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## MATTHEW TULLY

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### State's top dog bites at chance to dialogue

Posted on June 25, 2008

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A few colleagues and I recently decided to combine a pair of our favorite things: discussion about news and politics, and King David Dogs, the city's premier hot dog joint.

We dubbed the venture "Dialogue and Dogs" and agreed to make it a monthly event to which we would invite a rotating series of Indiana newsmakers.

Our decision to hold the event at King David, 15 N. Pennsylvania St., was an easy one. The hot dogs are fantastic, and the restaurant is run by a great group of guys. Moreover, the fledgling business is both an inspiring example of entrepreneurship and an independent restaurant in a region dominated by chains.

The decision on whom to invite as the guest at the inaugural "Dialogue and Dogs" also was easy. We went straight to the top with Gov. Mitch Daniels, who said he'd been planning to try King David and agreed to join us.

The governor arrived a bit before noon Thursday, causing a stir in the small restaurant as he stood in line and ordered a "South of the Border Dog." If you're keeping score, that particular delicacy is topped with chili, nacho cheese, onions, jalapenos and salsa.

Interesting side note: Workers at King David write the name of your order in shorthand on the boxes that contain the hot dogs. Daniels' South of the Border dog had thus been innocently marked "SOB."

## ABOUT MATTHEW TULLY

For 13 years, Matthew Tully has covered government and politics in locales ranging from Gary, Ind., to the nation's capital. Since arriving at The Star in 2002, Tully has covered City Hall, Mitch Daniels' campaign for governor and the controversial push for a new Indianapolis Colts stadium. He was named the paper's political columnist in June of 2005.



After graduating from Indiana University in 1992, Tully began his career as a reporter for the Post-Tribune in Gary. While the city reigned as the nation's Murder Capital, Tully spent much of his time at the paper covering two diverse areas -- the police beat in Gary and, for four sessions, the Indiana General Assembly. Tully joined Congressional Quarterly in Washington, D.C., in 1997, where he covered the U.S. Senate and reported on topics ranging from the Clinton impeachment trial to the political aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks.

Born in Washington, D.C., and raised in northwest Indiana, Tully is a 1992 graduate of Indiana University. He lives in Indianapolis with his wife, Valerie.

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"I've been called worse," he said with a smile.

For about 90 minutes, Indy Star staffers Tim Swarens, Daniel Lee, John Ketzenberger and I chatted with Daniels about everything from the recent floods to the 2008 campaign to his concerns about student misbehavior in public schools. While we ate and talked, numerous customers did double takes as they walked by our table.

*"I think I saw the governor eating a hot dog today,"* I imagined them telling their spouses when they got home that night.

Much of our discussion, not surprisingly, centered on the severe flooding that has dominated the governor's time in recent weeks. Daniels talked at length about the many victims he'd met during his travels.

"Nothing is more poignant than people of modest means who lose everything, and I saw a lot of that," he said, adding, "Over and over people would say, 'We still have each other.' You don't know how they have the fortitude to say it, but I heard it a million times."

Daniels recalled being in Fort Wayne as the rain was beginning to punish Central and Southern Indiana more than two weeks ago. He was "all packed" and ready to leave for a trade mission to Japan. He canceled the trip.

"It quickly became clear that was exactly the right call," he said. "Not only was this a big problem, but probably the biggest (disaster) we've had."

As we shifted the conversation to politics, Daniels said his campaign's "vital signs" are good, even while predicting this "might be the worst" election year Republicans have seen. He offered an interesting theory when asked how the thousands of new voters turning out for Sen. Barack Obama's presidential run would affect his campaign.

"Might help," he said. "If these are folks who are looking for change, that's us with a capital C. My impression is the new folks who have been brought in are very nonpartisan. I think they've been attracted not by (Obama's) party label, but by him."

In this unfavorable political environment for Republicans, Daniels said many voters have told him they would vote for his re-election in November even though they would not support Republican presidential nominee John McCain.

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though they would not support Republican presidential nominee John McCain. And while Daniels endorsed McCain early, it's clear he doesn't want to be closely associated with D.C. Republicans this year. At one point, he said he'd declined requests to visit other states in support of McCain.

"I said, 'Listen, I've got a job here,' " he said. "I'm not sure I'd do him any good anyway."

After we'd finished our dogs and began to wrap up the dialogue, I asked Daniels how he would judge his first term. He said he counted as successes the state's improved business climate and the billions raised for infrastructure through the controversial Indiana Toll Road lease. He also mentioned the state's healthy budget situation and noted that most states, unlike Indiana, are dealing with crushing budget deficits.

"They have to do some pretty bad stuff when they get in the red," he said.

On the negative side, Daniels acknowledged Indiana has not seen major improvements in education during his term. That, he said, has been a disappointment and would be a prime focus of his second-term agenda, which he will unveil in detail in coming weeks.

Taking all of the ups and downs of his administration into account, I asked Daniels what grade he'd give his first term as governor. He declined to offer one.

"That's why we have elections," he said.

Daniels' next election comes Nov. 4. In it, he faces Democratic nominee Jill Long Thompson, who, by the way, I have invited to an upcoming session of "Dialogue and Dogs."

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