



News from the Idaho Democratic Party

For immediate release

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From Idaho to the White House: Messina offers insider's stories

BOISE – "I am not a public speaker ... I am a private schemer," Jim Messina said near the start of his keynote address to the 2009 Frank Church Banquet on Saturday night, March 7. But by sharing his insider's tales and enthusiasm for public service, the 1988 Boise High School graduate and Deputy White House Chief of Staff gave his audience a generous glimpse into a still-young administration that's already secured its place in the history books.

Calling himself a "proud 13-year graduate of the Idaho public schools," Messina told how his first political experience was serving as Jimmy Carter's 1980 campaign manager at Roosevelt School in Boise. "We were stomped," he recalled. "It was really the last campaign I lost." After his graduation from Boise High School, Messina went on to earn a political science degree from the University of Montana, run many successful campaigns across the country and work for three members of Congress: Sen. Max Baucus, Sen. Byron Dorgan and U.S. Rep Carolyn McCarthy. Messina gets credit for helping engineer the rise of Democratic success in the Mountain West and the defeat of George W. Bush's 2005 plan to privatize Social Security.

Messina gleefully told his Idaho audience of his first trip with President Obama on Marine One, when his mom - who lives in Nampa - phoned just as he was boarding the presidential helicopter to tell him he was on CNN. He shared how he got Obama's call to join the White House staff while at a University of Montana Grizzlies game a few weeks after Election Day last fall, and how the president served as his "wingman" when Messina recently took a date to a gala at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. He also was one of just six people in the room when Chief Justice John Roberts re-administered the presidential oath to Obama on January 20, hours after Roberts had mixed up the wording in the public ceremony.

He also hinted at the less-glamorous side of life in the White House, where he spends long days in a windowless office 50 feet from his boss' quarters, mostly wrestling with some of the administration's thorniest problems including cabinet nominations and oversight of the federal stimulus package. Messina recalled an incident not long ago when, after he'd failed to live up to his nickname as the White House "Fixer," he'd let loose with some colorful language. Soon after, the president was standing at his office door saying, "You know I can hear you, right?"

But Messina's love for his job - and his recognition of Obama's place in history - was most evident when he told stories about how people have responded to the first African American president, the man we have chosen to guide us through one of the most troubled times in our nation's history. He told of people lining up in the rain at 4:30 a.m. to vote in Virginia, and of an 86-year-old woman who briefly collapsed after casting her vote in Gary, Indiana. ("I've never been better," she told the people

who rushed to her side.) He told how, on a recent trip to Florida, the streets leading to the town hall meeting were lined for three miles "by people just wanting to wave to their president. That's passion. That's what my boss inspires. I'm very proud."

Messina praised Congressman Walt Minnick and said that Idaho's first Democratic House member in 14 years can lead a Democratic revival in Idaho and assist the White House, too. "Change started for all of you with Walt Minnick," he said. "The single most important thing you can do to help President Obama is to re-elect Congressman Minnick." For his part, earlier in the evening, Minnick told the banquet audience that while he won't apologize for his fiscally conservative votes that are sometimes at odds with his party's majority, he is proud to be an Idaho Democrat who has voted with his party two-thirds of the time. He also praised President Barack Obama for his "grace and warmth" and predicted that he will become "perhaps the greatest president any of us will see in our lifetimes."

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