

Inside

12/8/07

■ Uncovering a Good Yarn



Jeff Porro is ready for his close-up. The Washington-based speechwriter-for-hire will see his story credit on the silver screen when the Denzel Washington film *The Great Debaters* hits theaters on December 25.

The movie recounts the tale of the debate team from the segregated Wiley College that took on—and defeated—teams from leading white universities in the 1930s. A decade ago, Porro saw an article in *American Legacy* magazine about the squad and realized he had heard one of the former debaters, James Farmer, speak at a civil-rights rally at Berkeley in the 1960s. “I was electrified,” Porro recalled. “He was the most articulate human being I’d ever heard.”

Porro delved through the Library of Congress to research the history of the team and its coach, Melvin Tolson. The script banged around Oprah Winfrey’s Harpo Entertainment Group for a few years and Washington agreed to produce the movie in 2005.

Porro has no plans to relocate to L.A. “If I were 25 and single, maybe I would move to Hollywood,” he said. “I’ve got kids and I really like being a speechwriter.”

—Randy Barrett

GOP Express For journalists covering the New Hampshire primary, the South Carolina GOP has arranged for a charter flight from Manchester to Myrtle Beach departing on the morning of January 9 for only \$299. Now that’s convenience. The next day, the party will sponsor a debate among the Republican presidential hopefuls there. “We’ve had folks sign up,” said South Carolina GOP spokesman Rob Godfrey, but he added

that seats are still available. It’s not the cheapest seat in the skies. Flights on various airlines and multiple stops can get you to Myrtle Beach for a little less than \$200. But the travel time on commercial flights is seven to nine hours, compared with the two-hour direct flight that the South Carolina Republicans are offering. “This is not a fundraiser. This is something to make life easier for reporters,” said Godfrey.

—James A. Barnes



Murmurs

Psst! Outgoing Sen. and not-quite-ever presidential candidate **Chuck Hagel**, R-Neb., said this week he’s bailing on politics because he doesn’t fit in the GOP anymore. I’m “not sure where my party is today,” Hagel told a State Department audience. He added that it no longer reflects the type of Republican beliefs he adheres to, such as those of former President **Eisenhower** ... Iowa’s Democratic Gov. **Chet Culver** told reporters he’s not going to predict the caucus winners like Sen. **Chuck Grassley**, R-Iowa, did (**Barack Obama** and **Mitt Romney**). “It is completely a jump ball,” Culver said on December 5. But he did make the claim that Iowa gets as much sun each year as Hawaii. Who needs all that bothersome sand, anyway? ... Former White House budget chieftain **Rob Portman**, who left his administration post in June and joined the Ohio-based law firm Squire Sanders & Dempsey last month, apparently passed up at least one lucrative slot running a Washington trade group, according to K Street sources. We hear that Portman waved off a \$2 million-a-year post heading a behemoth financial services association, in part so he can spend more time in Ohio and nurse some possible political ambitions ...

Vital Statistics

560

Number of deaths of Iraqi security forces and civilians in November 2007

—icasualties.org

1,864

Number of deaths of Iraqi security forces and civilians in November 2006

—icasualties.org