

Jeanne Simon: Surrogate Presidential Candidate

by George Beres

Jeanne Simon has worn many hats in her varied career: attorney, legislator, wife, mother. Her newest one, as she described it before a Eugene luncheon audience, October 15, is that of "surrogate presidential candidate."

She wore the hat of adopted daughter comfortably as she returned for one day to the hometown of her husband, Democratic presidential aspirant, Senator Paul Simon, now of Illinois.

"Paul brags about his roots in the Northwest," she said. "I'm not sure that's such a good idea before the primaries in Iowa and New Hampshire. Paul has been back here for class reunions, and once was University of Oregon commencement speaker. He never has said goodbye to Eugene."

Her surrogate role, she feels, is in response to the fact that "more than ever before, the electorate is putting wives and families of presidential candidates under greater scrutiny."

That role also reflects her special awareness of the political process as a former member of the Illinois House of Representatives. She and Paul first met in 1957, when they were members of the Illinois House. It was at a luncheon featuring two speakers. One was Paul, a second term member of the House; the other was a newly elected U.S. senator, George McGovern.

As she recalls that meeting, "I'm afraid I was much too casual. I think I was concentrating more on listening to George McGovern."

She has a clear view of what her identity would be should her husband become president.

"If Paul becomes president, I don't intend to pour tea, wear a white orchid and hand out his favorite recipes. My role models are Rosalynn Carter with her concern for mental health, and Eleanor Roosevelt with her compassion and her willingness to risk criticism. As wife of the president, I'd want to be an ombudswoman/trouble-shooter."

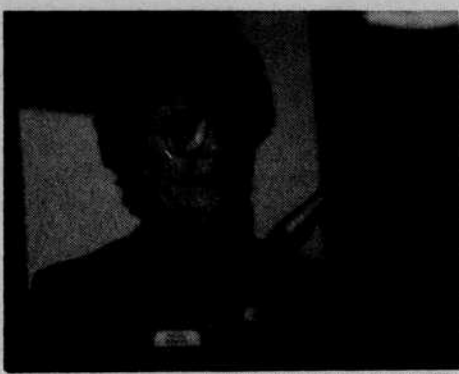


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"The term 'First Lady' really bothers me. If there is any title I would have in that role, I'd want to earn it—like I did a law degree and a seat in the Illinois House. I wouldn't mind being called 'wife of the president.'"

As a senate wife, she attends hearings on subjects that concern her:

"I may not often agree with Sen. Orin Hatch. But I attended one of his committee meetings where he expressed genuine concern for the safety of miners. I thought, 'Bully for Orin Hatch!'"

She was asked if her husband had the gumption to make tough decisions.

"He has, often," she responded. "In Illinois, we produce much coal. So it is not locally popular when Paul suggests actions to prevent the spread of acid rain. Then there was the tax bill of 1986. Paul was one of but three senators to vote 'No.'"

His personal integrity was tested, she feels, during the televised hearings that made a temporary folk hero of Col. Oliver North:

"In the midst of the fervor and furor around North, he risked speaking out against him at a

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national conference of county officials in Indianapolis. He told the group: 'Col. North is no hero.' There was a gasp from the crowd—then boos. Paul held his ground and quoted from something Abraham Lincoln said in 1838 about Elijah Lovejoy, the first martyr for press freedom in Illinois: 'If we lose our respect for the law, eventually we will lose our respect for freedom.' The crowd was quiet for a moment. Then it cheered him."

She said her husband has shown he is not afraid to say what he believes, even if it is unpopular. But he also believes in hearing "the full story."

"Paul waited to hear Judge Bork testify before he decided against giving him a vote of confidence for the Supreme Court. He was very bothered by what Bork said related to the Dred Scott Decision. He believes Bork insists on a strict interpretation of what Bork calls 'the original intent' of the Constitution in every area, and has too narrow a vision of the Constitution and of the United States."

The senator's earlier reference to Lovejoy comes naturally for one who was a schoolboy employee of the *Eugene Register-Guard* and the *University of Oregon Daily Emerald*.

"Paul is a journalist, and recognizes the needs and rights of the press," said his surrogate.

"When he was a young editor in Troy, Illinois, his paper was threatened with bombing. He didn't back down. His answer was: 'I've got an old press and good insurance.'"

Jeanne said the Simon campaign is doing well, having raised about \$2 million.

"We need much more, and can, but imagine what it would be like to have the \$9 million of Gov. Dukakis," she said. "As of Jan. 1, we should be helped by qualifying for matching funds."

With all his blue ribbon credentials, Simon has to guard against a backlash toward a candidate who seems "too goody-goody." But Jean says, "My husband isn't perfect. He's not running for sainthood. He's running for president."

One former Eugenean, Paul's mother, whose husband was minister of Grace Lutheran Church, is an important campaigner, though in her eighties. Her 40-year correspondence with Beryl Pohl, mother of Eugene realtor Norman Pohl, keeps her abreast of Eugene happenings.

Grandma also has her political feistiness. During a parade, a man—upset by Paul's pro-choice stance on abortion—kept yelling at her, "Your son is a baby-killer." According to Jean, "He kept after her, so Grandma from Eugene took matters into her own hands: She hit him in the mid-section with her purse."

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