

The journey to the Democratic convention

By Tom Betz

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The young woman smiled as she handed me my prize — press credentials to the Democratic National Convention in Denver — and asked if I had any questions.

It had taken six months of waiting and several processes to get to that point, but it certainly seemed worth it on Sunday morning as I arrived in Denver to begin a new adventure by attending and covering my first Democratic National Convention.

I had hoped to attend the convention both as a delegate and as a reporter, but the snow storm on Feb. 5, sort of stopped me from driving to Oakley for the caucus — the first phase of the delegate selection process.

With the delegate side out of the question I turned to the press credentials avenue. The first step was to find out how to apply for the credentials, and that I found on the Internet. The press credentials were being handled through the U.S. House of Representatives Press Gallery in Washington.

Step one was to fill out a form on-line and then send three copies of the newspaper and a cover letter to Washington. The web site said the decision on press credentials would not be made until May. I had

the package with the newspapers — I picked out the ones I had done stories about the Democratic caucus process and the congressional assembly — and had it mailed before the end of February.

As I waited outside the special room at the Sheraton Plaza I thought about the months of waiting to get there. When May came and there was no word on the press credentials I started checking. The first thing I found out was there were at least five different levels of press credentials, and it appeared the periodical press was not on the top of the list.

I was assured that the decision would be made in June, and that yes they had my information on file.

The Press Gallery people sent me an e-mail in June saying I had to fill out another form on-line to get credentials, and give them details about what coverage I planned at the convention. I dutifully filled it out and sent the form off in to the ether world thinking I should hear soon.

I actually got a phone call the first week of July saying that the press gallery had not received the on-line form and that unless I filled it out I would not get any credentials. I assured the girl I had filled it out in June. She said they knew I had done that, but that the system had fouled up and I was one of many who had

submitted our forms only to have them swallowed by a computer glitch.

I filled it out again and this time I got an e-mail telling me they had received the form, and that I should hear from them by the end of July.

Since February I had been telling my staff that I was planning to go to Denver and expected to get press credentials. As the weeks went by they kept asking if I had heard anything to be able to plan for that week.

I got an e-mail at the end of July saying the letters for credentials had been mailed. The e-mail said I would have to bring the original letter to Denver on Sunday to pick up the credentials.

When I got to Denver and tried to find a parking place at the Sheraton I kept thinking it was a familiar location, and then remembered it had been at the Hilton Hotel where I had been at a State Democratic Convention with my grandfather, Fred Betz, who introduced me to his friend, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who happened to be running for president in 1968. My grandfather, who had been Colorado Democratic Chairman in the 60s had been a longtime supporter of Humphrey, and I still have the photo of us taken in that Hilton Hotel room those 40

years ago.

The press credentials were being handed out across the street in the basement of the expanded portion of the Sheraton. I got directions and found the elevator to the basement. I started looking for the right room where my credentials waited. I walked past the room for the Democratic National Convention Committee credentials, then the Congressional Daily Newspaper credentials, the Radio/television credentials, the photographer credentials and finally came to the last one the Congressional Periodical credentials.

A man and woman stood guard at the door and she asked for my name, the original letter and my driver's license. I handed them over and she took the letter and held it up to the light to check the watermark to make sure it was authentic.

I was told they had three tables inside with the alphabet split up and that only one person was allowed in per table. I had to wait about 10 minutes for the table with "G" to be available.

As I stood there I thought about the day I had met Humphrey and that same day I had waited with my camera out in front of the Hilton for him to come back from a speech at the Brown Palace Hotel. The

Secret Service guys on duty were nice as they suggested a place for me to stand as we expected him to come by motorcade. Humphrey did one of his usual things and walked back to the Hilton after the speech surrounded by people and a circle of secret service people. I stood on top of a flower pot and got some photos of him, but then had to get down and found myself stuck behind the glass door when he came sweeping by. I was thrilled with my photos, but wish I had been in a better place to get to shake his hand again that day.

The girl brought me back to reality and said it was my turn. I went in and the two young women at the table asked for the original letter and my driver's license. They checked them and made sure I was the right person. While one got the envelope with the credentials the other had me sign and date a form plus give them a cell phone number in case of emergencies.

The girl took the credentials out of the envelope and explained how they worked and that the one for Perimeter got me inside the Pepsi Center parking area where all the tents and outside events were to be held. The second one was the Hall pass, which would be the one to get me inside the Pepsi Center, but not

on the floor of the convention. To get a Floor pass I would have to go to the floor pass desk and sign up for a pass.

If one was available I would hand over my Hall pass and they would hand me a Floor pass to give me access to the floor of the convention for an hour or two.

She said the Hall pass would be my ticket to Invesco at Mile High on Thursday, and asked if I had any questions as she handed me my credentials.

I knew in my mind there were a couple of questions I needed to ask — what about a parking pass and can I bring my camera into the Pepsi Center without photographer credentials — but in the excitement of gaining the prize I forgot them.

I found out later I would have to go to another office to get a parking pass good for the Auarai campus, and to walk from there to the Pepsi Center.

I will have to ask the camera question when I get there.

It is time to get the real adventure started by going to the Kansas delegation breakfast out at the Doubletree Inn at the Denver Tech Center.

I hate the red tape, but I love this job.

Obama 'plot' involved three from the Burlington area

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in bond." Officials in Burlington would not discuss the charges Tuesday night.

In the Glendale hotel room, as at the Hyatt and in the pickup, the affidavit said, officers found bags of meth, and the group all admitted they had been using the drug.

Gartrell, when stopped by Aurora police, said he had no idea about the guns and drugs. He told officers he borrowed the truck from his cousin, Adolf, and told them they could find him at the Hyatt, the agent, Shane Abraham, wrote.

At the Hyatt, however, agents found Johnson and an unnamed woman, who had been doing drugs. They told officers Adolf had gone to the Glendale hotel.

In an interview later, Gartrell said he parted with Adolf and the couple at the Hyatt, the left in a pickup Adolf had been driving,

looking for cigarettes. He said he had been "clean" for two years until Johnson offered him drugs after picking him up in downtown Denver.

The allegations of a plot to kill Obama apparently came up Monday after a woman who had been at the Hyatt and the Glendale hotel told a Secret Service agent the men had talked about killing the candidate because his is black, and no "n****r" should ever live in the White House.

She said Adolf told her he believed Obama had a suite on the Hyatt third floor.

While she was with Adolf at the Cherry Creek Hotel in Glendale, the affidavit said, two "unidentified individuals" came to the room about 2 a.m. to talk to Adolf, and he told her to leave. That was about three hours before police broke down the door, and about 20 minutes after Gartrell's arrest.

Monday, the affidavit says, Johnson told

agents he had rented the room at the Hyatt at the request of Adolf. He said Adolf and one of the women made threatening remarks about Obama and the woman said she could kill him with a gun hidden in a camera lens.

He said Adolf then commented that it wouldn't matter if he killed Obama because he was going to jail on pending felony charges anyway. Johnson also said he'd brought the guns to Denver "to do some hunting with Adolf." In tears, agents said, he claimed Adolf had made earlier threats against Obama, and had told him he would use the .22-250 Ruger, which he called a sniper rifle, the gun stolen from Goodland.

The affidavit also disclosed an interview in Goodland with Lloyd Studer, a nephew of Floyd Studer, who said he owned the Ruger. Agents Engelbert and McNamee

said he bought the rifle in a private sale, from an individual, and stored it and other guns at his uncle's home while the family harvested wheat.

"Shortly after the firearm was stolen (in 2005), a friend of his asked Studer if his Ruger .22-250 had been stolen," the agents said, "and then told Studer that an associate of Shawn Adolf named Eric Rodriguez may have possibly stolen the firearm."

"Studer stated that he and Adolf were previous associates, further stating that he knew that Adolf and Rodriguez were associates who had previously cooked methamphetamine together."

Both the blue pickup Gartrell was driving and a white pickup had been rented from Enterprise by Johnson, agents said. A search of the white pickup revealed a black stocking cap and mag light, black tactical pants and camouflage clothing, laptop computers,

books on committing fraud, "numerous" possibly stolen credit cards and phone cards, and drug paraphernalia.

Charges against Adolf included possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, possession of body armor by a convicted felon, and possession of methamphetamine with intent to sell; against Gartrell, possession of methamphetamine; and against Johnson, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon and possession of meth.

The Associated Press reported agents also were checking for links between the men and vandalism shootings of at least two federal buildings in Denver over the past two weeks. Windows were shot at the U.S. Custom House and the Military Entrance Processing Station, on the same street in the downtown Federal District.

The Denver Post reported a fourth person, a juvenile girl, had been arrested.

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