

Romney's Work Beginning to Pay Off

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Mitt Romney is beginning to emerge as the frontrunner for the Republican nomination for president in a race that as recently as one month ago was distinguished from most previous Republican nomination campaigns by the absence of such a frontrunner. Among actual candidates, Romney [leads most polls](#) and has [raised the most money](#). Romney is again demonstrating that for winning a presidential nomination, building an organization and raising money is at least as important as leadership and the ability to excite the base, two characteristics that Romney appears to lack.

Romney has done his work relatively quietly while the decisions by Donald Trump and Mike Huckabee not to run and the disastrous beginning to Newt Gingrich's quixotic bid for the White House have received considerably more coverage in recent weeks. Of these three stories, Huckabee's decision not to run is the most significant. Huckabee is a good politician with excellent communication skills and opinions that would have resonated well with the conservative Republican base. Huckabee also had a very difficult time building an organization and raising money in 2008 and evinced little enthusiasm for doing that again in 2012, seemingly preferring the comfort and compensation of his work for Fox News.

With Huckabee out of the way, the remaining potential obstacles to Romney's path to the nomination include candidates who would have a very difficult time in a general election, like Michele Bachmann or Gingrich and potentially Sarah Palin, candidates who have not yet demonstrated an ability to connect with voters or donors, notably Tim Pawlenty and candidates who have not yet formally announced their candidacies such as Jon Huntsman and Mitch Daniels. This last category also includes people like New Jersey Governor Chris Christie who have made no indications that they are actually running and whose campaigns exist largely in the minds of GOP strategists.

Christie, and this time, Daniels, fall into the category of dream candidates. These are the candidates that, despite giving indication that they will not run, are viewed as strong candidates by party leaders due to both their demographic or other appeal as well as to the likelihood that they will not run. This dynamic is the political equivalence of a man who is attracted to a woman because she is unattainable. These types of candidates are a strange, but surprisingly permanent part of the political landscape in the U.S.

Perhaps the most famous of these candidates was former New York Governor Mario Cuomo who, following his keynote speech at the 1984 Democratic Convention, was viewed by many as the ideal candidate for the Democratic Party in both 1988 and 1992, but never ran. In the months leading up to the 1988 and 1992 primaries, Democrats kept hoping for Cuomo to get in the race and inspire the party as first Michael Dukakis and

then Bill Clinton went about the work of building an organization, raising money, getting nominated and, in the case of Bill Clinton, getting elected.

There is something very appealing and dramatic about the prospect of dream candidates or candidates who are drafted at the last minute because the party is not happy with the field of candidates. They take the minds of the party faithful off of real candidates who are never perfect and often uninspiring and lead them to believe, often falsely that a better candidate is just around the corner. Had he ever run, Cuomo, as a very liberal New Yorker, would have been very vulnerable; and if Chris Christie ever ran he would be vulnerable on his lack of experience and divisive tenure as governor of New Jersey, but these realities never get in the way of a good political fantasy.

Similarly, candidates who are not among the frontrunners six to eight months or so before the voting starts rarely get nominated. Even in the 2008 campaign, although Hillary Clinton was the leading Democratic candidate in mid-2007, Barack Obama was the only candidate who was close to her in money raised or in poll numbers. By that time, the race was already beginning to narrow to two candidates with John Edwards still holding onto his status as a top-tier candidate, but not by much.

Romney's emergence as a the clear leading candidate in the race for president has already probably helped one potentially strong candidate, Huckabee, leave the race and will be a major barrier to entry to other candidates who are still exploring their options, who now start so far behind Romney with regards to money and poll numbers.

Romney's liberal record as governor of Massachusetts, particularly with regards to health care, has led some in the GOP to declare him unelectable, but the GOP field is full of candidates like Michele Bachmann, Ron Paul, Newt Gingrich and potential candidates like Sarah Palin who are equally unelectable. The electable candidates are either not yet running, Daniels and Christie, or have proven unable to connect with voters, like Pawlenty. Romney is a flawed candidate, but one who has done his work. He is running against a field of flawed candidates who have been unable, or unwilling to do the same. The nomination has not been won yet, but unless some of the other candidates begin raising money and building an organization, rather than talking and making money for themselves, the race for the Republican nomination will be over before it starts.