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Do It for the GOPper: Republican Presidential Politics Plays to the Faithful

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Abstract

While the Dems got through with their debates a week back, in the interest of fairness it behooves me to at least give the GOPpers a report with regards to Trans America. Two weeks earlier, they had their first network debate with all candidates currently declared (Fred Thompson is not one of those) in Iowa; [...]

Article

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Two weeks earlier, they had their first network debate with all candidates currently declared (Fred Thompson is not one of those) in Iowa; the following week they conducted their straw poll there, with the expected victory for Mitt (the only presidential candidate ever named after a baseball glove) Romney. For the sake of fairness, the other top-tier candidates to date - Rudy Giuliani and John McCain - skipped the straw poll. Fred Thompson has not officially declared, so he's officially not a candidate and polled better than the aforementioned other skippers.

So what does this mean for GOP America? Moreover, what does this communicate to Transgender Americans? The straw poll itself showed little. The only surprises were two outsiders (those not willing to throw the money around to buy a victory) placed second and fifth respectively. Ark. Gov. Mike Huckabee topped both Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas, and Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado who tossed the money out only to see less-than-expected results for the buck. Furthermore the ultimate GOP outsider, Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, finished closely behind those conventional two.

As for GOP nominations and ultimately success, all candidates in the debate have their dilemmas to hurdle. None of them appear a lock-tight cinch.

Rep. Tom Tancredo is the candidate of choice if you really want to "stick it to the Mexicans." He's the choice of the "deport-all-the-non-English-speaking-foreigners" crowd - especially if it's spoken with a latino accent. There's some agreement from this writer in that opening the border wide simply to bring in cheap labor is wrong. This only accomplishes desperation among American citizens in the workplace, drives down wages in favor of exploiting those newly-arrived workers while driving up profits for the top tier, and foments polarization between citizens and immigrants. Most pointedly this has little to do with humanitarian concern. The ultimate goal is the bottom line and preying upon those who don't know any better. If that were Tancredo's push, it would be noteworthy. However, the Colorado Rep's

complaints come off as thinly veiled indignation at having to read signs in Spanish in his home state.

Watching former Health Secretary, Tommy Thompson was vaguely frightening. He of the V-chip implantation under his skin (or ID chip, whatever) came across at times as being very machine-like in the debates. His answers at times weren't really answering the questions from the debate, but rote spewing of campaign-speech soundbites. It left me wondering if he was even aware of being in a debate. It seemed he was almost acting as if he was shooting his campaign commercial. Being HHS Secretary, he defied the party and scored big audience applause on women's health and issues of the uninsured, something that will keep folks like Billy Kristol awake at night. Thompson also chastised the Iraq war calculus, but stopped short of calling the war there a mistake.

Senator Sam Brownback showed himself to be the conservative's conservative, mean-spirited, willing to sling any amount of mud to win and to momentarily grasp any argument - however flimsy - in order to win. He comes across as the typical GOPper who distrusts (and likely outright despises) anyone that's not straight, white, male and conservative. While being nearly a clone of the Tom DeLay, Bill Frist, Dick Cheney ilk, he's also strangely against the ongoing Iraq War. Thus his niche: like Bush in every respect, will slavishly pander to prejudicial religious leader voting bloc, but doesn't like Bush's handling of the war.

Sen. John McCain was by far the most painful to watch in the Iowa debates. He looked uncomfortable, scored very few points with the audience, and generally came across as unprepared or distracted. In answering an Email question about regrets, his cryptic answer of testifying about someone he thought was a friend, when he shouldn't have was baffling. While he's gamely tried to say his campaign isn't flagging, it's virtual implosion is wearing on him and it shows. While he would've been a much better and plausible choice for independents in 2000, his star has long-since fallen. The 2004 partisan-loyalty to non-vet Bush over the vets push for Kerry and against the mishandling of the Iraq war were bad enough (something he then looked very uncomfortable with). Afterwards, his obvious pandering to both George W. Bush in 2006 (where he famously asked all to not vote for him but to vote for the President to show their support), and the blatant 180 to the religiopolitical leadership (vis a vis tacit remorse in his meetings with Falwell) showed him to be just as personally expedient as any other GOP hopeful. It's hard to believe that once upon a time McCain was a self-admitted "maverick" and pushed principle over party. Nowadays, he's just another GOP politicker.

Mayor Rudy Giuliani - what can I say about him other than he's the number two guy, trying harder, but not a polished speaker. Sure the polls have him at the top. But eh arch-con folks have not weighed in, and do not want this as their poster boy. Yes, he's slicker than goose dung, shown particularly when he deflected the answer about his one defining mistake with humor. Was it really humor, or a knowing cognizance that GOP America never forgets and especially hates any GOP candidate being embarrassingly candid on record? Rudy's answer to the mistake question showed distinct shades of W - nothing for the record, and all about glibness. Hizzoner scored biggest on the defense of abortion, though he tried to finesse his position initially (something he should learn from, but likely will not). One troubling aspect he showed (not only on women's rights but others he's developed expedient amnesia on during campaigning): Rudy will buckle on principle if the money (read elected office) is right. After the straw polling, his offspring's views of Rudy came to light. Rudy's response? "I love my family very, very much and will do anything for them. There are complexities in every family in America," and basically a

‘leave my family alone’ reply. Nice attempt to cover, but too many eyes are watching.

Mid-stage we had Mass. Gov. Mitt Romney, the only man named after baseball equipment. His birth name is Willard, but he avoids it (think ‘movies about rats.’) Mitt’s very polished, extremely practiced, and nothing more than a political rhetoric machine. His all-too-predictable conservative responses were anthropomorphic. It’s almost as if he’d gotten the V-chip implanted instead of Tommy Thompson (or certainly a much better version of it). When pinned on his past political views by the oh-so-Rovian candidate, Sen. Brownback, Romney unsuccessfully tried to outright lie, then feverishly deflect attention from his past political values. Just as GOP folk painted Sen. John Kerry, you can put a big ol’ flip-flop costume on Mitt as well. Is this a Massachusetts thing? He’ll be the dutiful pet for the RNC when it counts. Mitt also took pains to note that he was not “a carbon copy of {George W Bush}.” Indeed, he favors not only keeping Guantanamo (a la Bush/Cheney), but also even expanding it! After the straw poll, embarrassing claims came out about his sons “showing their patriotism by volunteering” for Mitt’s campaign rather than joining the military and directly fighting the war on terror. This comes from perhaps the biggest proponent (outside of McCain) of Bush’s decisions in Iraq and support for the overall concept of the Iraq War. Supportive ... so long as it ain’t his kids who must go. Very Bush-like, wins points with the W crowd.

Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee sounded almost like a Democrat. During the debates, he scored a number of times on issues of the uninsured, on war (not jumping into war and forcing other nations to be like us), on democracy (how we should set an example others will follow - later capitalized by Romney), and how he believed we should all be considered equal. His final statement was best, that he worked for all Americans no matter what race, religion, belief! Another score was on our national infrastructure decline while nation-building in Iraq. (In context, George W. Bush also stumped on the promise of no “nation building” like Bill Clinton. Take that for what it’s worth.) On debate alone, Huckabee almost won my heart. Then I snapped to reality and recognized this was a GOPper. If (big IF) he were to somehow win the nomination, he’d have to face the music of profit-uber-alles Corp. America and the religiopolitical leaders who believe in swift and extreme judgment. That the governor would be so candid is laudable. However the message’s populist nature in the RNC-world is a political career-killer. Unless he’s willing to ditch all that Iowa debate rhetoric, then Gov. Mike might as well turn in his GOP credentials on the way out the door.

Rep. Ron Paul of Texas actually scored many of the biggest applauses in the Iowa crowd; mostly with bringing troops home and ending the capricious fashion America (circa 21st century) goes to war. Paul also made big points about how America made more progress with peace against former enemy (Vietnam) than in war. It’s a point worth taking when considering Vietnam with whom we now enjoy good relations and trade, contrasted to thirty-five years earlier. Knowing Rep. Paul from here in Texas, I’ve always been fully aware that (unlike McCain) he embodies the word “Republican maverick.” If there’s anyone who’s not a George W. Bush, status quo Republican, it’s Ron Paul. The downside (from a conservative vantage-point) is that he’s indistinguishable from Rep. Dennis Kucinich. Indeed, he’s also co-author of the same bill with Rep. Kucinich to immediately bring the troops home. While that’s great news to families of the soldiers in Iraq, it’s blasphemy to the Romney / Cheney / George W. Bush paradigm. Add to that Rep. Paul’s populist message and his desire to see the big money shut out of politics and you see a lost totally cause in a GOP world. Rep. Paul would do much better to run as Libertarian than the corporate-owned GOP. Ron still puts faith in the GOP. Outside of politics, though, few others do.

The only other candidate in the GOP race for President isn't even a candidate yet. Even now, many pundits are speculating that his dalliance in officially jumping in is actually writing himself out of the script for whatever reason. Star of TV and movies, Sen. Fred Thompson, appears to almost have a carte blanche to the top of the GOP ticket almost as soon as he announces. And therein lies the rub. This Tennessean Thompson (not to be confused with Tommy of HHS and Wisconsin) is playing coy and remaining above the fray. Good in one sense: he's not beaten up in the early stages. However, the bad side is that no one really knows what he's about. True, it worked for George W. Bush's elections. But that also works on the bad side as well: what worked for Bush shouldn't have. Sen. Fred will shoot straight, a distinctive plus from the current administration. But he'll also be beholden to the same RNC kingmakers and their mandates for what their party's choice will be. That'll be an ill fit for Fred Thompson, and he'll prove to be an ill fit for the RNC -on either the religiopolitical side, or the corporate side, depending on his issue that day. Fred Thompson may be the only candidate on the R side that's been candid with the transgender community. He was one of the offices that informed lobbyists from the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC) what was happening behind the scenes on our issues from the likes of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). He qualified that statement by saying he wasn't going to support trans issues, but reported that he felt what HRC was doing on the sly was wrong. Clearly, Sen. Thompson won't be getting the HRC or the gay/lesbian vote.

But will he, or for that matter, any of the GOP crop win the transgender vote? If the individual is all about getting big windfall tax breaks for themselves, and has no concern for the ability to have an ID with an appropriate name and gender marker, or a passport, or doesn't care for seeing fairness in trial cases, child custody or health care treatment, is independently wealthy enough to never need for job-seeking, and certainly has no concern for the well-being of other in their community - then yes, someone may vote GOP. But for the overwhelming majority of trans America, especially anyone who's been paying any attention, the answer is a resounding no. The RNC will dictate where the party and their candidates will go. They don't care for mavericks (see McCain) or independent thinkers (Ron Paul, Huckabee). As they demonstrated with Bush 41, if you don't toe the line, kiss your political career and your legacy (inasmuch as they can affect it) goodbye. Voting for anyone with an R in back of their name is voting for the RNC and all of their social engineering plans for the "New American Century."

And for transgender America, that's about like ridding oneself of a headache by self-decapitation.

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