

# Joe the Plumber makes house call

*2008 presidential campaign figure to be in Lewiston to support Mike Kingsley's run for office*

**Joel Mills/Lewiston Tribune**

The name Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher may not root out any memories for those who don't recall the 2008 presidential campaign in excruciating detail, but the nickname Joe the Plumber just might.

Wurzelbacher was swept into the national spotlight in October of that year when Barack Obama, then a U.S. senator from Illinois, was campaigning on his suburban Ohio street. Wurzelbacher - who is speaking Saturday in Lewiston - asked the future president about tax policy, and the campaign of Republican presidential nominee John McCain latched onto Obama's response about spreading wealth as evidence of a socialist agenda.

"John McCain, being a typical politician, obviously was grabbing hold of whatever he could use to his advantage," Wurzelbacher said by phone from his home in Holland, a suburb of Toledo. "Barack Obama initially tried it, and then they figured out very shortly that I wasn't going that way."

The apprentice plumber was whisked off to McCain campaign events. But the candidate's attempt at harnessing Wurzelbacher's appeal as some kind of middle-class hero didn't help.

"He was obviously unsuccessful," Wurzelbacher said.

But Wurzelbacher has been involved in politics ever since. He wrote a book, started a conservative website that employs several writers, appeared as a commentator on television talk shows, spoke at conservative events and ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 2012. On Saturday, he will endorse Lewiston businessman Mike Kingsley's run for the Idaho House of Representatives at a rally from 2 to

7 p.m. at Boomer's Garden. Kingsley is challenging Idaho House Minority Leader John Rusche, D-Lewiston, in the November election.

Even though his initial fame came out of nowhere, Wurzelbacher said he didn't let the experience go to his head.

"I'm a big boy," he said. "I kept my feet planted, and I knew what John McCain was doing. Even though I wasn't thrilled with John McCain being the Republican nominee at the time, I just thought he might - and I'll stress that 'might' - do a little bit better job than Barack Obama has done."

After the election, Wurzelbacher said he turned down most opportunities, from starring on a reality TV show to appearances on late-night television. He was a single dad at the time and wanted to stay focused on raising his 12-year-old son. Still, he got behind some of the issues he believes in, like Second Amendment rights.

Sometimes his statements have generated controversy, like blaming the Holocaust on Nazi gun control measures. He also took heat earlier this year when he wrote an open letter to the parents of those killed in a mass shooting that said, "As harsh as this sounds - your dead kids don't trump my constitutional rights" to own guns.

Wurzelbacher, who sells high-end guns in another business venture, said politicians and the media have jumped on those and other statements to drive their own agendas.

"People unfortunately seem to be addicted to that drama," he said.

Kingsley said he invited Wurzelbacher to Lewiston because he's like average Americans.

"I am sure I don't agree with all Joe says, but he does know how to get a conversation going," Kingsley said via Facebook.

The candidate declined to say how much Wurzelbacher is being paid for his appearance or the source of the funds, adding that the information will eventually be disclosed on his campaign finance reports.

Wurzelbacher said the red-state welcome he will likely receive when he arrives in Lewiston today will be nice. But he's more interested in meeting people who might disagree with his views than in finding common ground.

"The politicians and the media keep us divided," he said. "That way they stay in power. One-on-one, we'll find that we have a lot more in common. We need to be Americans and we need to be able to work together to get things accomplished."

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