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Forecasting 2024

By Matt A. Mayer

Though the dust isn't settled yet on the 2020 presidential election, it is never too early to speculate on who may throw their hat in the ring for 2024, assuming Joe Biden does indeed become president on January 20, 2021. Whether Biden runs for reelection will remain a hot topic as the weight of the presidency impacts his already suspect mental capacity. He would be 82-years-old in 2024 and far beyond the age that many Americans would believe is a wise one for such a demanding job.

Regardless, a silver lining for Republicans of losing in 2024 is that history suggests they have a better chance of success in 2024 than had Trump won reelection. After all, since Franklin Roosevelt/Harry Truman, only once has a party secured The White House in three straight elections, which occurred when George H.W. Bush won Ronald Reagan's third term. Thus, a win this year would have made a win in 2024 unlikely.

It goes without saying that if Donald Trump (he will be 78 years old in 2024) decides to seek a second term again, then there won't be much of a Republican primary other than a few NeverTrump candidates deeply engaged in a quixotic quest. The reality is 95% of Republicans voted for Trump in record numbers in 2020 and his presidential record leaves little room to oust him. If Trump wants another shot, he will get it.

After eight years of being governed by a president in his seventies or eighties, I suspect a younger candidate will provide an important contrast to Biden, especially if he ages as many expect him to age over the next four years. Someone with youthful exuberance and experience could play well with younger and middle-aged voters.

There are four categories of candidates for 2024: Trump family and administration veterans; eager Trump allies; reluctant Trump allies; and NeverTrumpers. These categories matter a great deal because Trump's endorsement likely will ensure that candidate wins. The first two groups stand a solid chance of getting Trump's endorsement, whereas the third group will have to do some convincing to get it and the last group will be the target of Trump's enmity early and often.

Trump Family and Administration Veterans

Because family is thicker than loyalty, should Don Trump Jr. decide to run, it would be impossible for Trump not to support him. Don Jr. proved himself to be a very good campaigner on his dad's behalf. He is telegenic and hard-hitting like his dad, which Republican primary voters love. With the expected attacks on the Trump Organization by the New York Attorney

General and Democrats in Washington, I think Don Jr. will find another way to serve than running for President in 2024. At only 46-years-old in 2024, he will have plenty of time to run for the presidency over the next twenty years.

Though lacking the charisma of Trump and his son, Mike Pence (65 in 2024) served loyally for four years as Trump's Vice President. He took many bullets for Trump and toed the line when doing so likely conflicted with his own views and self-interest. He has more than earned the right to Trump's endorsement and support should he decide to run in 2024. He would be wise to run on a Trumpist agenda, but without the Trump personality traits that alienated some key voters.

If I was advising Pence, I'd tell him to nail down Trump and Don Jr. as soon as possible on whether one of them will run and then announce a likely run in 2024 if neither man opts to run. Such a move would clear the field and create a vice-presidential race among the remaining field. I also would get to work on a book that explains and defends his work as the head of the administration's COVID response. He has a strong story to tell, but the media has worked overtime to warp that story to help the Democrats.

After Pence, Mike Pompeo (60) and Nikki Haley (52) were loyal cabinet members who unequivocally pushed the Trump agenda at the treacherous State Department and United Nations. As a result, Pompeo and Haley are next in line for a Trump endorsement. Frankly, a ticket featuring both of them would be very formidable, as it leverages their foreign policy credentials and Haley's two terms as South Carolina's governor. The challenge for Pompeo and Haley will be in finding highly visible perches where they can remain national figures over the next three years.

The one obvious upside with Haley is she is a woman, so stands the best chance to win over the female vote and become the first woman to win the presidency. It would be ironic for the Left if Haley were to do so, as she would join Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel as a center-right woman who took the reins of power of a major western power. Liberals and progressives believe only their women deserve to break that glass ceiling.

Eager Trump Allies

The next group includes Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (46), South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem (52), former Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal (53), and former Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker (57). All four have been

strong supporters of Trump during his term. As governors, they also possess solid executive experience that will help should one of them reach The White House. DeSantis will be up for reelection in 2022, so his fate will depend on how that effort goes. Noem currently has captured the Republican base's attention given her unapologetic stance to keep South Dakota open during the pandemic. Like DeSantis, she'll run for reelection in 2022 so will remain on the national scene. The issue for both Jindal and Walker is they have to find ways to remain relevant over the next few years, which won't be easy.

Reluctant Trump Allies

The third group includes Ted Cruz (53), Marco Rubio (53), Rick Scott (71), and Tim Scott (59). The problem for both Cruz and Rick Scott is that they are up for reelection in 2024 so have to choose whether to run for reelection and a likely win or run for the presidency in what will be a potentially crowded field. Because both men are behind the first two groups of candidates, they should pass on the presidency and run for reelection.

As for Rubio and Tim Scott, the compelling aspects of their candidacies would be their respective racial backgrounds. As a Cuban, Rubio will further solidify the Hispanic vote in Florida and could attract Hispanics in other key states like Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, and Texas. With the gains Trump made among African-Americans, especially men, Scott could continue peeling off African-American voters from the Democratic Party. His work on law enforcement reforms and other key issues make him a very attractive candidate nationally. Despite their less-than-full-throated Trump support, the Republican Party would be idiotic not to include both men on a short-list of vice-presidential candidates.

NeverTrumpers

This group also could be called the Don Quixotes after the Cervantes character who imagined his greatness as a chivalrous knight-errant, but merely was a delusional man riding an ass fighting windmills. This group includes former Ohio Governor John Kasich (72), U.S. Senator and former presidential candidate Mitt Romney (77), and Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse (52). Romney is up for reelection in 2024 so it would be hard for him to run again. Plus, actor Scott Baio is threatening a primary challenge given his anti-Trump actions, including being the only Republican to vote for Trump's impeachment.

Kasich suffers from delusions of grandeur and a messianic complex in which he believes he was born to become president. His five-year opposition to Trump won't ever be forgotten by the Republican base. He has as much chance of winning the Republican nomination as Uri Geller does of bending a spoon with his mind.

As for Sasse, the reality is few voters actually know who he is. He may misinterpret his clout with CNN as relevance among primary voting Republicans, but he'll quickly learn should he enter the fray that the number of CNN appearances are inversely proportionate to Republican primary votes.

Assuming neither Trump nor Don Jr. run in 2024, I'd expect to see Pence, Pompeo, and Haley as the top contenders for the presidential nomination, with DeSantis, Noem, Rubio, and Tim Scott on the vice-presidential short-list. Any combination of these candidates would make a formidable ticket except a Haley-Scott ticket which isn't allowed constitutionally as fellow South Carolinians. I also think it will be hard for Republicans to run two white men together, especially when there are such highly qualified minority candidates available who can expand the Republican tent even more than Trump did.

In looking ahead, Republicans should feel very good they have such a deep and talented bench.

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