would stick with the current Representative. [WP/ABC July]

47% would vote to replace every Member of Congress. [NBC/WSJ 6/10]

Gallup found 63% of registered voters saying that most Members of Congress do not deserve re-election. Although 50% say their Representative deserves re-election. This is the lowest re-elect number Gallup has recorded since late 1992.

Among those who think that most Members do not deserve re-election the reasoning includes:

- Members of Congress are just doing a bad job or no job at all
  - Members are making judgements based on bad criteria such as self-interest, partisanship, special interests
  - There are Members who have simply been in Congress too long.
- [Gallup]

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By 47% to 46% voters say that if the election were held today they would vote for a Republican. In March, April and June, when asked the same question, there was a slight preference for the Democratic candidate. [WP/ABC July]

In a mid-July Quinnipiac survey there is an even stronger preference for Republican candidates. By 43% to 38% voters would vote for the Republican candidate in their District. This includes a 44% - 29% Republican preference among Independents.

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A plurality of Americans (39%) say it makes no difference whether or not the President and the Congress are of the same or different political parties. 30% feel that divided government is better, and nearly same number (27%) says the Executive Branch and Congress should be controlled by the same Party. [Gallup]

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## U.S. SENATE

The Senate landscape continues to change. There are now 12 seats rated as Toss Ups. Moving into this category is California, where it appears that Carley Fiorina (®) is making a contest out of her effort to unseat Democratic incumbent Barbara Boxer.

Florida moves into the Toss-Up column as a result of Governor Charlie Crist's decision to continue in the race as an Independent. Kendrick Meek (D), who will likely win his primary, runs a poor third to Crist and the Republican candidate, Mario Rubio.

Illinois, which looked to be Leaning Republican, has moved to the center column. Both the Democratic candidate, Alexi Giannoulias, the current State

Treasurer, and Mark Kirk, a Republican Congressman, have experienced exposure of various flaws.

Harry Reid, the Senate Democratic Majority Leader, who was trailing for months, seems to have gotten new life as a result of a Tea Party candidate, Sharon Angle, winning the Republican primary. Angle is not an experienced candidate and so far shows it. In the end, this will be the ultimate test of whether voters so want new faces that they will go for Angle, who gives no evidence of being up to the job.

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Since the first issue of WW in this cycle, April 2009, the number of Senate seats that are Solid or Leaning Democratic has dropped from 15 to 9. The number of Solid or Leaning Republican seats has grown from 15 to 18 and back to 16. The number of Toss-up seats has grown from 7 to 12.

	<u>Solid D</u>	<u>Lean D</u>	<u>T-up</u>	<u>Lean R</u>	<u>Solid R</u>
July 2010	8	1	12	3	13
June 2010	7	2	9	6	12
March 2010	7	3	8	6	12
November 2009	10	4	10	3	11
August 2009	9	6	7	3	12
June 2009	9	7	6	3	12
April 2009	9	6	7	4	11

Of the 12 Toss-Up races, 3 lean to the GOP and 9 are even.

<u>THE U.S. SENATE</u>	
Democrats	57
Republicans	41
Independents	2 (caucus Dem)

Here is how the 37 Senate elections (19 Democratic incumbents, 18 Republican incumbents) look to me at this time (underlining reflects retirement). (D=Dem incumbent in office, R=GOP incumbent in office, I=Ind. incumbent in office) [\*Gillibrand]

Safe <u>Democratic(8)</u> Connecticut Hawaii Maryland New York(A) New York(B)* Oregon Vermont West Virginia	Leaning <u>Democratic(1)</u> Wisconsin	<u>Toss-Up(12)</u> Arkansas California Colorado Florida Illinois Kentucky Missouri Nevada New Hampsh. Ohio Pennsylvania Washington	Leaning <u>Republican(3)</u> Indiana Louisiana No. Carolina	Safe <u>Republican(13)</u> Alabama Alaska Arizona Delaware Georgia Idaho Iowa Kansas No. Dakota Oklahoma So. Carolina So. Dakota Utah
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	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Ind</u>
Seats not up in 2010	39	22	2
Safe in 2010	7	13	0
Leaning in 2010	1	3	0
Total	48	38	2
Toss-ups	12 (5R/7D)		
	Even	9	
	Lean GOP	3	
	Lean Dem	0	

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## U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The number of seats that the Cook Political Report rates as solidly Democratic has dropped by 43 seats since April 2009, from 197 to 154. The total number of solidly Republican seats has grown from 139 to 161.

	<u>4/1/09</u>	<u>7/24/10</u>	
Solid Dem	197	154	(-43)
Likely Dem	36	34	(- 2)
Lean Dem	19	33	(+14)
TOTAL Dem	252	221	(-31)
TOTAL GOP	178	181	(+ 3)
Lean GOP	4	7	(+ 3)
Likely GOP	35	13	(-22)
Solid GOP	139	161	(+22)

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### THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats 256  
 Republicans 179

	<u>4/1/09</u>	<u>10/6/09</u>	<u>12/16/09</u>	<u>3/31/10</u>	<u>7/24/10</u>
TOTAL Dem	252	247	242	227	221
Solid Dem	197	183	174	162	154
Likely Dem	36	44	45	35	34
Lean Dem	19	20	23	30	33
Toss-up	5	12	19	27	33
D	4	8	16	25	30
R	1	4	3	2	3
Lean GOP	4	10	8	7	7
Likely GOP	35	21	15	14	13
Solid GOP	139	145	151	160	161
TOTAL GOP	178	176	174	181	181

[As always, thanks to the “Cook Political Report,” which is the best when it comes to analysis of Congressional races (as well as other electoral matters)].

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### **THIS AND THAT**

If you could fit the entire population of the world into a village consisting of 100 people, maintaining the proportions of all the people living on Earth, that village would consist of:

- 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 Americans (North, Central & South), 8 Africans
- 52 women, 48 men
- 20 Caucasians and 70 non-Caucasians
- 30 Christians and 70 non-Christians
- 89 heterosexuals and 11 gays and lesbians.

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## **RESTAURANTS**

Sego Restaurant & Bar  
131 Washington Street  
Ketchum, Idaho  
208-928-7878

There are a variety of seating areas for dinner. As you enter the restaurant, to the left is a lounge/bar area where dinner is also served. It is separated from the main dining area by a floor to ceiling wall that is open at both ends.

There are 2 four-person booths and 6 deuces in a row that can be made into any combination. The bar is at the back of the lounge area with 8 high chairs.

The main dining room seats 66 in various configurations. There are 5 four person booths. The evening I was there the room was dominated by 4 tables of 12, 8, 10, and 8 respectively, all of which are composed of booths.

At the very front of the restaurant there is a so-called "private dining area," which really isn't private. It will hold up to 16 people. The night I was there it was being used for the band, which started playing at 8:30 p.m....I was gone by then.

There is also an outdoor main floor seating area with 3 four-top tables.

The rooftop, which I did not see, seats 50 people, but is totally dependent on the weather. Apparently, a few people ate up there the night I was there, but a number of folks went up to the roof to check it out and then came down and took tables on the main floor.

I sat at the front end of the lounge area.

The floor is made of dark wood, and the tables and chairs are also dark wood. The building exterior and interior have a modern look.

The art that adorns the restaurant, ranging from photography to mixed media, was provided by the Gail Severn Gallery and it is all for sale.

The silverware comes wrapped in a cloth napkin tied with a rawhide strip.

A long twisted bread roll is served on a small wooden block with a round butter pat on the block as well. It is quite good.

I selected four courses, although my guess is that most folks do with three.

The first course was smoked Sturgeon sorrel, with Idaho caviar, and tiny potato blocks.

For a second course I chose one of the two flat breads that are offered. The flatbread is served on a larger wood plank. I chose an offering topped with asparagus, Pasteurized egg, fromage blanc, and mushrooms. Each flatbread would easily serve 3 people if ordered as a second appetizer. 2 people would be satisfied if it was the only appetizer. I took half of it back to the hotel for a later snack.

My third course was wood oven roasted game hen with summer squashes and roast garlic. The game hen had a particularly tantalizing crispy skin.

I sampled two of the 6 desserts that were described as favorites by my server. The first was Prosecco Sabeyon with black mission figs and Amaretti cookie crumbs. The second was Tart of the Moment, seasonal fruit and a lemon butter crust.

The Tastes of each of the dishes are unique and interesting. I am not sure how it would be as a place where one went for dinner every night. However, Virginia, who put me on to the restaurant, says she could easily go there every night.

The portions are not too large, but more than adequate.

Only beer and wine are served. The wine is served in "bowls" that are shaped like regular wine glasses without stems. It reminds me of the view by the grandfather of the Mondavi family who believed that wine should be served in tumblers.

The service was excellent. My server was Sheridan, a 2009 graduate of Brown University. As her classmates headed for New York and Washington D.C., Sheridan decided to come out West for a few years until she takes on grad school. She is a skier and has now become an avid mountain biker. She was totally friendly and helpful.

One of the complaints of others who have eaten at Sejo is that their meals took a long time in coming once they ordered. This suggests that the kitchen is not yet up to the task. This could become problematic as the summer season allows full use of the rooftop dining area.

My dinner was nicely paced; not rushed, but moving along.

I called for a 7 p.m. reservation, which was accepted. However, the host suggested that, if I could arrive a little earlier, it would be a little less congested because there were a number of large groups coming at 7 p.m. I entered the restaurant about 6:40 p.m. and was quickly seated.

The restroom is first class. As you walk in, dead ahead there is a stainless steel commode area open at top and bottom, and to the right is a wall hanging urinal. The wash basin, which is next to the door as you come in, to the right, has a black top with a white ceramic wash basin embedded. There is a large mirror above the wash basin. There are large brown tiles on the floor and up the walls to about 3 feet, with a layer of smaller tiles at the 3 foot levels. The walls are a mild green. Having been open such a short time, the restroom is still impeccably clean.

Note to Bob: You will not like this restaurant. It has a line at the bottom of the menu that says "substitutions politely declined."

The restaurant opened in December 2009.

*Mike*

Suite 500  
2100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-728-1100  
mberman@dubersteingroup.com