

Beacon Hill Byline – by Mary Rogeness

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Thoughts from Houston and the GOP convention

At last week's Republican Convention in Houston, native Texans kept telling us how lucky we were to have missed the really hot weather from the preceding week. Since the Massachusetts delegation had left New England on a rainy 60 degree morning, we found the 90-degree hazy sun hot enough for us! And the convention generated any needed additional heat in four days of political hoopla that followed.

These are my impressions of that extravaganza.

The Astrodome was a magnificent forum for the thousands of delegates gathered from all over the country. Presidents Reagan and Ford spoke representing the track record of Republican presidents, and cabinet secretaries Jack Kemp and Lynn Martin delineated the campaign ahead. Gov. Weld took the podium Tuesday evening to cover our Republican record of law enforcement, adding a brief comment counter to the platform's abortion stand. The entire Massachusetts delegation donned Celtics caps in honor of our governor's time in the spotlight, and we heard praise about his performance from delegates from all parts of the nation.

An assemblage of thousands of political activists was bound to include many who, like me, are legislators in their home states, and we spent many hours sharing experiences. Some delegates seemed to link their politics with fundamentalist Christian theology, a connection that I do not share. Once the platform was adopted, I was glad to see the focus shift to more general issues. There were also a number of delegates scouting the arena for limited edition collectible buttons. The one that appealed to me most was the subtle statement on a Connecticut button that said, "Barbara's right. I managed to bring home a small collection, while refusing several tempting offers for my Massachusetts buttons.

The most moving speaker of the week was Mary Fisher, the daughter of a well-known Republican fundraiser. She spoke about the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic as a young mother who is HIV-positive. Her touching appeal for compassion for all AIDS victims was compelling.

Thursday night's nomination acceptance by President Bush, the climax of the convention, was the much-anticipated "speech of his life." We all felt that he addressed the campaign issues thoroughly, both acknowledging that many people are struggling in today's economy and claiming credit for national security brought about by changes on the international scene. And we were pleased to read in Friday's papers that the press approved of his job.

Beyond the speech, the ultimate spectacle came with the Bush family joining together in front of the crowd, all 22 of them. Old convention hands had been saying throughout the week, "Wait for the balloons!" I have seen balloons before, but nothing like this! When they dropped, I understood and shared the thrill of the crowd. 250,000 red, white and blue balloons drifted from the sky, punctuated by burst of fireworks in the world's only indoor pyrotechnic display. As the balloons bounced, so did the poll numbers for the Republican ticket, and the campaign is launched.