

A Clinton Campaign Would Help Obama

Even before Barack Obama handily won reelection last month, speculation about whether Hillary Clinton would run for president was growing strong. This speculation has only gotten stronger in recent months. Clinton will be leaving her position as Secretary of State next month, but has not made any concrete plans for the future or, more specifically, for 2016. She is also very popular and has a significantly more impressive resume than when she ran in 2008.

Should Clinton run, she would be a very strong front-runner for the Democratic Party's nomination for president. Her presence in the race would also likely lead a lot of prominent senators and governors to decide that 2016 is not their year. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, for example, may run for president in 2016, but will almost certainly not challenge Clinton if she runs.

Although Clinton would be a strong general election candidate, her chances of winning in November in 2016 would largely be determined by whether President Obama's second term is viewed as successful by voters. Thus, although Clinton has removed herself from the Obama administration, perhaps to allow herself the time and political space to put together a presidential campaign, the ultimate outcome of that campaign cannot be separated from the fate of a presidential administration of which Clinton is no longer part.

Second terms are often difficult because the recently reelected president is a lame duck. Obama will face this problem, but will also have to work with a Republican-controlled House of Representatives and a Republican leadership which remain steadfast in their opposition to the recently reelected president. This does not make Obama's task impossible, but it makes it more difficult. For Obama to succeed he will need a Democratic Party in congress that is unified and committed to supporting the president's agenda.

Interestingly, this is why a Clinton presidential campaign could help Obama. If Clinton decides to run, and makes that decision soon, she will clear most of the potential Democratic field. This means that at least a handful of members of congress who would have otherwise been running for president for most of the next four years will be instead focusing more on their work in congress and building their resumes for the future beyond 2016. More significantly, it means that no prominent Democratic members of congress will be trying to distance themselves from President Obama as a way to carve out a niche for themselves heading into a competitive and crowded presidential primary field. Members of congress who might have been, for example, trying to make a name for themselves with their own budget plan, or by taking a more hawkish position than the president on foreign policy issues, will have little incentive to do that and greater incentive to simply help the president succeed.

If Clinton does not run, key Democratic senators will spend much of their time, beginning soon, in early caucus and primary states like Iowa and New Hampshire, as well as raising money, rather than legislating. Moreover, as candidates they will probably realize that given the difficulties of solving the

problems facing our country, it is easier to propose unworkable solutions and apportion blame on the campaign trail than to stay in Washington and work with President Obama against long odds on solutions that may be politically unpopular. A competitive primary will not necessarily be bad for the Democratic Party or weaken their chances in the general election, but it could make governance more difficult for President Obama during his second term.

The dynamic between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton over the last several years has been an intriguing subtext to much of recent Democratic Party politics. The two were initially rivals as Obama posed a serious challenge to what should have been an easy race to the Democratic nomination for Clinton in 2008. Ultimately, in a race that probably dragged too long and occasionally got nasty, Obama defeated Clinton and went on to become president.

The story did not end there; nor has it ended with Clinton serving as a very successful and popular Secretary of State for the last four years, something that surprised anybody who thought the rift between Clinton and Obama from the primary season was too deep. Some might even find it ironic that it was one of Obama's strongest rivals who helped make his first term a success. Clinton and Obama, however, remain tied to each other even now that the former is leaving office. Clinton's decision to run will help Obama accomplish more in his second term, just as a successful Obama second term will be essential for a Democratic victory for Clinton, or anybody else, in 2016.

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