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## S.C. experts say message is deciding factor

**Jessica Bernstein-Wax, Washington Correspondent**

WASHINGTON -- Price Atkinson never has trouble keeping tabs on his boss -- even in a swarming crowd.

Atkinson, Rep. Bob Inglis' press secretary, says he can easily spot the South Carolina Republican making his way through a packed room -- thanks to Inglis' tall, lanky physique.

Fair enough.

But did the 6-foot congressman's height help him, or others, stand out on the campaign trail? The jury is still out.

While most experts agree that a candidate's height may impress voters, conventional wisdom holds that the public will use weightier criteria to select its leaders.

Nonetheless, according to a theory dubbed the Presidential Height Index, the taller presidential candidate has won the popular vote in every election that featured a televised debate, with two exceptions: •1976: Jimmy Carter, 5 feet 9½ inches, won both the popular and electoral votes in his run against Gerald Ford, 6 feet. •2004: President George W. Bush, 5 feet 11 inches, enjoyed a narrow victory over Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., who checks in at a whopping 6 feet 4 inches. Had Kerry won, he would have tied Abraham Lincoln for the record as the tallest president. (While Bush won the electoral vote in 2000, Al Gore, 6 feet 1 inch, had more popular votes.)

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution offers one possible explanation for why many people associate tallness with power, said Daniel Cable, a business professor at the University of North Carolina.

"If you believe in Darwinism -- there was a fight or flight instinct: If I approach you and you're taller than me then I flee, and if I approach you and I'm taller than you, I fight," Cable said. "Genetically speaking, across hundreds of generations, it could be that we are hard-wired in essence to give taller people power."

Cable's research has shown a strong correlation between height and income, with taller people earning about \$789 per inch a year more than their vertically challenged counterparts. On the other hand, many of Hollywood's most celebrated leading men have been of average height or shorter. Tom Cruise, for instance, is said to be 5 feet 7 inches tall.

When it comes to politics, Americans want authoritative leaders "who can stand tall with other heads of state," said Cole Blease Graham, a political science professor at the University of South Carolina.

To gain a few extra inches, some candidates have even resorted to wearing cowboy boots -- which Graham describes as glorified elevator shoes -- at public appearances.

"The packaging of a candidate is like the packaging of soap powder," Graham said. "In terms of policy sometimes it's hard to tell a difference, so packaging becomes another cue for the vote."

Nonetheless, height is just one factor among many and the power of experience, substance on issues, or even a pleasant demeanor should not be underestimated, Graham said.

So how do the 2008 hopefuls measure up?

At 5 feet 6 inches tall, Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., is the shortest candidate, but two inches above the average height for an American woman. Cable says the correlation between height and income is stronger in men than in women.

Sen. John McCain is 5 feet 8 inches tall and will probably be the shortest frontrunner in the Republican primary. But Professor Graham says McCain's military and political experience will likely make up for his smaller stature. "There's a different kind of height and depth there," Graham said.

The Internet Movie Database puts Rudolph Giuliani's height at 5 feet 9 ½ inches – 9 ½ inches above another celebrated Italian-American New York City mayor, Fiorello H. LaGuardia. Known as the "Little Flower," LaGuardia presided over the Big Apple from 1934 to 1945 and could reportedly walk under a horse without removing his top hat.

Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, a Republican, and Sen. Barrack Obama, D-Ill., are among the tallest frontrunners for the 2008 election. At 6 feet 2 inches, Romney has about an inch on Obama, who is roughly 6 foot 1, according to his press office. Former Sen. John Edwards, Kerry's running mate in 2004, is about 6 feet tall.

Inglis, who has a slightly receding hairline, says he is considering backing Giuliani's bid -- for reasons other than the blunt-talking Republican's stature.

"Those of us without presidential hair need somebody to break that barrier for us," Inglis said. "If Giuliani could be elected president, any of us with more challenging hair could make it."

Of course, in some cases big hair can quite literally add an inch or two to a person's height -- leading some to question whether Kerry's 6 foot 4 measurement includes his lofty coiffure.

"Before I got bald, I was 6 feet tall -- I lost about a half inch of hair," said Rep. John Spratt, D-S.C.

Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., said a "big physical presence" may help but ultimately isn't the deciding factor in national and state elections.

When asked about his own height DeMint replied, "Would yo•believe 6 foot 5?"

After a short pause, he chuckled: "I usually say I'm 5 foot 10 inches, but I don't think I ever made it past 5 foot 9 ½."

DeMint added that he was surprised by Strom Thurmond's small size when he met the legendary South Carolina senator in person after years of seeing him on television.

"I guess I thought he was John Wayne size before I finally met him," DeMint said.

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