

A Presidential ~~candidate~~ Candidate

The weight of the moment was etched on his face. Barack Obama, the freshman senator from Illinois was about to announce to his constituents that he was running for president of the United States. ~~Waiting b~~ Backstage (at left), his wife, Michelle, brushed specks of lint from his overcoat. Their daughters, Malia and Sasha, were dressed for the frigid temperatures that ~~soon~~ awaited them on this February morning at the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Ill.

Sen. Obama hugged Sasha, ~~and~~ Malia, and then kissed his wife. At one point, seemingly in prayer, he closed his eyes for a few seconds. As he was introduced to the crowd and the door flung open, a blast of cold air hit ~~everyone~~ the family and staff. ~~when the door was flung open~~. The campaign had officially begun. The now-presidential candidate made trips to Iowa, Chicago, and New Hampshire as part of his “announcement tour.”

Throughout the spring of 2007, I met up with Sen. Obama on the campaign trail, usually in New Hampshire, Iowa or South Carolina. All three states held early primaries or caucuses, and were crucial to any candidate’s chance of winning the nomination.

That summer, I left the *Chicago Tribune* to become a photojournalism professor at Ohio University. My coverage of Barack Obama had come to an end, I thought, but as it turned out, it was only put on hold. ~~only temporarily~~.

Welcome to Washington

“Glad to have you,” Barack Obama said, ~~to me~~, shaking my hand in a relaxed manner. In a few hours, he would be sworn in as the junior U.S. Senator from Illinois—99th out of 100 in seniority. I was meeting him on this unseasonably warm January 2005 morning at his Washington hotel, ready to tag along ~~with him~~ during his first official day in the nation’s ~~capitol~~capital.

At the time, I was the Washington-based national photographer for the *Chicago Tribune*, Sen. Obama’s hometown newspaper. My *Tribune* colleague, political ~~correspondent~~correspondent Jeff Zeleny, had proposed a series for the paper on Sen. Obama’s first year in office and asked me if I was interested in taking part. (“Of course!” I replied.)

Several weeks before Sen. Obama was sworn in, Zeleny and I met with ~~his~~the Senator’s communications director, Robert Gibbs, to outline our plan. Gibbs promised cooperation, though pinning him down on the logistics later became a challenge. I think he thought I would go away, but I persisted with e-mails and phone calls for the next couple of weeks, and Gibbs came through with the access he promised.

I tried not to be a nuisance to Sen. Obama on that first day. But I also tried to set a standard for the level of behind-the-scenes access I wanted to maintain. [can you give a quick example?] Zeleny was a great reporter to partner with; ~~as~~because he really understood my needs and would back off when necessary. [explain more here about why you would need him to back off. The readers aren’t reporters, so they might not get it.]

Sen. Obama’s family accompanied him to most of the ceremonial activities on his first day. This presented some ~~nice~~terrific opportunities to candidly photograph him interacting with his two daughters, Malia (pictured at right) and Sasha.

A few days later, Zeleny and I headed to Springfield, Ill., where Sen. Obama officially opened his new field office. The place was jam-packed. After Sen. Obama addressed the gatheringcrowd, supporters descended on him seeking handshakes and autographs. At one point, Sen. Obama spotted me trailing him, and turning back towards me said, “Hey, I really like those pictures you took of me with my kids.”

Soon after I gave Sen. Obama 8"x10" prints of those pictures. This helped my future access, no doubt. [but that's not the only reason you did it, right?]

What struck me early on was how ~~comfortable~~ easily Sen. Obama conducted himself while I was photographing him. He went about his business; I went about mine. "He's a natural," I told friends.

I have worked in Washington for XX years, covering Congressional and Senate hearings and photographing individual politicians both in public and behind the scenes. Barack Obama hads a certain presence that I ~~hadn't~~ have not seen in a lot of politicians. [more here. Is it charm? Calmness? Some combination of things?] ~~He was~~ His intelligence is obvious but not off-putting, his concern is genuine, ~~obviously intelligent~~ and if the occasion warrants ~~ed~~, he ~~Obama~~ could can give as inspirational a speech as any politician I've ever seen. There ~~was~~ is also something else: Early into that first assignment, I began to believe that I was photographing a future President of the United States, and that my pictures would become an historic look at the rise of ~~his~~ Barack Obama's political career.

