

COMMENT

Republicans Obama should worry about

By David Gray

COULD the 2012 presidential election be a repeat of the 1980 or 1888 election?

President Obama is enduring his worse political season with a series of challenging poll numbers. His unfavorable rating is at an all-time high. In head-to-head poll comparisons, he now is behind major GOP contenders.

The current political mood favors the GOP. In 2010, generic polls favor generic Republican candidates over generic Democratic ones. All things being equal, this year, Republicans would win the elections. But it's a political eternity between now and 2012. In key swing state polls, Obama also is behind hypothetical GOP nominees in Midwestern states like Pennsylvania and Ohio.

Earlier this week, Politico reported that a poll of likely Republican voters in Iowa found Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney leading the field of potential GOP presidential candidates. However, it's still early. At this point in 2006, Clinton, Edwards and Gore were leading the Democratic field. Barack Obama hardly registered on the polls. So it's quite possible that some other GOP contenders will emerge to challenge.

As I talk with Democratic operatives, most are not concerned about the likely GOP challengers. Democratic strategists are not worried about Romney with his history of job consolidations nor Palin,

Gingrich or most of the usual suspects. Huckabee is a bit of a worry as he is an excellent communicator, would not have to appease the base and could run a populist campaign, but it's unclear he'll even run. Overall, Democratic strategists I've talked to feel good given the president's incumbency, ability to raise money and campaign skills.

If I were the Democrats I would be worried about two possible tickets that are not on the radar. The first, a Meg Whitman-John Thune ticket, would look back to 1980. Assuming Whitman defeats Jerry Brown to become governor of California, she would be a formidable challenger to Obama. The main Democratic strategies against GOP candidates are to argue they are too extreme and that they represent a return to past failed GOP policies.

Both strategies would have a hard time working on relatively moderate and new Whitman. Obama would have trouble arguing her inexperience as she ran a major corporation, eBay, and the largest state. She instantly would put California in play, which would be a nightmare for the Democratic election plan. Her nomination would peel off moderate women voters who would have a chance to vote for the first female president. Thune would be a telegenic VP who could attack Obama, has low baggage and negatives and could keep the Republican base in line.

Appeasing the GOP base would be a challenge for Whitman who first would have to win the GOP nomination, a challenge given her moderate views on abortion and immigration (she would likely have to shift her position on

abortion somewhat which, admittedly, would be an issue to overcome).

Yet if the GOP wants to make Obama, who is often compared to Jimmy Carter, a one-term president, nominating a California governor, as they did in 1980 with Reagan, would be a strong choice.

Another off-the-radar candidate who would present a challenge to Obama would be Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels. Daniels is well regarded for his work as governor. He would be able to help turn the Midwestern swing states of Indiana, Ohio, Missouri and Michigan, perhaps flipping them to the GOP, which could decide the election as those states often do.

Daniels could be paired with a Thune, Bobby Jindal or some other candidate that the GOP base really likes. This strategy would look back to the election of 1888 when a Democratic President Grover Cleveland (who like Obama was a lawyer who had relatively little experience when he was also sworn in at age 47) was defeated by a few votes to a Republican from Indiana named Benjamin Harrison. If this were to happen, Obama would be young enough that, like Cleveland, who was then re-elected in 1892 making him the only president elected to two nonconsecutive terms, that he could conceivably run again in 2016.

There is a lot of time between now and 2012, and it will be interesting to see how it plays for Obama and his possible opponents.

David Gray is director of the Workforce and Family Program for the New American Foundation. Readers may contact him via e-mail at gray@newamerica.

Elliott's Comments: Having read this article in today's (Friday, August 27th, 2010) Daily News, Meg Whitman as the new Governor of California may run for President in 2012 in the middle of her first term just like Barack Obama did after only serving 2 years in the Senate. She could be the one who will destroy our chance to nominate a real constitutionalist like Ron Paul or Jim DeMint and at the same time make Abel Maldonado or Gavin Newsom our new Governor! More reasons why we must vote for Chelene Nightingale for Governor and James King for Lt. Gov.