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## **JANE ANN MORRISON: First lady handles wind and invitation-only crowd with ease**



First lady Michelle Obama courted danger at the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. Exercising with the kids wasn't a problem. Neither was scrambling on the rocks wearing silver slippers. Those things, she handled with aplomb.

But gusty winds during her speech almost gave her a Marilyn Monroe-skirt-in-the-air moment. The wind went whipping up her bell-shaped yellow skirt, and it looked like she might end up mooning U.S. Sen. Harry Reid sitting behind her and basking in being called a tremendous asset.

But she is a smart first lady. From where I stood, I could see her use one hand to hold her skirt down at the back during her 10-minute speech, avoiding what would have been a memorable media gotcha moment.

Instead, the photo of the day was Obama and Reid in a yoga move that looked as if they were playing patty cake together.

Michelle Obama's handlers kept her at bay from the local media, even though I am sure she could have handled any question asked.

The only first lady in my memory who gave the Las Vegas press access was Laura Bush, who earned my respect in February 2004 when she took on all comers during a 15-minute news conference at the Advanced Technologies Academy. She was peppered with policy questions about the No Child Left Behind Act, the Yucca Mountain Project, gay marriage, jobs, even her husband's military service. She was direct and impressive. (I had an interview with her mother-in-law, Barbara Bush, in 1999, but she was no longer first lady and the political risks weren't as great.)

Access to the current first lady went to an invitation-only crowd of about 80 people, not counting the 18 kids chosen to help her promote her anti-obesity efforts.

Because I couldn't talk to her, I talked to those who did. Invited guests praised her self-assurance, her approachability, her warmth. Several shared stories with me that explained why she is admired more than her husband.

Clark County Commissioner Susan Brager and state Treasurer Kim Wallin said that, as she shook hands, Obama reminded them she had a cold and they should wash their hands and not touch their faces. That showed thoughtfulness to others.

Public relations maven Helen Foley, one of the few Las Vegas who supported President Barack Obama early in the campaign in July 2007, took a photo of the first lady, Reid, and her daughter, Grace. Except you couldn't see Grace. But Obama halted, posed again with Foley's son, Will, 6, her 7-year-old daughter, and Reid. Foley crafted a great photo.

"She knows how important that is to a mother," Foley said.

Maureen Peckman of the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health used her 90 seconds with Obama well. She handed Obama a packet of information about the Cleveland Center's obesity program. Peckman was savvy enough to know information like that would be of real interest and a source of credible information.

Christine Spadafor, chief executive officer of St. Jude's Ranch for Children, packed her 30 seconds. She reminded Obama they were at Harvard Law School at the same time. Obama graduated in the class of 1988 and Spadafor in the class of 1987.

"Like you, I went to corporate law first and left to go into community service," Spadafor told Obama.

After making that connection, Spadafor mentioned the children at St. Jude's may be abused, abandoned and neglected, but none of them is obese because exercise is a priority at the ranch.

The anonymous hate spewers hiding behind their computers probably wouldn't have the guts to say anything if they faced Michelle Obama.

What would you say to her, given the chance? Tell me.

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