

■ END OF THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Burns forces savor victory

By CHRISTINE LYALL
Of The Gazette Staff

As Sen. Conrad Burns approached the voter registration table at Sandstone Elementary School Tuesday morning, a poll worker asked him if he had any money left.

Always the jokester, Burns reached into his pocket and pulled out a small wad of bills. He counted \$24.

"We're down to the last day of the campaign," Burns said. "It's been a long haul ... I'm glad it's over."

Clad in blue jeans, a cotton shirt, cowboy boots and a cowboy hat — with his lucky \$3 bill tucked in the inside brim — Burns appeared casual and collected on Election Day. Only twice did his nerves get the best of him when he tripped on a telephone cord and spilled some of his orange soda in his campaign headquarters while making personal "thank you" calls to his supporters.

Tuesday was a positive, upbeat day for the Congressional senator, who was seeking his second, six-year term. Having cast his vote by 10:30 a.m., he proceeded to his office at 2708 First Ave. North to firm up his schedule for the rest of the week.

Mark Baker, Burns' state coordinator, would be the senator's anchor most of the day, which was sprinkled with sporadic press appearances, phone calls, discussions of Christmas card photos, the University of Missouri basketball coach Norm Stewart (one of Burns' college roommates) and the great view of the mountains from the Billings Petroleum Club.

And, unfortunately, there was some bad news that would cast a small shadow over the rest of an otherwise bright day for Burns.

At about 11:30 a.m., a phone call came in from Jerrold Weissman in Great Falls. Weissman



Gazette photo by James Woodcock

Senator Conrad Burns fields calls from supporters Tuesday while relaxing in his Billings office.

was chair of Burns' campaign in Cascade County.

Earlier that day, a D.A. Davidson aircraft crashed during take-off from the Great Falls airport, when one of its two engines failed. The pilot and all three passengers died.

Among the victims were Gene Lewis, Bob Bragg and Don Knudsen, the "executive brain trust" of D.A. Davidson, Burns said, and friends of his.

"God darn I feel bad about that," Burns said of the crash. "What a way to remember an Election Day.

"It takes all the joy out of life," he lamented.

Between sips of his soup, Baker suggested that Burns would have to work a moment of silence into his speech that evening at the Holiday Inn.

Some other slightly discourag-

ing news came from Burns' son, who is a freshman at Concordia College in Moorehead, Minn. The boy called his father Tuesday morning to inform him that he didn't make the hockey team.

"But that's okay," Burns said with his trademark smile. "The sin is not in not achieving, the sin is in not trying."

A motto Burns has lived by.

By 3:30 p.m., after a dose of

Tums and three hours on the phones, Burns is ready to go home, take a shower so he'll "smell like a flower" and put on a tie.

He would later appear at the Republican party at the Holiday Inn victorious, having been declared the winner by the Associated Press at 8:03 p.m.

Burns said he would get back to work and "let America sing ... just let Montana sing."

Burns workers ease up

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Now that the campaign season is over, Kathy McLane is going to go home and be sick.

McLane, director of finance for Sen. Conrad Burns' campaign, said she managed to stay healthy during her hectic, seven-month stint but has finally found the time to contract a cold.

"I've been so busy, I haven't had time to breathe," she said in a whisper, with what remains of her voice. "And when you stop to breathe, a cold catches up with you."

Once she recovers, McLane said she will travel to New Mexico then Glendive to visit family. After that, she said she will look for a job and "pray a lot."

Before accepting the finance directorship, McLane worked full time for Burns as a senior case worker in Glendive. She said she sacrificed the security of that job and switched to the temporary position because she "wanted to put her whole heart into the campaign."

But, like most of her colleagues, McLane isn't too worried about unemployment. It most likely won't last long.

"Conrad's been so wonderful," she said of the senator. "He'll help us if there's a way."

Working on a political campaign, said several of the Billings staffers, is brief, but exhilarating and worth the results — win or no win. The learning opportunities, such as in researching, telemarketing, fund raising, business administration and team work, are invaluable and will carry over into new jobs.

However, although at least two of Burns' campaign staffers in Billings have plans for the "afterlife," most of them expressed uncertainty about their future. But, while still basking in the glow of a well-run campaign, none of them seemed concerned.

Throughout the state, the Burns campaign employed about 60 full-time and part-time people. In Billings, the campaign headquarters paid staff numbered about 30.

"Maybe I should be scared right now, but I don't know," Tricia Pearson said of her next move. Pearson was an assistant field representative and administrative assistant in the Burns headquarters office.

She said she's not had time to think about life beyond Election Day. Despite the lack of benefits and the limited amount of free time that came with Pearson's job, the recent college graduate "can't imagine having done anything else right now."

"It all boils down to Conrad Burns," she said. "You work this hard because you believe in that person because he believes in what you believe in."

Jack Light, deputy campaign manager, worked with the campaign for 14 months. Although he basically had his career tied up in the campaign, the fact that it was over hardly fazed him.

With financial reports yet to file, lists and histories to compile, databases to build and office equipment to sell, Light still has plenty of work ahead of him.

"I haven't given any thought to resting," he said. "I don't know what I'll do ... I haven't been able to think past the next week and a half. My whole focus has been on the race."

Tonia Fisher, director of manpower, said she will take a couple of weeks to drive to the coast, read, rest and reevaluate.

"The campaign has been sort of like rushing head-first into a brick wall," she said. In other words, it's a spine-tingling thrill — but then what?

Fisher, who said she will now most likely pursue temporary work, said serving on Burns' campaign was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that she wouldn't have passed up, regardless of its brevity.