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## Jackson County official plays phone tag with Obama

Buck Koos recalls finally getting to talk to the future president about county needs

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Shortly after the November election, Americans were entertained by the story of a Florida congresswoman who hung up on then-President-elect Barack Obama, mistakenly thinking it was a prank call.

But Jackson County (Iowa) Board of Supervisors Chairman Larry "Buck" Koos has a great story of his own about Obama and phone calls.

Koos related his story last week to Telegraph Herald reporter Eileen Mozinski, who offers this account to political column readers:

Sitting in a Jackson County Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday, Larry "Buck" Koos found himself thinking about a time before the Iowa caucuses.

Presidential candidates were flocking to Iowa trying to garner the support of area leaders.

One of then-Illinois Sen. Barack Obama's campaign managers asked Koos what was most important to Jackson County, and Koos told him it was the area's road infrastructure.

"You want us to produce all this grain for the ethanol industry, we're wearing our roads out and we have less money to fix them than when we did 10 years ago," Koos said.

Not long after, Koos was out cutting firewood when he got a voice mail on his cell phone.

"Buck, this is Barack Obama," the voice on the message said.

Koos paused briefly trying to decide if it was a campaign recording before realizing that the speaker had mentioned him by name. Then some jitters took over.

"Somehow," Koos said, "I delete everything. I delete the message, the phone number, the whole thing's gone."

Embarrassed by his mistake, Koos put out calls to Obama's Iowa staff telling them he was trying to return the senator's message, all the while figuring he had missed his chance to talk to Obama.

But that same evening, sitting in his chair reading the newspaper, Koos' cell phone rang.

"So I pick up and I hear him say, 'This is Sen. Obama,' and just then I lose the signal on my phone," Koos said.

Koos' teenage daughter informed him knowingly that he needed to be in a different room near a window to get the signal.

Dashing into that room with his discomfort now overwhelming, Koos called the number back and left a voice mail message.

"I said, 'Sen. Obama, this is Buck Koos and I've been screwing up every call you've been trying to get to me today,'" he said.

Convinced that now he had definitely lost his opportunity, Koos was even more surprised when his phone rang again with Obama on the line.

"We talked for about 15 minutes about infrastructure. I told him my concerns," Koos said. "He assured me that if he got to Washington, he would put in a good word for the small, rural counties."

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And Koos was convinced.

"Anybody who will call me three times because I don't know how to operate a cell phone, he's dedicated. He's my man," Koos said.

The campaign raged on with Iowa as a frequent stomping grounds for the candidates, and Koos ran into the Illinois senator several more times.

He was amazed when Obama greeted him by name at one event when Koos wasn't wearing a name tag. A campaign manager informed him that the senator was "phenomenal" at remembering names.

"And," the staffer asked, "how many 'Bucks' are there in politics?"

From that point on, Koos referred to Obama as "Barack" -- jokingly implying that the two knew each other well.

And when 11 a.m. central time rolled around on Tuesday's Inauguration Day, Koos found himself thinking about the man who could so easily remember names.

"I was looking at the clock thinking, 'He got sworn in. OK, it's time to get to work, Mr. President. I can't call you 'Barack' anymore."

As the nation's 44th president spoke to millions on the National Mall calling for an "era of responsibility," the Jackson County supervisors were heeding his advice by working ahead.

Koos said they spent the morning going over the details on project proposals for the state in anticipation of the economic stimulus that the new administration is expected to try and push through as soon as possible.

And while the need for help spreads far in the current economic crisis, Koos remains confident that the new president will come through on that promise made so many months ago on the cell phone call.

"He said he will not forget the little counties," Koos said. "I believed him then and I believe him today that that's what's going to happen."

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A record number of women will serve in state legislatures in 2009, according to the Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

The women serving in 2009 will include 1,465 who won elections in 2008, in addition to 319 holdovers who were not up for election. There will be 433 women in state senates and 1,351 women in state houses or assemblies.

Ranking the tri-state legislatures, Illinois has the 15th highest percentage of female members, with 13 out of 59 in the Senate and 36 out of 118 in the House. Iowa is 28th, with nine out of 50 in the Senate and 25 out of 100 in the House. Wisconsin is 31st, with seven females out of 33 senators and 22 out of 99 assembly members.

At the federal level, none of Iowa's five congressional districts are represented by a woman, while five of Illinois' 19 districts are, and two of Wisconsin's eight districts have women representatives.

Of the 100 members of the U.S. Senate, 16 are women. In the U.S. House of Representatives, women comprise 74 of the 435 members.

Just a reminder: Iowa is among four states that have never sent a woman to either the U.S. Senate or House, along with Delaware, Mississippi and Vermont.

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