

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



Andrea Robinson

## **The Greenest Show on Earth: Democrats Gear Up for Denver**

By Stephanie Simon

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DENVER -- As the Mile High City gears up to host a Democratic bash for 50,000, organizers are discovering the perils of trying to stage a political spectacle that's also politically correct.

Consider the fanny packs.

The host committee for the Democratic National Convention wanted 15,000 fanny packs for volunteers. But they had to be made of organic cotton. By unionized labor. In the USA.

Official merchandiser Bob DeMasse scoured the country. His weary conclusion: "That just doesn't exist."

Ditto for the baseball caps. "We have a union cap or an organic cap," Mr. DeMasse says. "But we don't have a union-organic offering."

Much of the hand-wringing can be blamed on Denver's Democratic mayor, John Hickenlooper, who challenged his party and his city to "make this the greenest convention in the history of the planet."

Convention organizers hired the first-ever Director of Greening, longtime environmental activist **Andrea Robinson**. Her response to the mayor's challenge: "That terrifies me!"

After all, the last time Democrats met in Denver -- to nominate William Jennings Bryan in 1908 -- they dispatched horse-drawn wagons to bring snow from the Rocky Mountains to cool the meeting hall. Ms. Robinson suspected modern-day delegates would prefer air conditioning. So she quickly modified the mayor's goal: She'd supervise "the most sustainable political convention in modern American history."

Now, she must pull it off.

To test whether celebratory balloons advertised as biodegradable actually will decompose, Ms. Robinson buried samples in a steaming compost heap. She hired an Official Carbon Adviser, who will measure the greenhouse-gas emissions of every placard, every plane trip, every appetizer prepared and every coffee cup tossed. The Democrats hope to pay penance for those emissions by investing in renewable energy projects.

Perhaps Ms. Robinson's most audacious goal is to reuse, recycle or compost at least 85% of all waste generated during the convention.

To police the four-day event Aug. 25-28, she's assembling (via paperless online signup) a trash brigade. Decked out in green shirts, 900 volunteers will hover at waste-disposal stations to make sure delegates put each scrap of trash in the proper bin. Lest a fork slip into the wrong container unnoticed, volunteers will paw through every bag before it is hauled away.

"That's the only way to make sure it's pure," Ms. Robinson says.

Republicans are pushing conservation, too, as they gear up for their convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Like the Democrats, they're cutting down on printing by doing as much work as possible by email; using recycled office furniture; and urging employees to walk or take public transportation to work. The Republicans also encourage vendors to be as environmentally friendly as possible.

But Matt Burns, a spokesman for the Republican convention, looks on with undisguised glee at some of the Democrats' efforts -- such as the "lean 'n' green" catering guidelines.

Among them: No fried food. And, on the theory that nutritious food is more vibrant, each meal should include "at least three of the following colors: red, green, yellow, blue/purple, and white." (Garnishes don't count.) At least 70% of ingredients should be organic or grown locally, to minimize emissions from fuel burned during transportation. "One would think," says Mr. Burns, "that the Democrats in Denver have bigger fish to bake -- they have ruled out frying already -- than mandating color-coordinated pretzel platters."

Democrats say the point is to build habits that will endure long after the convention. To that end, the city has staged "greening workshops" attended by hundreds of caterers, restaurant owners and hotel managers. "It's the new patriotism," Mayor Hickenlooper says.

Laura Hylton, general manager of Biscuits & Berries catering, agrees in principle. But she has been testing her recipes using local ingredients for weeks and still can't get the green peppercorn sauce right when she uses white Colorado wine. The state's high-altitude wine industry took off in the early 1990s and produces some award-winning labels, but Ms. Hylton says diplomatically, "It's a little . . . lacking. Our wineries out here aren't what you'd see in California or France."

Joanne Katz, who runs the Denver caterer Three Tomatoes, will take one for the green team by removing her fried goat-cheese won tons with chipotle pepper caramel sauce from the menu. But she questions whether some of the guidelines will have the desired earth-saving effects.

Compostable utensils, she says, are often shipped from Asia on fuel-guzzling cargo ships. As for the plates: "Is it better to drive across town to have china delivered to an event and then use hot water to wash it, or is it better to use petroleum-based disposables?" she asks.

The convention's greening gurus say they're doing the best they can with the most current information available.

But it's almost inevitable that principles, politics and profit will conflict. To wit: [Coors Brewing Co.](#), in Golden, Colo., will donate biofuel made from beer waste to power the convention's fleet of flex-fuel vehicles. A green star for the convention -- but it has rankled die-hard liberals, who boycotted Coors in the 1960s and '70s to protest hiring practices that they said discriminated against blacks, Latinos, women and gays. Heirs to the Coors fortune have long been active in conservative causes and Republican politics.

Convention officials say Coors is a good corporate citizen. And a Coors spokeswoman says the donation was a gesture of civic pride, not politics.

No matter, grumbles Anna Flynn, a longtime union member from Denver who objected to the donation. "Any way you put it, it's still Coors," she says.

Chris Lopez, a spokesman for the host committee, says that securing a diverse group of sponsors is as much about showcasing the regional economy as promoting sustainability. He added that Democrats are nudging sponsors to "think green" by participating in an eco-festival and cutting back on paper fliers stuffed into delegate goody bags.

Watching the greening frenzy from afar, Fred L. Smith Jr., president of the libertarian Washington think tank Competitive Enterprise Institute, suggested the Democrats could really shrink their footprint by staging a virtual-reality convention: "Just have everyone stay at home with their laptops, sitting in their pajamas, interacting through their avatars."

Ms. Robinson, the greening director, says big showy conventions are part of the American political tradition, and thus worth a few emissions here and there. Also, she hates to be a killjoy.

True, she did try (unsuccessfully) to get bottled water banned from the convention hall. But remember those balloons? She checked the compost heap last week -- and found them still intact. She has added more liquid to try to get them to degrade.

And if they don't? "The balloons will be there," she promises.

So will the fanny packs -- made in the USA of undyed, organic fabric. Mr. DeMasse vows to get a union shop to print the logo, but he says the ink will be petroleum based. Unless, that is, he decides to get the logo embroidered -- with biodegradable thread.



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