



Jubilant Carter delegates included A. Frederick Fellmeth (left) and Robert E. O'Connor (right) of Penn State

# Enthusied delegate reflects on convention

By ROBERT E. O'CONNOR  
For the Collegian

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Robert E. O'Connor is an assistant professor of political science at the University. He and A. Frederick Fellmeth (12th-political science) were elected delegates to the Democratic National Convention pledged to Jimmy Carter.

## Impressions

For us, the Democratic National Convention was not a boring experience. It was a unique and exhilarating week whose memories we will always treasure. How can a political scientist be bored when he takes the opportunity on the floor to discuss politics with Mayor Daley? How can a political science major be bored when he is working as a whip for the Pennsylvania delegation with its machinations involving people he had previously seen only on television? Admittedly, our enthusiasm is "uncool" in this age of cynicism. But we were indeed thrilled to participate in the nomination of a candidate who we feel can accomplish a great deal for and with the American people.

One lesson we learned was that politicians are simple people just like Aunt Hilda and Uncle Charley. They are not figures larger than life; they have no magical powers. Although we both knew this intellectually before the convention, emotionally, we still felt that celebrity politicians were somehow different from you and us. During our week of talking, listening and watching, we discovered that some politicians are rather insensitive turkeys while others are very sharp individuals. Some impressed us as phony plastic people and others as authentic individuals. We concluded that it is impossible to make any general assessments of the intelligence, capability or goodness of political leaders as a group. What they do have in common is self-confidence and records of working long hours in pursuit of their goals. There is a clear message in this for anyone aspiring to a career in electoral politics.

Our daily routine did not provide the New York vacation some of our "friends" had predicted for us. The convention was in session for more than 10 hours on two days and for the entire evenings of the other two days. The Pennsylvania delegation also caucused at length every day to discuss and debate whatever issues were to come up on the floor. As elected delegates, we felt an obligation to attend every meeting for its full duration regardless of our predictions that some meetings would entail only redundant rhetoric. We did, though, permit ourselves breaks in our usual asceticism at late night parties after adjournments.

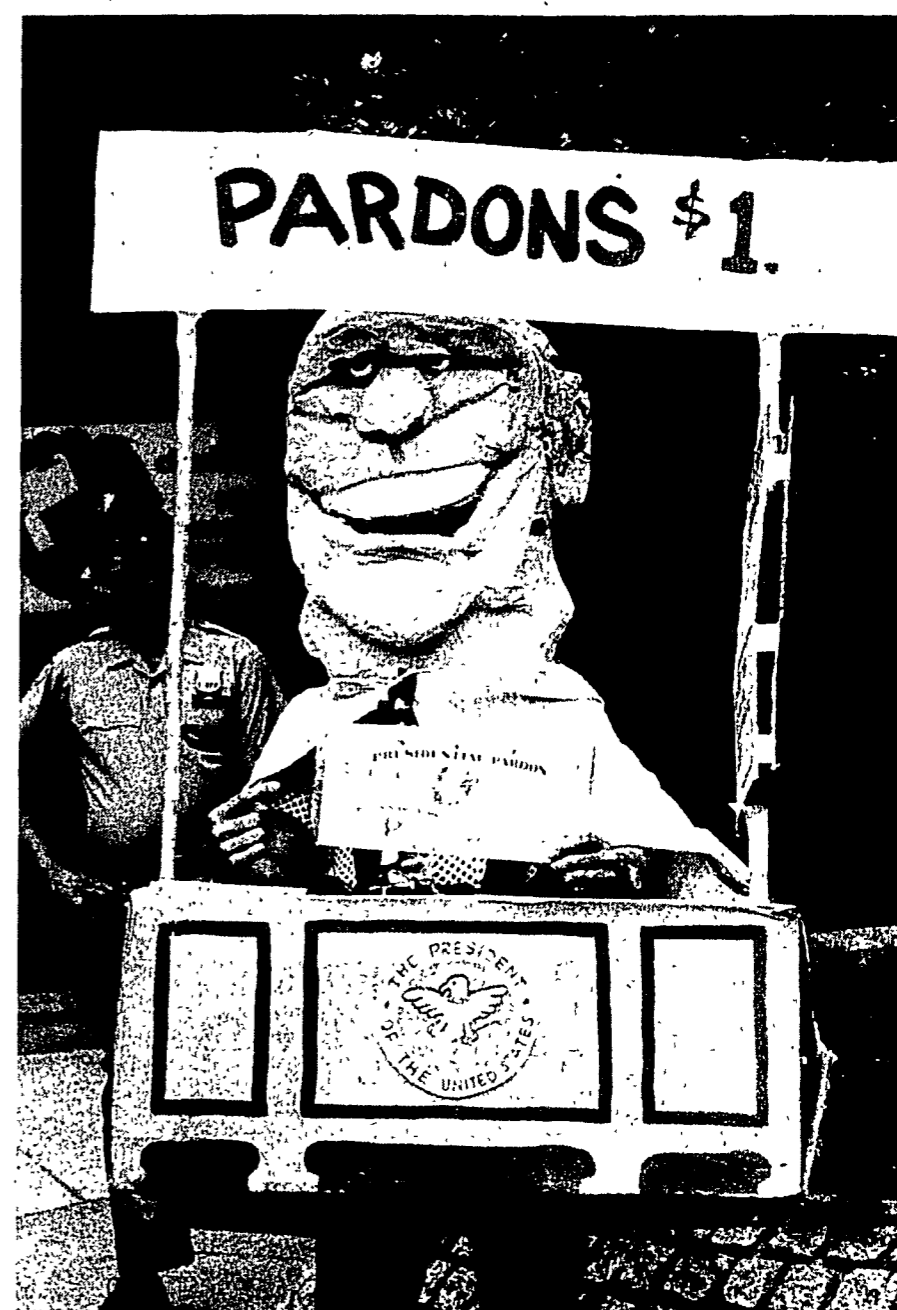
Issues at the convention were generated by minority reports to the rules committee statement and the platform. Although the Carter organization, New Democratic Coalition and other caucuses had positions on these issues, lobbying was gentle

and polite, mostly in the form of written hand-outs. Even though my vote was opposite the Carter position on two or three issues, I suffered no reprisals of any kind from either the leadership of the Pennsylvania Carter caucus or from anyone on Carter's national staff. Unlike what has happened at other conventions, there was no pressure to "prove" one's loyalty to any particular candidate by voting a certain way on issues.

Probably the issue of greatest importance to Pennsylvanians was the debate over "loophole" primaries that permit a candidate to win substantially more delegates than his or her percentage of the vote. This is a loophole to the rule banning winner take all primaries. By selecting most delegates by district elections, Pennsylvania has such a "loophole" primary because a candidate winning pluralities in most districts would win most delegates or an advocate of the status quo. Regardless of whom the Republicans nominate, there will be a clear choice in the fall.

Much of what happened can be summarized in a party I stumbled upon at 6 a.m. Friday morning in an elevator. The participants were riding up and down, enjoying the Muzak and singing. There was a white fellow from Mississippi, a black woman delegate from College Station, Tex., a Connecticut congressman, a Udall delegate from Philadelphia, two Minnesota delegates and a couple of other people. I asked, "Are you all going to work for Carter and Mondale this fall?" The Udall delegate shouted, "Hell, yes!" The Mississippian yelled, "It's time for a change," and the Texan responded, "Amen!" They then resumed singing. I joined them loudly, smiling and feeling boyishly wonderful.

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Conventioneering included peanuts and pardons outside Madison Square Garden and sign waving inside.

(Photos for the Collegian by Ira Joffe.)