

2008 BY CHARLIE COOK Presidential *Winter Book*

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While much of the current political attention in the United States is focused on the hotly contested battle for control of Congress this fall, an equally competitive fight for the Presidency is looming, with the campaign effectively beginning the day after the November 7 midterm election, if not sooner. The extraordinary aspect about the 2008 election is that this will be the first presidential election in eighty years, since 1928, without a sitting President or Vice President running. In 1952, there was no President or Vice President on the general election ballot, but Alban Barkley, Harry Truman's Vice President, unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination. Without an incumbent or even semi-incumbent seeking either party's nomination, that makes both contests even more interesting and volatile than normal.

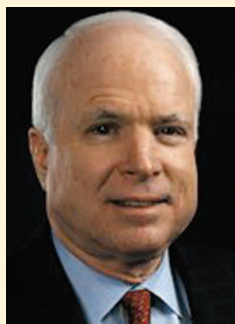
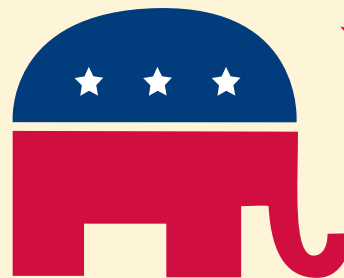
THE REPUBLICAN RACE

Each month, Democratic pollster Thomas Riehle and his Republican counterpart, Lance Tarrance, through their new corporate public affairs polling firm RT Strategies, conduct a national poll for the *Cook Political Report*. In their December survey, among Republican voters and independents who lean toward the Republican side and intend to vote in Republican caucuses or primaries, there was a tie for first place between Senator

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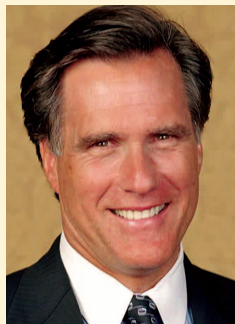


Team Republican



John McCain
Arizona Senator

THOUGH THE ODDS are great that he will run in 2008, in late August of that year he will turn 72, a year older than Ronald Reagan was upon becoming President, making the Arizonan the oldest person to become president. While McCain has many very strong qualities, he does have one real problem. Too many conservatives and members of the Republican establishment hate him, resenting his independence and maverick positioning, his adamant support for campaign finance reform, his opposition to President Bush on some high visibility issues such as his ban on torture of Iraq and terrorism detainees, and his middle ground position on gun control.



Mitt Romney
Massachusetts Governor

ROMNEY IS EARNING very high marks on the campaign trail in terms of intellect, speaking style, and record as both a winning candidate and as governor of a very liberal and Democratic state. The question is whether Romney's Mormon faith will be an impediment in seeking the nomination of a party that is composed of a strong and vocal contingent of evangelical Christians who tend to see the Mormon Church as more of a cult than a religion.



Rudy Giuliani
Former Mayor of New York

IT'S A GOOD BET that Republicans will not nominate a presidential candidate in 2008 who is pro-choice on the abortion issue and in favor of many gay rights and gun control measures. In short, it is extremely unlikely that Giuliani will be the Republican presidential nominee in 2008 or anytime soon.



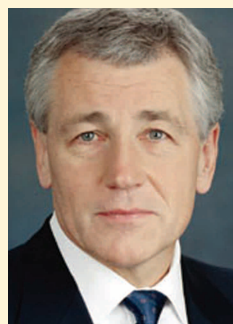
Bill Frist
Tennessee Senator
Senate Majority Leader

THOUGH FRIST currently has a great deal of visibility as a result of his position as the party's leader in the Senate, his record as leader has been spotty at best, his speaking ability very weak, and his political judgment and instincts highly suspect, with his video diagnosis of a catatonic Terri Schiavo perhaps his most remembered moment as Senate leader.



George Allen
Virginia Senator

IF YOU PUT Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush in a blender, you would produce George Allen. Allen's effervescent, upbeat, seemingly always sunny disposition is strongly reminiscent of Reagan, while his informal, cowboy/frat-boy/jocular style, frequently wearing cowboy boots, chewing tobacco, and throwing an omnipresent football as former University of Virginia quarterback and son of a former Washington Redskins and Los Angeles Rams head coach, tends towards the current President.

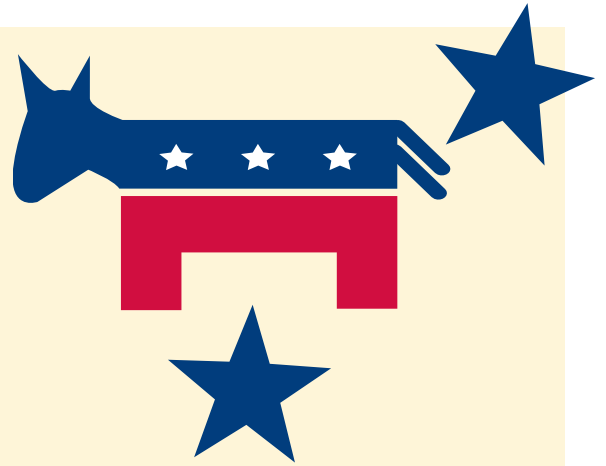


Chuck Hagel
Nebraska Senator

HAGEL, THOUGH very well regarded in the Senate and certainly a maverick in the McCain style but not as controversial, must get out of McCain's shadow if he is to succeed.



Team Democrat



Hillary Rodham Clinton
New York Senator

CLEARLY CLINTON is the overwhelming favorite to win the Democratic nomination, but is the contest over? Just to play the devil's advocate, think of it this way. Virtually 100 percent of Democratic voters know who Hillary Clinton is, and 100 percent have an opinion of her, whether they love or hate her, trust or distrust her. But in one of our surveys, only 33 percent supported her, meaning that 67 percent knew of and had an opinion of her, but do not support her. Or to use the other survey, 44 percent supported her, so it was 56 percent who knew of and had an opinion of her, but did not support her. They wonder whether she can win a general election.



John Edwards
Former North Carolina Senator

EDWARDS CAME OUT of the 2004 campaign relatively unscathed and certainly has impressive campaigning skills, but then again, doesn't have much more governmental experience now than when he ran in 2004, and that was certainly his Achilles heel. His message is less class-warfare oriented than three years ago, and now more along the lines of "the social safety net is broken, the country has prospered but we have left too many people behind," fit for the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.



Mark Warner
Former Governor of Virginia

WARNER HAS YET to prove himself on the national campaign trail with the rhetorical and campaign skills necessary to compete. He is still a work in progress.



John Kerry
Massachusetts Senator

THE ATTITUDE in the Democratic Party toward Kerry appears to be a combination of "been there, done that, got the tee shirt," and, "if he were any good, he would have won last time." The 14 or 17 percent who back Kerry in current polling are more likely to be Democrats who aren't wild about Clinton but aren't familiar enough with any of the other alternatives to support them yet, thus are using the Kerry column as a parking place until someone else strikes their fancy.



Joseph Biden
Delaware Senator

BIDEN IS THE MOST seasoned and established of the bunch, having served in the Senate since 1973 and holding great foreign policy credentials, but there is a whiff of "old news" about the Delaware Senator, and his verbosity has become legendary and he risks becoming a caricature if it is not controlled.



Bill Richardson
New Mexico Governor

RICHARDSON CERTAINLY has the credentials, but pros question whether he is disciplined enough to win this marathon contest.

The extraordinary aspect about the 2008 election is that this will be the first presidential election in eighty years, since 1928, without a sitting President or Vice President running.

John McCain of Arizona and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, each with 25 percent of the vote, with former House Speaker Newt Gingrich landing in third place with 12 percent.

After these three, support levels drop rather significantly, as the balance of the field of prospective candidates are largely unknown outside their home states and among true political aficionados. In fourth place was Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee, followed by a two-way tie for fifth place between Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania with four percent each, though the latter is now seen as highly unlikely to run. With three percent each are Senator George Allen of Virginia and New York Governor George Pataki, while Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska and Governors Mike Huckabee of Arkansas and Mark Sanford of South Carolina each had two percent (Sanford is now seen as unlikely to run as well). Rounding out the field was Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas.

The question was asked again in late March, but instead of the entire laundry list of candidates given, only the top three names were listed, with respondents offered the option of “or someone else.” There was still a tie for first between McCain and Giuliani, this time with 30 percent each instead of 25, and Gingrich earned 11 percent instead of 12.

Given the volatile, unpredictable nature of presidential politics, only a fool at this early stage would feel certain they know who the nominee in either party will be, but it’s a good bet that Republicans will not nominate a presidential candidate in 2008 who is pro-choice on the abortion issue and in favor of many gay rights and

gun control measures. These are core litmus test issues for many voters in the Republican base. It would be hard enough to see the GOP nominate someone who is “wrong” on one or two out of three, let alone three (just to be fair and symmetrical, it is just as unlikely that Democrats would nominate someone who is pro-life on abortion, and pretty much opposed to any gun control or gay rights measures). In short, it is extremely unlikely that Rudy Giuliani will be the Republican presidential nominee in 2008 or anytime soon.

That leaves John McCain as the sole early true frontrunner for the GOP nomination, if he runs. Though the odds are great that he will run in 2008, keep in mind that in late August of that year, he will turn 72 years of age, a year older than Ronald Reagan was upon becoming President, and the Arizonan would become the oldest person to become president. It should also be remembered that McCain has had a harder life than most of the rest of us, having spent five and a half years of torture in a prisoner of war camp, and more recently, suffering through three bouts of skin cancer. There is every sign that McCain intends to run and will run, but under these circumstances, there will always be a certain percentage chance that he will not make the race.

While McCain has many very strong qualities, he does have one real problem. Too many conservatives and members of the Republican establishment hate him, resenting his independence and maverick positioning, his adamant support for campaign finance reform, his opposition to President Bush on some high visibility issues such as his ban on torture of Iraq and terrorism detainees and his middle ground position on gun control. You could say that the U.S. Navy did not put McCain in a single seat fighter for nothing—the guy has never been much of a team player.

In recent months, McCain has tried hard to overcome these perceptions, has become a vehement defender of President Bush on every possible issue, and for the record has always been a staunch defender of the war in Iraq. How successful McCain can be in repositioning himself as sufficiently loyal and trustworthy that the party will entrust their nomination to him is the \$64,000 question.

While most Republican activists and the political press corps give nothing but lip service to Newt Gingrich’s chances, across the country he does generate a great deal of “buzz,” the result of hundreds of impressive performances at state and local Republican Party Lincoln Day and campaign fundraising events. Though Frist currently has a great deal of visibility as a result of his position as the party’s leader in the Senate, his record

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as leader has been spotty at best, his speaking ability very weak, and his political judgment and instincts highly suspect, with his video diagnosis of a catatonic Terri Schiavo perhaps his most remembered moment as Senate leader.

Facing an uphill battle for re-election, Rick Santorum is no longer considered to be a viable presidential possibility, but Mitt Romney is earning very high marks on the campaign trail in terms of intellect, speaking style, and record as both a winning candidate and as governor of a very liberal and Democratic state. The question is whether Romney's Mormon faith will be an impediment in seeking the nomination of a party that is composed of a strong and vocal contingent of evangelical Christians who tend to see the Mormon Church as more of a cult than a religion. Also, some leaders may feel threatened by the fact that the Mormon faith is the fastest growing religion in small town and rural America.

Although largely unknown outside of Washington and his adopted home state of Virginia, George Allen is getting a great deal of attention as the closest candidate to President Bush, both philosophically and stylistically, in the field. Chuck Todd, editor of *The Hotline*, a daily electronic political newsletter, has glibly remarked that if you put Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush in a blender, you would produce

George Allen. Allen's effervescent, upbeat, seemingly always sunny disposition is strongly reminiscent of Reagan, while his informal, cowboy/frat-boy/jocular style, frequently wearing cowboy boots, chewing tobacco, and throwing an omnipresent football as former University of Virginia quarterback and son of a former Washington Redskins and Los Angeles Rams head coach, tends towards the current President.

As for the rest of the field, George Pataki shows no sign of attracting support west of the Hudson River, Mark Sanford seems to have his hands full as governor of South Carolina, and Chuck Hagel, though very well regarded in the Senate and certainly a maverick in the McCain style but not as controversial, must get out of McCain's shadow if he is to succeed. Mike Huckabee, a Baptist minister before becoming lieutenant governor and governor, and Sam Brownback, are expected to be competing with one another for the social, cultural and religious conservative wing of the party, but where each could find the funding to wage a viable campaign is debatable.

Perhaps the best way to look at the contest for the Republican nomination is to think about three NCAA basketball brackets. The top bracket is for the Secular Republican candidates and voters, those who focus on economic, business, trade, and foreign policy issues, those who either do not dwell on social, cultural, and values-related issues at all, or are liberal or moderate on those issues. You could also call them Country Club Republicans, or perhaps just Episcopalians and Presbyterians. If Giuliani were to run, it would definitely be in this bracket. Hagel would be here as well, but the odds are great that if McCain runs, as he seems very likely to do, he will dominate this bracket.

The bottom bracket is for the Sacred Republican Party, the faction of the party that considers moral and cultural values and social issues of paramount importance, and believes that the party should espouse these issues at every opportunity. Reverend Pat Robertson ran in this bracket in 1988, and conservative activists Gary Bauer and Alan Keyes ran in this group in 2000, the last contested GOP nomination. This time, Brownback and Huckabee are competing in this bracket, and if he were to run, Santorum would be here as well.

This leaves in the middle the Bridge, or Hybrid Bracket, made up of Republican candidates and voters who do not fit clearly in either the Secular or Sacred brackets—they have a foot in each camp. While they frequently talk about values issues and are certainly conservative on most if not all issues, their emphasis

is more on non-social issues. While Gingrich is certainly a contender here, and this is where Frist would run as well, the dominant player is more likely to be Allen, whose name recognition is certainly the lowest of the three but to whom insiders and professionals give high marks. Indeed, in December 2005, *National Journal* took a poll of 100 Republican insiders, members of Congress, state GOP chairs, campaign consultants, and strategists and lobbyists, and found that 39 out of 100 listed Allen as the most likely nominee for their party, followed by McCain with 38. No other candidate pulled beyond single digits.

A conventional political analysis would argue that Allen is the most likely, as he most strongly resembles at least two of the last four men (George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan) nominated by the party. From a marketing perspective, the middle bracket would also be the easiest to run from and would be the most elastic, as a candidate there could reach up to steal some of the less secular of the seculars and reach down for the less sacred of the sacreds.

But while the resistance to McCain within the party is strong, there is a growing sense in the party that his star is rising, and that the hesitation is weakening. If two conditions are met, the GOP nomination is his. If Republicans collectively conclude first, that Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton will be the Democratic presidential nominee, and second, that only McCain can beat her, he will be the GOP standard-bearer. For conservatives and establishment figures, if the choice becomes one of either supporting McCain or having Hillary Clinton as president, there will be few conservatives who will stand in his way.

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There is no one hated more by the conservative movement or the Republican base than Hillary Clinton—not her husband, not John Kerry, not even Al Gore.

In recent months, we have seen a number of senior officials of the 2004 Bush campaign move into the McCain camp, as well as card-carrying members of the GOP establishment and party leaders who heretofore could not abide McCain. To a certain extent, this could be political expediency, with some having visions of running mate or cabinet slot or ambassadorial appointments dancing in their heads. But there is also a growing feeling among Republicans that Clinton may be unbeatable within the Democratic Party and that they have to be ready with the candidate that they see as the best foil to Clinton. Finally, with the very strong dynamic for change that appears in the polls, and President Bush's approval ratings now mired in the 30 percent range, there is a feeling that they have to nominate someone who is cut from a very different bolt of cloth than the current incumbent, and McCain is certainly a change.

THE DEMOCRATIC RACE

On the Democratic side, the question is whether this nomination is Hillary Clinton's for the asking. When *National Journal* asked 100 Democratic insiders who they thought their party's 2008 nominee would be, 76 out of 100 picked Clinton, ten picked former Virginia Governor Mark Warner, and no one else received more than single digits.

In the December *Cook Political Report*/RT Strategies national poll of Democrats and independents who leaned to the Democratic side and planned to vote in Democratic caucuses and primaries, 33 percent supported Clinton, 17 percent Kerry, the 2004 nominee, 15 percent backed former North Carolina Senator John Edwards, Kerry's running mate in 2004, then a similar drop off to what was seen on the GOP side occurred. Candidates who are largely unknown outside of their home states filled the rest of the field. Senator Joe Biden of Delaware ran fourth with 7 percent, and there was a three-way tie for fifth between Senator Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico, and Warner, the former Virginia Governor. Senator Evan Bayh of Indiana and retired Army General Wes Clark had 3 percent each while Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack had less than 1 percent. In the February survey, when just the top three were offered, Clinton's support ran higher, to 44 percent. Kerry had 14 percent instead of 17, and Edwards had 16 percent, up from 15. *Continued on page 59*

Continued from page 37

Each party begins with 48 percent, and the fight, likely to cost three-quarters of a billion dollars from start to finish, from all sources, will be over the remaining four percent, perhaps seven million votes.

Before focusing on Clinton, a few words about John Kerry are in order. If there is anyone who isn't a paid staffer of Kerry who is pushing him to run again in 2008, I haven't found them. The attitude in the Democratic Party toward Kerry appears to be a combination of "been there, done that, got the tee shirt," and, "if he were any good, he would have won last time." The 14 or 17 percent who back Kerry in current polling are more likely to be Democrats who aren't wild about Clinton but aren't familiar enough with any of the other alternatives to support them yet, thus are using the Kerry column as a parking place until someone else strikes their fancy.

Clearly Clinton is the overwhelming favorite to win the Democratic nomination, but is the contest over? Just to play the devil's advocate, think of it this way. Virtually 100 percent of Democratic voters know who Hillary Clinton is, and 100 percent have an opinion of her, whether they love or hate her, trust or distrust her. But in one of our surveys, only 33 percent supported her, meaning that 67 percent knew of and had an opinion of her, but do not support her. Or to use the other survey, 44 percent supported her, so it was 56 percent who knew of and had an opinion of her, but did not support her. Obviously there are some Democrats who don't like or agree with Hillary Clinton, but polling shows that 80 percent of Democrats have a favorable opinion of her, so it isn't that many.

The reason for this gap between those who know, have an opinion, and even like her, and the much

smaller number who actually support her is very simple: They wonder whether she can win a general election. When our February poll asked Democrats whether they thought if nominated, Hillary Clinton would have as good a chance as any other Democratic nominee of winning the general election, or if they worried that she could not win a general election, 47 percent said her chances were as good as any Democrat, but 46 percent worried that she could not win a general election. Simply put, to win the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton has to convince her own party members that she can win a general election.

While historically, electability has not been an important determinant for many party members in deciding who should be their nominee for President, we are now in a different era. With partisan polarization and an intensity of emotion about politics higher than at any point in our lives, electability is an important factor in both parties. While the country was polarized along pro-Clinton/anti-Clinton lines back during Bill Clinton's presidency, the divide is now much broader and deeper, between the Red Republican America and the Blue Democratic America, with many red areas and red voters getting redder and blue areas and blue voters getting bluer. The country is more politically polarized than any time since the late 1800s. Neither party is inclined to nominate someone who they doubt can win.

To be sure, Clinton is trying to reposition herself as a centrist. She is playing a more active role in the moderate Democratic Leadership Council, and has sought and obtained a platform on the Senate Armed Services Committee where she has taken some remarkably hawkish positions. Keep in mind that short of Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, there was no Democrat in the Senate who was a more vocal supporter of going to war with Iraq than Clinton. And last year she sought to find common ground with abortion opponents, promoting alternatives to abortion, and just a few months ago she co-sponsored a statutory ban on burning the American flag. But will it work? Can she

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rebrand herself and change the caricature that was drawn of her back in the 1990s? (Interestingly, this is a challenge facing Gingrich as well.)

So the best way to look at the Democratic nomination is to think of two brackets, the Hillary Clinton bracket, and one to determine who will be the alternative to Clinton. If Clinton is successful in convincing the party she can win the general election, her nomination is a *fait accompli*. But, if she can't, whoever wins that alternative bracket will be the Democratic nominee.

In terms of the alternative candidate, there's Kerry, but that's pretty unlikely. There is Edwards, who came out of the 2004 campaign relatively unscathed and certainly has impressive campaigning skills, but then again, doesn't have much more governmental experience now than when he ran in 2004, and that was certainly his Achilles heel. His message is less class-warfare oriented than three years ago, and now more along the lines of "the social safety net is broken, the country has prospered but we have left too many people behind," fit for the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Then there is Biden, who is the most seasoned and established of the bunch, having served in the Senate since 1973 and holding great foreign policy credentials, but there is a whiff of "old news" about the Delaware Senator, and his verbosity has become legendary and he risks becoming a caricature if it is not controlled.

Then there are all the new faces. First Evan Bayh was the flavor of the month, more recently Mark Warner, and next probably Tom Vilsack, with each drawing the attention of Democrats who emphasize the importance of winning in red (Indiana and Virginia) or purple (Iowa) states. Finally there is Bill Richardson, who certainly has the credentials, but pros question whether he is disciplined enough to win this marathon contest.

WHO SHOULD DEMOCRATS NOMINATE?

One thought is geographic. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the last three Democrats elected president were Southerners, from Texas, Georgia, and Arkansas. There is no question that the ability to win Southern votes and Southern states was a real asset. But it is also arguable whether even with a Southern candidate, in this highly polarized country we live in today, even a Southerner could carry a single state in the old Confederacy (despite its actual location, Florida is generally not considered to be a Southern state).

But an argument could be made that geography is important and that Democrats should still consider a Southerner for their nomination.

Ideologically speaking, and to a certain extent in terms of partisanship, the American people form a classic bell curve, with a few on the far left and far right but most between the thirty- and even the forty-yard lines, a bit more right of center than left. But among the true swing voters, those between the forty-yard lines, when they see a Democratic presidential nominee who is a Southerner, very likely having won statewide elections, there is an assumption of moderation, that the Southern Democrat is fairly centrist, and in those cases, the burden of proof is on Republicans to prove that the Southern Democrat is a hopeless and unrepentant liberal. But when Democrats nominate a candidate from the Northeast, particularly from New England, especially Massachusetts, there is a presumption of liberalism, and the burden of proof is on the Democrat to prove that he or she is a mainstream candidate and not a hopeless and unrepentant

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liberal. This would argue that Democrats should look first for a Southerner, and if they can't find what they want and need in the South, then look to the Midwest, the Great Plains or the Rocky Mountain states, anywhere but the Northeast and the West Coast, with their pejorative connotations.

But another way of looking at it, and this applies to both parties, is the fact that the last two sitting members of Congress, Senate or House, to get elected President were John F. Kennedy and Warren G. Harding. The fact that in over three-quarters of a century, only two sitting members were elected, despite the fact that the vast majority of viable candidates were members of Congress, is quite telling. Whether the public looks for executive experience and the kind of decision-making that is more likely found in an executive rather than legislative post, or whether it is the paper trail of floor and committee votes that legislators create, the proof is in the numbers.

These two factors would seem to argue for Mark Warner, but he has yet to prove himself on the national campaign trail with the rhetorical and campaign skills necessary to compete. He is still a work in progress. Bill Richardson has some of those skills, but many doubt whether he can go the distance. The spotlight has not yet turned to Tom Vilsack, and he certainly has an interesting life story, as an orphan who became a governor, but he still has a long way to go. Evan Bayh was a governor, but now has the Senate seat to deal with, and like Warner, has yet to prove to be a mesmerizing campaigner.

No doubt one of these alternatives will turn into a butterfly, but that still leaves the question of whether Clinton can convince her party that she can win. But can she?

Since the end of World War II, a party has entered a presidential election having held the White House for eight consecutive years on five occasions. In four out of five, they failed to win a third consecutive term. In 1960, after

eight years of Dwight Eisenhower, Vice President Richard Nixon failed to win and was defeated by Senator John Kennedy. Eight years later, after two terms of Kennedy and Johnson, Vice President Hubert Humphrey was unable to hold onto the Presidency and was defeated by Nixon. After eight years of Nixon and Gerald Ford as President, Ford was defeated by Jimmy Carter, who failed to win re-election in 1980. After eight years of Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore was unable to win, and was beaten by George W. Bush. The only time in this era that a party held onto the White House for three terms was after eight years of Reagan. But in fall of 1988, Reagan had a Gallup job approval rating in the low to mid fifties, significantly higher than where President Bush is likely to be, and the Democrats nominated Michael Dukakis, from, yes, Massachusetts.

When something happens four times out of five, it can be said that there is a predisposition toward that thing happening, just as from time to time, farmers rotate the crops in their field or drivers rotate the tires on the car. Voters like to rotate the party holding the White House, and often, governorships as well. But this only happens when the opposition party nominates a credible, acceptable, non-threatening agent of change.

The key questions in 2008 are: Will Democrats nominate a credible, acceptable, non-threatening agent of change? And will Republicans nominate their own agent of change, or will they go with a status quo-oriented candidate, in the face of poll numbers suggesting the opposite approach?

Finally, can Hillary Clinton win? While Clinton is certainly the most polarizing candidate that Democrats could possibly nominate, and there is a very strong risk in that, maybe it is too soon to say that she cannot win. It can be argued that John Kerry did not add one single vote to the Democratic column, that there was no value added to the ticket by Kerry. He won the votes of people who were going to vote Democratic no matter what, and would have voted for almost any Democrat running. Kerry won 48 percent of the vote in 2004, and came within 120,000 votes, out of 5.6 million cast in Ohio, of carrying the Buckeye State and therefore winning the Presidency. If Kerry could win 48 percent of the vote and come that close to victory, how can it be said that Clinton could not? My hunch is that each party begins with 48 percent, and the fight, likely to cost three-quarters of a billion dollars from start to finish, from all sources, will be over the remaining four percent, perhaps seven million votes. If each party starts with 48 percent, than almost any nominee can win. Whether Clinton is the best idea for Democrats is another story, but it is hard to argue that she cannot win. ♦