

Issues Intervene: Iran, Nukes and Israel

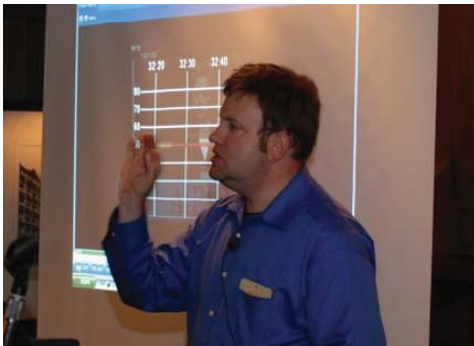
Mike Huckabee's band is playing in Minneapolis. John McCain flew in at midday. Sarah Palin, the virtually-unknown governor who now has the most-searched name on the Internet, is practicing for her speech Wednesday night.

The Republican convention calendar is also filled with items including a California delegation trip to the Mall of America and a Kansas delegation trip for souvenirs.

In a conference room at the University Club of St. Paul, however, a few dozen convention visitors gathered to discuss weightier issues--Iran, nuclear weapons, the threat to Israel, and how to build on Israel's high level of support among voters.

Americans in both parties overwhelmingly view Iran as a serious threat to the United States and believe that if Iran acquired nuclear weapons, it would share that capability with terrorist groups.

The findings come from a poll commissioned by the Israel Project, a non-partisan research and advocacy group. Democrats heard a similar presentation from the group in Denver. We dropped in Wednesday afternoon to hear pollsters Frank Luntz and Mark Feierstein discuss the results with Republicans.



Luntz (at left) goes beyond public opinion polls to equip small groups of viewers with dials to turn as they watch videos, dials that indicate second by second how negatively or positively each person feels about a speech.

Such an analysis allows him to precisely identify words that work. Luntz calls this a "power phrase."

He showed a chart that showed a rapid increase in support from an audience that heard the phrase "no nuclear weapons for Iran" in a video of a Hillary Clinton speech.

"The strongest way to communicate about Iran," Luntz added, "is not that they will attack the US or Israel but that they will supply this technology to terrorist groups."

An ineffective way to communicate, he said, is to tie Iran and Iraq together. Iraq policy has so little support, that twinning the threats posed by the two countries damages advocacy about the danger posed by Iran, he said.



Long speeches with many bullet points are not needed when "a single statement of seven or eight words will do," Luntz said.

The audience included Cheryl Halpern (at left), a New Jersey delegate and the chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. She and her husband, Fred, who also attended, are longtime Republican donors. Cheryl Halpern said afterward that in her role overseeing public broadcasting, she is particularly interested in ensuring that unbiased information is presented.

She said she is also interested, as is most of the country, in what Palin will say Wednesday evening.

--Carl Lavin

*Photos of Frank Luntz and Cheryl Halpern by Lauren Shay Lavin for Forbes.com
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