

MISSING THE PARTY

Let me start this post by throwing out some assertions.

- The most interesting question about New Hampshire, IMO, is not whether Obama beats Hillary or whether Mitt survives against McCain. It's whether Obama has a greater draw over Independents than McCain, which thereby deprives McCain of any victory there.
- In her very gracious concession speech the other night, Hillary seemed genuinely thrilled by the huge Democratic/female/youth turnout (even after bitching about Obama's direct appeal to "out-of-state" students for several weeks beforehand), even as she seemed to be recognizing how failed her strategy in Iowa had been.
- Mitt Romney won handful of delegates today, and regardless of what happens in NH, will go onto MI, a state where several buildings in Lansing bear his Daddy's name, to compete against a guy who had a huge

victory here in 2000.

All of which is my preface to saying that the pundits are (for the most part) dealing with a much too flat conception of what this primary is going to look like, seeing only the intra-party competition, and they're not seeing that we're already thick into a competition between the two parties that may well have real ramifications for the outcome.

That said, let me go back to the beginning and explain what I mean. The press has largely assumed that McCain, the "maverick" who won in NH in 2000, stands to be the non-Mitt there this year. That assumes, of course, that the Independents (and even the Republicans) who turned out for McCain in 2000 will turn out for him again and it assumes that McCain's prime contestant is Mitt. Now, ignore the fact that NH is a pretty solidly anti-war state and McCain is up there threatening a hundred year presence in Iraq. The bulk of the press still seems to be ignoring an unstated contest between Obama and McCain for Independents. Chris Bowers reads it right, IMO, when he suggests,

No momentum for McCain and Huckabee whatsoever. Obama is sucking up all the air right now, and probably the New Hampshire independents that McCain needed.

If Bowers is right, it suggests another dynamic that Iowa, at least seems to suggest and these poll results seem to support. The entire makeup of parties has changed this year, created by two factors. First, there's Obama's ability to attract both voters whom conventional wisdom has written off (youth and women) and cross-over voters in large numbers. His ability to draw cross-over voters means you can't look at NH without wondering how Obama and McCain will compete, and only against that backdrop do you get to the competition between Mitt and McCain.

As for Hillary's concession speech—I thought it

was more fascinating than Obama's truly awesome speech. That's partly because Hillary was so damn gracious; as I've said elsewhere, it was one of the first times that I felt Hillary was a member of the same Democratic party I am, and that she cares about the party more than Hillary.

I suspect that message came from the realization—as she saw the returns come in—that Obama's success at bringing out voters (both the traditionally low turnout youth and women, and Independents and some Republicans) has completely changed all the assumptions about this race. Hillary would have nearly tied Obama had her assumptions about politics held true (32 to 31 percent of the vote). But the difference was enough to give Obama a commanding lead—eight points—in one of the purportedly tight swing states that will determine the Presidential election. And huge huge numbers. I suspect Hillary may recognize that she doesn't have the time to recalibrate to factor for this completely redefined conventional wisdom, but I also suspect that she has grudgingly recognized that Obama may well be able to deliver a resounding victory for the Democrats in a way that will make a difference for the good part of a generation.

But Obama's success is not the only thing that has completely overturned conventional wisdom. The splitting of the three-legged stool that has, in conventional wisdom, made up the Republican party, has also utterly overturned conventional wisdom. Digby explains,

What we are seeing is the three legs of the conservative stool fighting for supremacy: Romney from the money wing, McCain (or Rudy) from the hawk wing and Huck from the God wing. The first two are part of the political establishment and rely on it for guidance. Up until now, the God wing did too. But now they have one of their own and they really don't need the permission of the money

boyz or the hawks to vote for him. And they sure don't care what the pointy headed TV gasbags think about it.

Huckabee won big last night with no money and no organization. Maybe he can't replicate it anywhere else. But I think he might. The religious right is the biggest single voting bloc in the GOP – the people they cultivated and trained to vote en masse for the Republicans. They have a very specific agenda of social issues that they care about and understand very well. They are true believers. And they are the only constituency in the party who actually likes their candidate and feels inspired by him. He's one of them. I think he can win it and win it in spite of the many unforced errors he's bound to make. His followers just don't care about stuff like that. Unless he suddenly goes soft on abortion or gay rights or one of their signature issues, he's got them.

I'd add a few more points to that. First, depending on how you classify Ron Paul, arguably 45% of Iowa's Republicans rejected the kind of corporate cronyism that has become the hallmark of the Republican party. In fact, I'm not really sure the corporatists are even still *in* the Republican party. Add in the fact that 60% of Huckabee's voters were Evangelicals, and I think it's possible that the remaining legs of the Republican party have either gone elsewhere (many of them—probably the corporatists—to Obama) or stayed home. While I'm sure Bush's remaining supporters will vote for a hawk like Giuliani or McCain, there really don't appear to be that many of them left—or at least, they don't appear energetic enough to haul their ass to a caucus to vote. And I sincerely wonder how many of the party's corporatists will remain loyal if and when Huckabee wins a few more primaries.

Understand. I think the Republicans may have

lost the corporatists for two reasons. I see corporatists as divided into two kinds of people. The vast majority are simply in favor of the kind of brutal efficacy and competence that capitalism supposedly requires. And those corporatists are increasingly dismayed and disgusted with the rank incompetence of the Republican party. They're going to vote, but they're going to vote for someone who looks competent, and if they have a choice between Obama and Mitt, I'm not sure they won't pick Obama. (The same is largely true if they had to pick between Hillary and Mitt.)

In addition to the efficacy and competence corporatists, there are the cronyists—the people who love love love the fact that Bush has sole-sourced contracts out to corporate cronies and gotten rank incompetence in return for emptying the nation's treasury. I think Giuliani, to some degree Mitt, and Huckabee have something to offer these people, at least so long as Huckabee's nationally-televised speeches are as devoid of populist ideology as his victory speech was on Thursday night. But the thing is—there simply aren't that many of these people; they're the business owners who have managed to suck the teat of Republican generosity without yet being tainted by scandal. And if the media and the horrified Republicans continue to paint Huckabee as a populist, I'm not sure the crony corporatists won't stay home, particularly if the near-fascist Giuliani continues to crash and burn.

Digby is right on (big surprise, I know) in her depiction of the revolt of the Christian Conservatives. But I would add that they party seems to be hemorrhaging a significant number of its corporatists as well. Perhaps just for this election, perhaps for a longer prior, that three-legged stool no longer exists, and all the pundits working with that as their base assumption are likely to be off in their predictions.

Meanwhile, the coverage is virtually ignoring

the role of Wyoming and Michigan in affecting the dynamics of the GOP race. How many of you have been watching today as Wyoming assigns fourteen delegates to Republicans, four so far to Romney and one to Duncan Hunter? [Update: Last count, Romney took 8 delegates.] Romney looks set to pick up as many delegates in Wyoming as are available in New Hampshire. And even assuming McCain wins New Hampshire (which I'm not assuming), I couldn't begin to tell you what will happen in Michigan's primary the following week. Like Wyoming, Michigan has lost half its Republican delegates, but that still leaves it with 30 and still makes it the biggest state to vote thus far. From what I've heard, the party has been pushing Mitt for some time—and that might work in this state, where lots of public buildings bear daddy Romney's name. But it's also a state in which McCain scored a big victory in 2000. And who knows what Michigan's own brand of wingnut Christian Conservatives will do? Huck might bring Chuck Norris around and score a chunk of delegates to recoup the lead heading into South Carolina. Finally, I can't even predict what Michigan's Democrats will do. Hillary is the only viable candidate on the ballot; so will Dems vote for her, take the initiative to vote "uncommitted," or cross over a wreck havoc like we did in 2000? All of these complexities (and the 42 delegates no one seems to be talking about) come before South Carolina and another forgotten GOP primary—the heavily Mormon Nevada.

All of which is to say that I think the assumptions of many, if not most, of those doing the punditing are questionable if not already proven wrong. I don't think Mitt is out if he loses NH, because he's got two winnable states with a lot more delegates even assuming Huckabee romps in SC. At the same time, aside from some heavily Mormon states, I'm not sure how many corporatists are still going to vote for the GOP this time around. So it may well be that Huckabee wins big in a party that only commands the support of a small fraction of the country.