



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #274 — NOV. 21, 2012

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### **A Truly Evil Though Minor Man**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Nov. 21, 2012)

I know, I know...you didn't think the man could even read, let alone write. Well, it turns out you're at least half right.

"I Got Duped by Glenn Beck!" by Sarah Cypher, Salon

Nov. 19, 2012, ([http://www.salon.com/2012/11/19/i\\_got\\_duped\\_by\\_glenn\\_beck/](http://www.salon.com/2012/11/19/i_got_duped_by_glenn_beck/))

(The pundit bought the creative rights to the dystopian novel I edited, transforming it into right-wing propaganda.)



Two weeks ago I discovered, to my surprise, that I had line-edited an early draft of Glenn Beck's new novel, *Agenda 21*. Glenn Beck! At the time I was working on it, the manuscript belonged to its actual author, a woman named Harriet Parke, who lives a few minutes from my aunt. But a year and a few lawyers later, Glenn Beck purchased the right to call himself its creator, and Ms. Parke agreed to be presented as a ghostwriter.

I would be proud to have my name in the acknowledgments of Ms. Parke's novel. But given that it is printed inside a book bearing Glenn Beck's name, the work I did is now deeply at odds with who I am as an editor. *Agenda 21* is going out into the world on Tuesday, Nov. 20, as something decidedly different from the novel I edited. Yes, the story is the same. So are the concepts, the characters and the writing. But the name in the byline — that changes the book's intent. It changes everything.

If you're not an urban planner, here's a crash course on the novel's eponymous United Nations Agenda 21. It's a 40-chapter behemoth written in 1993. It lays out non-binding guidelines for promoting economic growth, environmental protection and social equality. Basically, it is a recipe for living within our means today, so that we do not pass along to our children a degraded economy, environment and society. It addresses topics as various as toxic waste, biotechnology, conservation and green transportation, all with the goal of helping poor countries develop economies — in large part, by encouraging wealthy countries to dial back in sensible ways on their consumption of resources.

Today, city and regional planners support the concepts that underpin Agenda 21, because they translate the big picture to local efforts to save people time and money. In other words, think globally, act regionally. After all, the planning profession is about supporting a community's efforts to collaboratively make the best of change — such as whether your community is growing or shrinking, or becoming more rural, suburban or urban. Change is inevitable: Brookings reports that "our population exceeded 300 million in 2006, and we are on track to hit 350 million in the next 15 years." And that "America will probably be older, more diverse, more urban — and less equal" than we are today.

Planners help communities find common-sense, constructive ways of using limited resources wisely. It looks for ways to make transportation inexpensive, keep energy plentiful, and help towns and cities avoid the kind of bad economic decisions that lead to eyesores like, say, a half-deserted strip mall anchored to an abandoned Wal-Mart. Thanks to zoning, for instance, which was created in the 1920s to protect property values, no one can come in and inappropriately construct a landfill or a steel mill next to your house.

Glenn Beck and fellow pundits hate Agenda 21, however, because they interpret a few lines from chapter four out of context. Their scare tactic is to say it's the narrow end of a wedge that will insert global UN authority over American towns and cities, allow the government to confiscate private land, reallocate resources by force, and evict people from their single-family homes. Never mind that the law of the land begins with the United States Constitution and that our relationship with the UN can hardly be described as lockstep. Moreover, the United States has no land use laws at the federal level, whatsoever. All land use decision-making authority in the United States lies with the states, who delegate authority to local governments. Relatively speaking, the United States has some of the strictest protections for private property in the world.

Agenda 21 is simply a non-binding, unenforceable menu of guidelines that exists to help any town or city that signs on to it. But when removed from all sensible context and cast forward into a dystopian future, Agenda 21 becomes the novel *Agenda 21*, which tells the story of a post-American settlement where people are forced to ride bikes and walk on treadmills to generate electricity, told whom to marry, raised in communal kibbutz-like nurseries, and forced to swear allegiance to a scary green one-world socialist entity.

My job is to edit stories, not the author's sensibility. Sometimes I edit a manuscript whose politics or sense of the human condition doesn't agree with my own. That was the case with Ms. Parke's draft of *Agenda 21*, which contains a caricature of some things I find highly inoffensive, such as bicycles and feeding squirrels. I am OK with that, personally and professionally, because novels are meant to be read as fiction, as a form of complex entertainment. There is joy, too, in discovering and thinking about the ideas that underpin the plot. And besides, if everybody agreed, we'd live in a dully conformist world indeed. Think of something like Orwell's London in *1984*, which contains a vision of socialism whose simplified specter still haunts berserk right-wing pundits like ... well, like Glenn Beck.

Furthermore — and I must speculate here — the novel's actual author, a retired nurse in western Pennsylvania, has gained income and national recognition for years of hard work. I can't argue with that, either. We writers all want that. The only interesting thing here is that it comes with the sacrifice of her authorship: Her name appears as a "ghostwriter" in small letters on the cover. But she conceived of and wrote the book herself, and I respect the

humility it must take to partially efface one's name from one's own work. In an ideal world, all writers would write anonymously.

If the book had been published under Ms. Parke's name alone, it would remain an entertaining dystopian novel. The writing is capable, the story compelling, and most of its values are to be respected — family, localness, and a good education in history (Beck, and his publishing house, ought to take note of that, by the way). It would be marketed and sold to readers of speculative fiction, which are typically a brainy crowd. Maybe some among them would hold it up as a negative vision of a radical environmental agenda run amok, albeit in a world without Exxon Mobil or Wal-Mart — in fact, one without any wealthy corporations at all, who historically pitch their vast financial resources against environmental regulations.

But mostly, we'd just read it for the story. That's how I read it one year ago, and I enjoyed it. But why publish the novel under Beck's name? What would the book have lost if his publishing company, Mercury Ink, had simply let Ms. Parke call the novel her own? The answer, I think, is that it needs Beck's franchise in order to succeed in a purpose beyond entertainment.

Publishing "Agenda 21" under Glenn Beck's name transforms it, at least temporarily. Glenn Beck is more than just the nice guy whose publishing house is bringing Ms. Parke's work to a national audience. He's also a professional ideologue whose establishment confers the full force of its intellectually and morally irresponsible franchise on a novel that distorts the truth about Agenda 21, which is doing good work in the world. Glenn Beck is not writing as an artist, bound by the conventions of his art, plying his craft on the willing human imagination. Hell, he's not writing at all. He is a brand, with a budget, and with an agenda of his own. Ultimately, by assigning his brand to the novel *Agenda 21*, Beck turns a form of entertainment into a political lie, a tool for politicizing people.

On its own, *Agenda 21* should not work this way: just like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* does not drive women to the polls to keep religion out of politics, nor *The Hunger Games* motivate us to stop seeing war as a form of entertainment, nor *One Hundred Years of Solitude* give a corporation pause before plundering resources from poorer countries. If people show up en masse to vote for or against these things, it is not because spokespeople from NARAL or the NEA or the Union of Concerned Scientists pushed these novels on national TV; it's because people are responding to something provable and real right now.

The novel *Agenda 21* was inspired by Beck's entreaty to his viewers to "do your own research." Well, fine — if you read a single paragraph of a 40-chapter political tract, you can spin it all kinds of ways and call it "research." Beck does as much on his show, and I worry that Beck's many readers will get the wrong idea about the UN Agenda 21. In principle, it is an important part of city and regional planners' work, which involves making sure that people can access things they need: food, education, doctors' offices, stores. It's about making sure those things are even there when you need them. It's about helping people enjoy freedom and mobility, even if they are too poor or too old or too young to have a car. Or just don't want one. It's about the preservation of localness and sense of place instead of genericization, and about maintaining a familiar, comfortable way of life as our population expands from 300 million to over 400 million in my lifetime.

If, like me, you feel concerned about the inevitable population growth, decreased availability of clean water and resources, aging national infrastructure, and upward-trending global temperatures, you might take heart to know that city and regional planners are numerous, bright, well-educated people who devote their careers to finding ways to helping the rest of us enjoy a long-term high standard of living. Or, you can empower obstructionists who make the panicked hoarding of fuel and canned goods seem like the only long-term planning that matters.

There is a precedent for successful social fiction. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* focused public sentiment against slavery because its unstinting realism humanized a gross injustice that was already tinder in the national furnace. For the same reason, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* spurred labor reforms, though arguably it could have been more successful, sooner, if it hadn't slathered so much socialist propaganda onto a realistic portrayal of factory life.

Usually, though, preachy fiction is a brittle failure. I think of an interesting but flimsy environmental novel like Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*, whose political message overtakes the story. Gore Vidal's fiction suffers for the same reason. I do respect the writer who champions the underdog — the working poor, the immigrant, the father of

hungry children, the ambitious teen who is under-served by an opportunist or parochial education system. Less so, the writer whose vision empowers an avaricious establishment, or obstructs meaningful adaptation to our changing environment. Yet when I suspend my disbelief to read speculative fiction, finding myself preached to at all is an annoying betrayal.

Where that creative betrayal becomes shrill, however, is in the mouth of an ideologue. As a genre, speculative fiction keeps one eye on politics, but its goal is not to preach. It's to make up an entertaining version of reality — an augmentation of social truth, which is not the truth itself. A novel's vision can scare us, inspire us, affirm our emotions, and articulate our fears. It shouldn't, however, serve as a primary political agenda any more than Paul Ryan should be waving "Atlas Shrugged" around on the House floor. In the same way, *Agenda 21* is being delivered as propaganda, and by buying the right to call himself its author, Glenn Beck is diminishing a work of fiction to nothing more than a cheap appeal directed at people who will believe anything.



## **FotM NEWSLETTER #274 (Nov. 21, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

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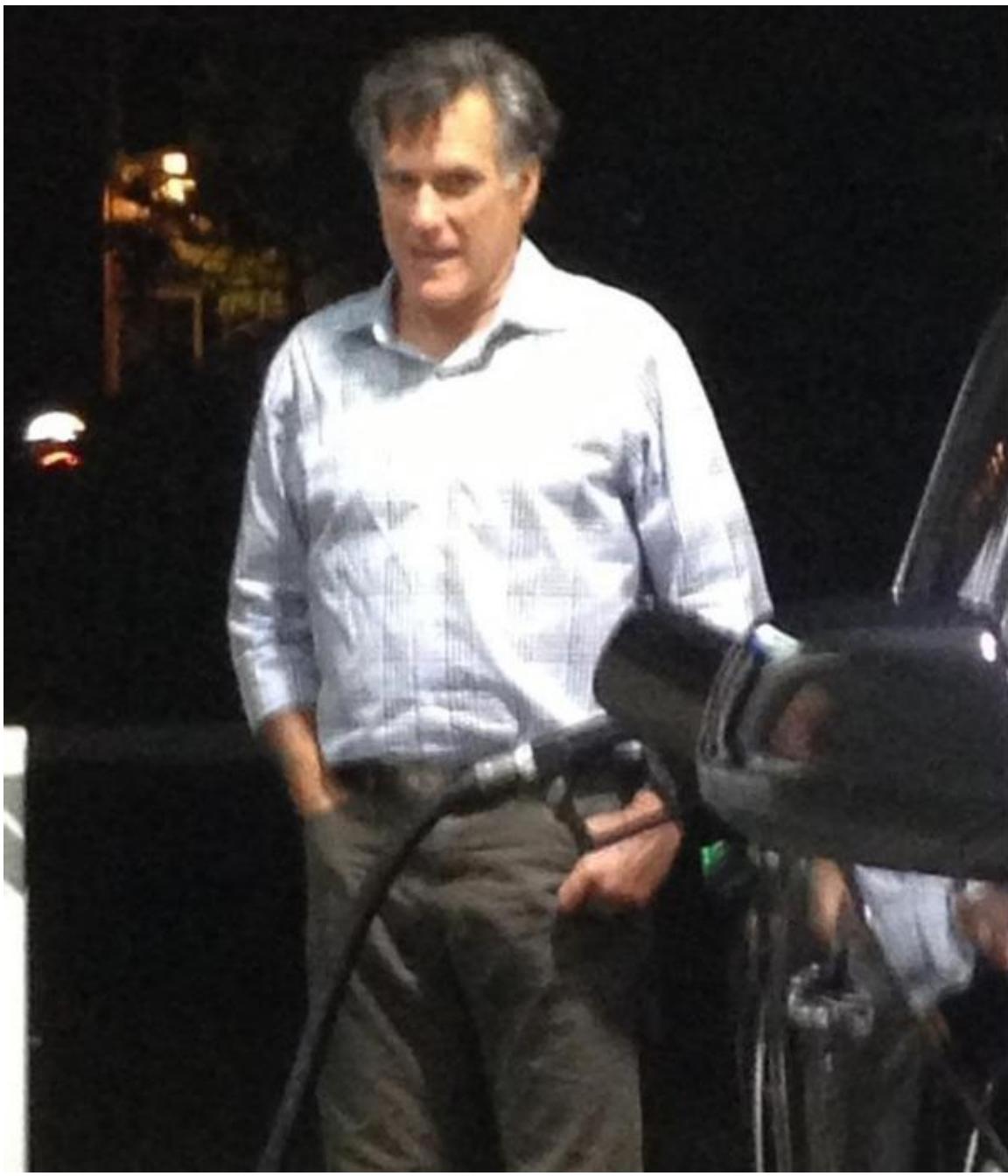
[20121120-01](#) 10:11 SteveB Photo: "Mitt Romney Pumps Gas"

I just love it! He looks like a homeless guy, but I bet he still doesn't give a damn about the homeless!

[Photo: "Mitt Romney Pumps Gas" by Reddit, Huffington Post](#)

Nov. 20, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/20/mitt-romney-gas-photo\\_n\\_2165651.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=mostpopular](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/20/mitt-romney-gas-photo_n_2165651.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular))

Days after losing the election to President Barack Obama, Mitt Romney is back to pumping his own gas. A photo surfaced on Reddit showing the "tired and washed up" Republican challenger at an undisclosed gas station. **It's a particularly humbling image of a candidate who was known to have trouble connecting with average people.**



20121120-02 11:18 Art "Ten Females Who Cost Mitt Romney the Presidency"

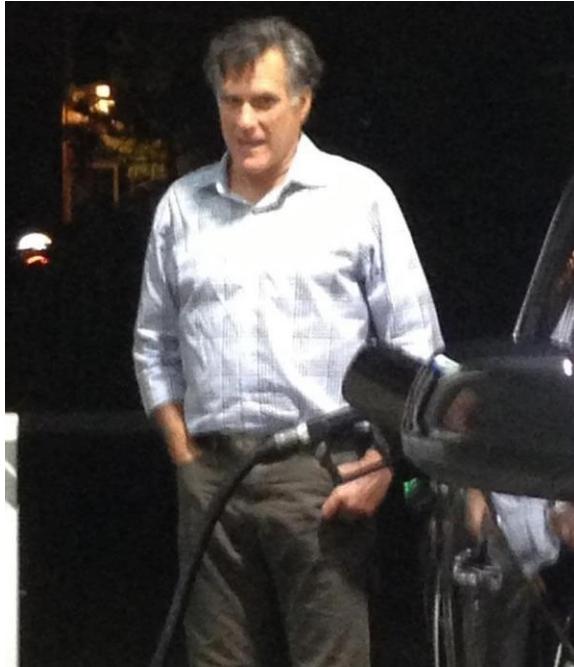
"Ten Females Who Cost Mitt Romney the Presidency" by Will Durst, Humor Times

Nov. 12, 2012, (<http://www.humortimes.com/14080/ten-females-cost-romney-presidency/>)

Holey moley catfish! Well, thank god that's finally over. Further thanks that the climax was quick and clean. Almost surgical. Not as long a night as many first thought it might be. Except for Karl Rove, that is, who for all we know is still scribbling numbers to prove the call on Clinton's re-election win in 1996 was premature. And as usual, Florida did all it could to gum things up, but was eventually rendered irrelevant. And long may it remain so. In the end, President Barack Obama trounced, er, battered, um, eked-out a victory — or to be more precise, Mitt Romney lost. Or shall we say, found a thousand ways to lose. Except for one brief, shining moment in the first debate, virtually carrying with him a defeat diviner.

And each and every one of his failures can be traced directly to females. The distaff of life. Single women. Married women. Old women. Young women. Ladies and divas and flappers and baby mamas; duchesses, priestesses, shorties and floozies. So here they are, the top ten females who cost Mitt Romney the presidency, each of them representing one of the myriad factors that helped construct the unelectable mosaic that became Bain's Captain of Industry:

1. **Michele Bachmann.** Mitt had to draft on her right wing to win the primary battle, and when he tried to tack back to the center appeared not to be the Washington Outsider he claimed, but a typical politician with the core values of a hollowed-out chocolate Easter Bunny. With really good hair.
2. Newly elected U.S. Sen. **Elizabeth Warren** from Massachusetts. A state the former governor lost by 23 points. Proof positive the man arouses the enduring passion of a broken garden rake.
3. Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton**, who took foreign policy off the table, making the entire election about the economy which kept getting better, gol darn it. And who can forget her husband. He certainly won't let us.
4. **Sandra Fluke**, who gave a face to the GOP's Paleolithic Bronze Age attitudes towards women, further exacerbated by the fact that no man in the party could seemingly shut up about it.
5. **Michelle Obama**, who is just darn likable. As is her husband. A stark contrast to Romney's cyborg demeanor and obvious discomfort around members of the human species.
6. **Superstorm Sandy**, for providing the opportunity for the president to look presidential and for Obama and Chris Christie to French kiss on Atlantic City's Boardwalk, crystallizing the concept that bipartisanship is not the saddest word. That's "goodbye."
7. **Ann Romney**, who would have made a simply terrific first lady. For Dwight D. Eisenhower.
8. **Candy Crowley**, who single-handedly halted Romney's momentum in the second debate by speaking way above her pay grade. Don't you hate it when the help speaks out of turn?
9. All the **Wal-Mart Moms**, who never really understood that whole Cayman Islands bank account thing marking him not as the poster child for the 1 percent, but as the poster child for the .0001 percent of the 1 percent.
10. And the last female responsible for Romney's loss; **Rafalca** the 15-year old mare who, while wearing the Romney silks in Olympic Dressage, failed to make the medal round and was probably shipped home strapped to the fuselage of a 747. Seriously, Mitt. Dressage?



[I just had to show it again! –SteveB]

**20121120-03** 11:22 Art Re: "Maryland, Rutgers Cash In on Their Incompetence with Move to Big Ten" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #273)

Agree. Good article. What has any of this to do with a college education?

**20121120-04** 14:05 SteveB "How Allen West Blew It"

Poor Allen West! And such a nice guy too!

"How Allen West Blew It" by Alex Isenstadt, Politico

Nov. 20, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/84108.html>)

(It wasn't supposed to end this way for Allen West.)

The tea party House freshman had an astonishing \$17 million war chest, sky-high name ID and a Republican-leaning district. His opponent, Patrick Murphy, was a 29-year-old construction company executive who had never sought office before. Even Democrats privately acknowledged late in the campaign that Murphy was probably a little green to be going up against a powerhouse like West.

But on Tuesday morning, it was West, not Murphy, issuing a lengthy concession statement after a two-week recount that confirmed he had fallen a painful 2,000 or so votes short. The congressman's unexpected loss left his advisers, donors and legion of tea party fans searching for answers.

His tight-knit circle of top campaign aides was "shocked," said one Republican close to the incumbent. On the eve of the election, a private survey conducted by West's veteran pollster, Gene Ulm, had the congressman leading by 5 percentage points.



Some Republicans close to the campaign blamed West's bombastic, no-holds-barred style — an approach they said simply didn't work in what was basically a moderate-minded district full of elderly voters. During his brief tenure in Congress, he dished out insults like candy at Halloween — he called Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz "vile, unprofessional and despicable"; dubbed President Barack Obama "probably the dumbest person walking around in America right now," and said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats "should get the hell out of the United States of America."

Behind the scenes, Republicans were urging West to tone it down. Early this year, shortly after launching his reelection campaign, the congressman sought out a surprising figure — former GOP Rep. Mark Foley, who resigned in 2006 amid revelations that he had sent sexually-charged electronic messages to House pages. Foley, who had represented much of the southwestern Florida district, counseled West to run to the middle — advice the congressman didn't take issue with.

Foley thought highly of West — at one point, he even advised the freshman to run for Senate in 2012, reasoning that his fundraising capabilities and national profile would make him a strong contender. But as Foley watched the House race play out, he saw West embracing much of the same conservative rhetoric that he had in his previous races.

And instead of presenting his compelling life story — West rose from an upbringing in the Georgia slums, eventually becoming a military commander before running for Congress — the Republican seemed intent on tearing down Murphy in harshly personal terms. One West TV ad blasted Murphy for his underage drinking arrest a decade ago, showing a mug shot of the intoxicated then-teenager.

"I think Allen might have been a bit too conservative for the district," Foley said in an interview. "The district was extremely center-focused."

Some of the Republicans said West's inability to get beyond the hard-charging image was a function of staff error. Aides, they said, failed to tame the congressman and to warn him that his outbursts — though catnip to his grassroots backers and good for fundraising — would ultimately damage him. West's congressional office got off to a particularly slow start — his first chief of staff, conservative radio talk show host Joyce Kaufman, resigned just a few days after she was hired.

"This was a congressional operation run amuck. The congressional staff couldn't control it, they failed to manage expectations, to manage the brand," said a Republican source close to West. "When you have something to say on national TV every time something arises, the brand is overused. The brand wasn't carefully constructed or guided."

"Sometimes people don't want controversy," the source said. "They just want a congressman."

West's approach provided Murphy a blank slate, with an opening to brand himself as a nonpartisan. The Democrat promised he would be a quiet, get-it-done type as a member of Congress,. In the closing days of the race, Murphy secured a surprise endorsement from Martin County Sheriff Bob Crowder, a moderate Republican who waged an unsuccessful primary bid against West. The nod bolstered Murphy's pitch.

Final vote tallies showed West winning fewer votes than Mitt Romney in two of the district's three counties — an indication that the congressman had bled some GOP support to Murphy, Republicans following the campaign said.

Former Democratic Rep. Ron Klein, whom West unseated in 2010, said Murphy's campaign was aimed at voters who soured on the Republican's style.

"I think by the end of two years, people either really liked [West] or really disliked him," said Klein, who coached Murphy in debate prep. "At the end of the day, more people decided they wanted a congressman who could get something done and were tired of the divisiveness."

"West," Klein said, "beat himself."

Those close to West also said Obama's surprisingly strong performance in South Florida helped to put Murphy over the top. Few of the congressman's advisers anticipated that Obama, who won more than 50 percent of the vote in two of the three counties that comprise the 18th Congressional District, would have a turnout operation so superior to Romney's. Obama's power was particularly pronounced in St. Lucie County, where the president won 53 percent of the vote and Murphy trounced West.

Democrats were surprised, too. In the weeks after his disastrous Denver debate performance, Obama's poll numbers fell in West's district — and that had a ripple effect on Murphy's standing, the candidate acknowledged in an October interview with Politico.

One private poll conducted for a Democratic outside group just prior to the Oct. 3 debate showed Obama and Murphy both leading at 52 percent apiece. When the same pollster surveyed the district on Oct. 7, however, Romney and West both claimed small leads.

"I think Obama was stronger in Florida than any of us expected," Foley said. "Obama's ground game in Florida was better than ours, and I think that had a big impact on the West race."

Then there was redistricting. When Republicans in the Florida Legislature finished redrawing the state's 27 congressional districts, they added Democrats to West's West Palm Beach seat — making his path to reelection significantly steeper. West eventually moved to run for a nearby seat that was vacant, but he had never run there before — meaning that he would have to introduce himself to new voters.

West, a political newcomer who unlike many of his Florida delegation colleagues had never served in the Legislature and had few allies there, had found himself on the losing end of the brutally political line-drawing process. Tallahassee, said one Republican source close to West, had done the congressman no favors.

For weeks, West's backers seethed. On his popular radio show, Rush Limbaugh, an outspoken West ally, accused then-Florida House Speaker-designate Will Weatherford, a Republican, of engineering a plot to destroy the congressman. The Broward County Republican Party started a website dubbed, "Save Allen West."

For West, the question now is what's next. Some Republicans speculate that he could write a book or hit the speaker's circuit — both lucrative options. Others say he could run for Congress in his native Georgia.

And then there are some who suggest he could get his own radio or TV show — perhaps on Fox News, where he's a frequent guest. On Tuesday morning, as he turned out the lights on his congressional career, he chose to make the announcement on a favorite platform, the network's morning broadcast, "Fox and Friends."

20121120-05

23:58 Marci

Cool Photos #11 (The Miniature Northern Saw-whet Owl)



20121120-06 23:59 SteveB Photo: Miami Beach, Florida

<http://ptitmath.canalblog.com/tag/zorro>



—Friends of the Middle,  
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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