

THE CORVALLIST

Interview with Michael Smith, candidate for President of the United States

Unabridged Version, March 2006

Basic campaign and background questions:

Your website lists several reasons that you have chosen to run for the Oregon primary, as opposed to staging a full national campaign. But why jump straight into the presidential race, as opposed to running for state congress or even city council? Why not work your way up through the political ranks and garner some political experience on the way?

- Valid point. First, this is more about making a gesture regarding the state of today's politics than it is about gaining an office. I have a full time job, and the last thing this country needs is another "seasoned" politician of the standard vintage. The country could benefit from a demonstration that the moderate middle is tired of the choices typically presented.
- It comes down to my estimate of how I could most effectively influence a huge system with negligible resources; I figured that it would take a big gesture. Modern campaigns cost a fortune (I heard that the last Governor's candidates spent around \$6 million.) But I thought that gathering the 5000 signatures to get on the primary ballot might not be overwhelming. Then my hope is that the Oregon primary is, as it typically is, overlooked by the national candidates since the nomination is usually locked up weeks before. Under those circumstances I'm hoping that the local press may be willing to spare some of the spotlight for a local-interest candidate.

What steps will you take to kick off your campaign? Will you be issuing press releases to local news organizations in the near future? Planning on local speaking engagements to drum up support? Running some ads on Oregon radio or TV stations? Basically, how will you let people know you're running?

- At this point I'm stuck in a bit of a conundrum – I have a long way to go so I need to start creating awareness, but it's so long to go that no one is really thinking about the 2008 races. I'm attending the Dorchester conference this weekend and slowly building a network of contacts.
- I plan to escalate the campaign in May, two years before the primary. At that point I will start to actively spend my weekends hitting the farmer's markets, festivals, and county fairs this summer. I'll attend just about any club, lodge, or civic meeting that extends an invitation, and I may have to crash a few without invitations.
- To date, most of my activities have been focused on the internet (participation in various blogs, etc.), and a few letters to the editor.

Do you have a target campaign budget in mind? Are you relying mostly on small individual contributions and/or self-financing the campaign, or do you plan to look for some corporate sponsorship?

- My budget, at least for the next year, is pretty minimal. I don't have any great personal fortune to tap – so far I've spent about \$500. Through the summer I envision spending maybe \$5,000; most of that for printing and travel expenses to various public events (farmer's markets, county fairs, etc.). If I can raise more funds I'll consider some modest radio or print ads, but probably save any additional

funds raised until summer 2007. At that point, with less than a year to the primary, I hope to accelerate with a modest media campaign and more visible public appearances. Finally in September '07 we can start collecting the nominating signatures for the primary ballot.

- I'm hoping that if I strike a chord with people, (not necessarily just Republicans, but folks who advocate an open honest debate) they will support my efforts \$20 at a time. I find it hard to imagine too many corporate PACs lining up behind my philosophy.

Your "Republican creed" features several reasons you identify with the Republican Party, yet many of your platform stances seem directly opposed with the modern GOP. Do you feel that the Republican Party has changed significantly, or have you always been a rebel? Have you considered running as an independent or Libertarian, or is running as a Republican candidate important to you?

- It gets back to what point I hope to make. I see many of the actions and pronouncements of vocal Republicans in conflict with those "[Why I am a Republican](#)" principles. I think there are many moderates out there whose values are aligned with these principles, but are intimidated to express themselves in the face of overwhelming fervor from the extreme right. I'm hoping to develop some fervor amongst moderates to say "Enough is enough; this is our Party too." I think the Republican Party has recently abandoned some of its principles in an effort to hold office. The right wing is a very seductive base for the party, but not its only constituency.
- I think the relevant parties will remain the two we have. I believe in the Republican Party principles of individual responsibility, limited government, and personal liberty. My challenge is to hold the party to integrity with its own principles.

What experience do you have that you feel would make you a good president?

- At the risk of sounding overly "populist", I bring a very humble perspective of working class roots to a system run in large part by people of privilege. From that perspective I've gained valuable experience through my service in military intelligence, and my work in several blue-collar and corporate environments; all the while going to school for an accounting degree at age 38, then an MBA. Together with a strong sense of principles, I believe I can advocate a vision of opportunity more meaningful for the voters than the vision put forth by the seasoned politicians. I may not be the smartest guy in the room, but I'm as smart as most, and have a steadfast conviction to opportunity for everyone; not just protecting the position of those already advantaged.

Do you belong to/volunteer for/donate to any charitable organizations?

- Over the past several years it's been primarily my children's interests that have shaped my non-work time. I was active with the Boy Scouts as my son was involved, and have shuttled kids to Girl Scouts, band practice, soccer games, and horse riding like most parents. As my children now reach an age of more independence, I hope to apply my free time to more creative interests. I've always believed that we each have a part to play in a strong country and community, I served 7 years in the volunteer Air Force, and now I'd like to contribute in the political arena.

How does your family feel about the campaign and the inevitable attention it will bring?

- They are excited about it as an adventure. I've already seen evidence that they may have to develop a bit thicker skin when the inevitable criticisms start to fly. When you step into the spotlight people feel its fair game to go after not only your political pronouncements, but everything else.

What are your religious beliefs? What role should/shouldn't religion play in policy decisions?

- This is probably one of those points where a seasoned politician would either lie, evade, or pander. Also a point on which it becomes unfortunately obvious why I might never get traction in a national campaign.
- I'm agnostic. I was raised Catholic with eight years of Catholic grade school – and after that I figured I had paid my dues; enough religion for a lifetime. My mother was raised Methodist, converted and raised our family Catholic, then went Mormon twenty years ago. My father-in-law is Jewish, and my wife's grandparents came from Russian Orthodox background. I firmly believe in the constitutional separation of church and state, and I question those who think they must have a religious person as leader. This election is for President, not Pope, and we should not be substituting a theocracy for our democracy. Would those who might question my lack of faith prefer a sanctimonious leader with his hand "on the button", firm in his faith of a greater reward in the afterlife, or would they prefer a leader who thinks this life is precious and any afterlife only unproven wishful thinking?
- I've encountered some believers who posit that there is no morality without religion. They argue that it's only fear of eternal damnation that motivates people to do right. First, the God I learned about in Catholic school was forgiving and loving; not a vindictive fear mongering bully. If there is a deity, he's the one I'd vote for. I would ask how have cultures throughout the ages survived without this fear of divine retribution? Many faiths have no concept of hell, yet many share their own version of "[do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.](#)" Jesus leveraged that concept straight from the Jewish faith, a faith that does not have an explicit concept of hell, yet a tradition from which most of our concepts of morality stem.

How is your health? Anything that would concern the public, such as Dick Cheney's multiple heart issues?

- My health is sound. I'm working, like many Americans, to lose some weight. As I've hit the middle years I've encountered some issues – specifically, I spent the night in the hospital several months ago with an episode of atrial fibrillation (an accelerated heart rate). My doctor ran several test, confirmed no specific heart disease, then gave me the lecture; "Get to the gym." I've been 3-4 times a week, an hour at a time on the elliptical torture mill, for the past 3 months. I can't wait for better weather so I can get on my bicycle more.

Any other skeletons in your closet? Blackmail material that you're concerned might surface? Bad habits that might be caught on tape?

- No. My early college years were sometimes a bit embarrassing, and my bachelor years in the Air Force were sometimes a bit inebriated, but nothing that isn't redeemed by my subsequent years of clean living and righteous piety.

Issues:

What would your priorities be if you were elected? Do you have an agenda, so to speak?

- The safe, successful return of our troop from Iraq would be my first concern. I don't think a return at any cost, neglecting the stability of Iraq or ignoring the sacrifices already made, is appropriate. But I do think we need to clearly define a strategy for stabilizing Iraq, and getting out promptly.
- Economic strength through free markets and less burdensome tax loads of a bloated federal bureaucracy. I'm not a "vote no on any tax whatsoever" sort of Republican, but I'm convinced that there's better value on tax dollars spent closest to home. We need a simplified tax structure that puts the American economy on more level ground with the rest of the world. I believe that abolishing all income taxes in favor of a consumption-based system would be a step in the right direction. Finally, we need a line-item veto.
- Constitutional integrity on federal government involvement in social issues and states' rights. Together with a cost-driven goal of reducing the cost of the federal government, we need a reduction in the scope of federal involvement in matters constitutionally left to the states. Consistent with the Republican principle that less governance is better governance, a Smith administration would stay far away from social issues like the "sanctity of marriage", TV violence, or censorship of rap lyrics.
- Constructive foreign policy based on cooperative, rather than coercive relationships. Recent foreign policy has been dominated by pronouncements of "evil" and a view that if you're not "with us", you're against us. We need a foreign policy built on positive relationships, respect for sovereignty, and leadership by example.

What are some of the policies of the current administration that you would like to change, and what efforts would you continue in your own administration?

- I'd like to get the federal government out of various programs that should be constitutionally managed by the states;
 - Education: "No Child Left Behind" usurps states' rights and creates a misleading culture of accomplishment through restricting educational practices to the teaching of specific test content.
 - Transportation: Except in the sense of interstate trade, much of the transportation department responsibilities should be left to the states. There's no way the transportation department should be coercing states to change drinking ages, or enact speed limits or safety laws based on threats of lost federal funding.
 - Energy: Except as a possible national security issue, a free market should be the driver of energy policy.
 - The Department of Agriculture: Again, except as a matter of interstate commerce, there's no reason that a free market can't manage how much corn is grown in Iowa, or how many hogs go to Peoria.
 - The Department of Interior: There is certainly no mandate in the constitution for the federal government to grow subsidized timber, manage free range land, or provide free mining property for the economy. I respect the public lands as a legacy.

Who would be in your dream cabinet? Who would you want to serve as your vice president?

- I'd look for the experience that I lack, and I'd look in both parties. I'd need a group of creative thinkers who know the processes of Capitol Hill but aren't too vested in the ingrained interests of the current system. I think I'd also look for people with some degree of experience "in the real world".
- Condoleezza Rice would make a great VP on many levels – politically savvy, socially ground-breaking. (However I'm not sure what her political philosophies might be.)

You support John Linder's "Fair Tax" bill, which would eliminate all taxes except for a consumption tax paid both by individuals and corporations. Wouldn't this simply reward those people who have the ability to shelter and save more of their capital? Would there be exceptions for necessity items such as food?

- I definitely like the consumption tax concept for various reasons, but disagree with Linder on some points. Specifically, I think basic food and medical costs should probably be exempted to make the tax less regressive.
- It's important to remember that we have a capitalist economy. When those with capital have the proper incentives, they provide the energy that moves the economy. We need to recognize the incredible burden of the current tax system and work to put that money back into the economy. For those of us who are merely aspiring capitalists, we need a structure that promotes achievement, incents saving, and allows upward mobility and a strong middle class.
- Finally, the consumption tax would go a long way to put the US economy on a more equal footing in the world. A US corporation doing business overseas has had to pay a huge tax burden before its product ever reaches the foreign market. (And be realistic. No corporation ever pays a tax; their consumers do every time they buy their product.) Foreign products enter the US on a much more advantaged footing.

How would you structure the federal budget? What items would receive priority in a Smith presidency?

- I'd go after the budget in a much more "constitutionally" based process. There are numerous departments that exceed their charter and would best be left to state or local control. A Smith budget would look to cut the various "department" spending (excluding Social Security) by about 50%
- The Defense budget would be visibly separated from the "aggression" budget. I'm being somewhat sarcastic, but the country deserves visibility to the costs of foreign intervention. I advocate a strong military defense, but invite an equally strong debate on military use as a tool of foreign policy.

What specific issues do you feel should be the domain of the federal government and what should revert to state control? Would there be minimum guidelines and standards in place? For example, if Alabama decided to abolish laws against racial discrimination, should that be their prerogative?

- The Constitution is pretty clear on the duties of the Federal Government; defense, interstate trade, currency, and foreign affairs. Everything else should be examined for potential return to the states. There are some issues that can be "stretched" to fall under commerce or defense; I'd be very critical of those justifications.

- Regarding a rogue "Alabama"; the 14th amendment and the Supreme Court are pretty effective checks against that sort of thing.

How would you reform education in America? Should funding higher education be a priority as well as K-12? Should there be federal standards, or should it be left entirely up to the states?

- My main concern with today's public education system is the lack of choice and ineffective "market" mechanisms for education. Government controls (No Child Left Behind) are not an appropriate substitute for the natural regulation inherent in customer feedback. In a free market, parents should be able to "vote with their feet" if schools are inadequate. Likewise, school boards should have more freedom to show ineffective teachers to the door.
- Regarding standards: A limited federal Education Department might establish some minimum benchmarks and serve as a clearinghouse for some resources or best practices. Further accreditation standards would arise through free market competition.
- Higher education and a good education in general, are the primary vehicles for upward mobility in society today. For all Americans to enjoy the dream of middle class achievement we need to make quality education available. I would link some form of higher education access to a military draft/national service program, similar to the old GI bill. I think it can be justified as a national security issue to insure solid military readiness, with an option for civilian service, and is certainly in our security interest to have the highest level of educational access available broadly.

How would you handle social programs such as TANF, food stamps and Medicaid? Medicare and Social Security?

- We have a contract with Americans on SS. We need to insure the financial viability of the system, but any change to the system would be minimal to those most fully vested in the system.
- TANF, and Food Stamps should be a state issue. Where disparities exist between states, the federal government has some role to play in defining minimum standards.
- Medicare/Medicaid should be part of an overall reform of healthcare.

How would you fix health care in America? Or does it need to be fixed?

- It needs to be fixed as a matter societal and economic health, but I don't see it as a direct federal funding responsibility. Federal leadership should be applied to find state solutions. Mandatory insurance through employment or state pools is one of the better ideas I've heard.
- I don't agree with caps on medical malpractice judgments. A free market can work to regulate the competence of our doctors without limits or protections.
- Until the systemic costs of health care are reined in, the US economy suffers a disadvantage compared to world economies with subsidized systems. Our economic health is directly related to the affordability of health care.

How should environmental and economic issues be balanced? Would you support signing the Kyoto treaty?

- I would not support Kyoto as it is. It is unfairly burdensome on the US economy and too lax on China and others.
- Environmental issues should regulate like free markets, although the government may have a role to play in fairly valuing environmental assets. For example, there's no reason for the government to subsidize the timber industry by providing free land and access. When timber sales are up for bid, let's allow the Sierra Club to compete for a 30 year freeze on the property by bidding against the local mill. Likewise, public lands should not be a free repository for mineral or oil extraction, nor are they strictly untouchable. We need to find a market balance but with a fair valuation of the conservation worth.

What is the most important foreign policy issue facing the U.S. today? What role should America play in global issues? Do you favor a more isolationist approach?

- Today's foreign policy is too negative and coercive. We need to rebuild the strong alliances that align the "western" world. Then, rather than bullying rogue states to fit our model, we can provide positive leadership and incentives to join a healthy community built on positive cooperation.
- Not isolationist, but definitely less "projecting" and intrusive. We've used the 9/11 attacks as a justification for proactively imposing our world view on the globe. We should certainly respond to specific imminent threats, but cautiously avoid assignments of "evil".
- America's greatest strength is its robust economy and culture. Constructive commercial engagement has a much more pervasive influence on the people of the world than our military strength.

How do you feel about the United Nations?

- It has an important role, but is not an elected body and should never violate sovereignty.

What is your opinion on free trade? Do you believe trade should be tied to human rights issues?

- A free global market is generally good, but we have the economic advantages that should morally compel us to consider human rights. Environmental and labor regulations that are justified for Americans on our soil should be equally valid for third-world villagers in remote corners out of view of our media. The concepts of free markets do not abandon all concepts of regulation. In fact, the concepts of balanced free markets imply an equal application of regulation across the system.

Did you support the Iraq War initially? And now? What would be your exit strategy?

- Initially yes, even without WMD or terrorist ties, Saddam was a despot and worthy of our intervention, but perhaps not a full-blown military invasion. There were many steps yet to be taken, and the military strategy should have been more cautiously committed.

- We need to define an end state and fully support execution. We owe two constituencies different, hopefully not mutually exclusive, deliverables. We owe the Iraqi people security to a standard equal or better than prior to our invasion. We owe our military forces a sound strategy for delivery of security to Iraq, and we owe them all necessary resources to accomplish that objective. To fail in these objectives would be a tragic dishonor to those who have sacrificed life and limb.

How should we handle detainees suspected of terrorist involvement? What should be done regarding Guantanamo Bay?

- If we are the champions of democracy and human dignity, we need to extend a good measure of those rights to the detainees. They deserve due process; perhaps not all constitutional protections, but certainly not relegation to the gulag until they fade from public memory. That's not consistent with the ideals this country should stand for.

You state that you support reinstatement of the draft. Do you mean during war time only, or would you institute a policy of conscription? How would you sell that to the American public?

- I would advocate a draft at all times, but flexibly manage the quotas and the deferments.
- The current burden of military service falls disproportionately on the working-class; folks with limited economic alternatives. The most evident proof of this is the lack of political interest in the Iraq war on our college campuses. The debate would be transformed dramatically if every American had a personal vested interest in our military policies. I would like to see a system where all men and women are entered into the registry, and a certain percentage is called to some form of national service. For those who object philosophically to military service, a slightly more burdensome commitment to social service would be an option. In return for their service, conscripts would earn subsistence compensation, but all earn generous entitlements for higher education upon the end of their service.
- I envision 18 year old Jimmy or Janie facing roughly a 5% probability of being drafted. If drafted, they could choose between a 2-year army stint, or a 3-year AmeriCorps-type commitment. Suddenly every 18 year old (or their parents) would look at their government in a new light. The draftees would gain a new perspective on how the world works through a military perspective, or how the inner city works for preschoolers. All draftees would have an improved avenue for higher education. The military would be strengthened by the breadth of diverse draftees, and everyone's sense of civilian political engagement would be heightened.

Silly questions (because they should be asked!):

What is your favorite movie/song/book/TV show?

- Movies: It's a Wonderful Life, and The Great Escape
- Song: Polka and Fugue from Schwanda the Bagpiper (great tuba part)
- Book: Harry Potter series (aloud with the kids)
- TV Show: The Simpsons

What's the best restaurant in town? (You endorse them, maybe they'll endorse you!)

- Best restaurant; Oasis. I want something a bit exotic when I go out. New Morning Bakery for desert – I have a chronic sweet tooth.

How much vacation time should a president be entitled to? Would you spend your vacation time here in Corvallis?

- In keeping with the concept that the government that governs least governs best, I think the more vacation the better. In a practical sense I don't think the President ever really gets any time off, does he?
- I'd love to consider Corvallis for the Western Whitehouse, but would the motorcades down 9th street be too disruptive?

Which foreign leaders would you most like the opportunity to vomit near?

- Ewww! I won't dignify that question with a response. It wouldn't be presidential.
- OK, If I had to choose...
 - To vomit on; Osama bin Laden.
 - To vomit near; Angela Merkel (I have a fondness for German beer.)
 - To vomit at; Pat Robertson.

When you pass by the Benton County courthouse between 5 and 6 p.m., do you wave to the protesters, ignore them or flip them the bird? Are they traitors, patriots or somewhere in between?

- I'd say they're somewhere in the patriot half of the spectrum for their conviction to advocate for their views. I don't see it as a disrespect of our troops and I reject the argument that it somehow demoralizes our troops to know that people disagree. When I served and took the military oath (very similar to the Presidential oath) to defend the constitution, I understood that to include the right to disagree.