



Is Pawlenty Plenty?

The Republicans' confused assortment of announced presidential candidates — as well as unannounced candidates and distant possibilities of candidates — seems to be clarifying somewhat. The withdrawal of Donald Trump and Mike Huckabee, as well as the withdrawal of much of Newt Gingrich's staff, seems like a much-needed weeding-out process.

Although Mitt Romney has been leading in the polls, his lead over other potential rivals has been slim. Being a "front-runner" this far ahead of next year's nominating convention would not mean much, even if Governor Romney's lead and his support were much bigger than they are.



The albatross around Romney's neck is the RomneyCare medical plan that he signed into law in Massachusetts. His refusal to repudiate RomneyCare means that, as a presidential candidate, he would forfeit one of the strongest argument against Barack Obama, who has ObamaCare as his albatross.

Nor is an about-face on RomneyCare a viable option for Mitt Romney. He has already done too many other about-faces for the voters to be likely to trust him after another. He has painted himself into a corner.

Articulate Newt Gingrich might be the best Republican to go toe-to-toe with Obama in presidential debates — and a lack of effective articulation has been the Republicans' big weakness for years. Try to name a Republican renowned for his articulation, besides Ronald Reagan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln.

While Newt Gingrich is not at that level, he is definitely a cut above most Republican candidates in talking. He also represents a cherished moment in Republican history, when they took the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years, as a result of Gingrich's "contract with America" election strategy.

But that was back in the 1990s, and many younger voters today may have no idea what that was all about. Worse yet, former Speaker Gingrich has shown too many signs of opportunism — including his wholly unnecessary swipe at Republican Congressman Paul Ryan's attempt to bring some fiscal sanity to Washington — to be trusted.

His own staff should know him better than the rest of us. Their recent resignations should mark the end of a very promising career that did not live up to all its promises. Even so, Gingrich performed a real service to the country as Speaker of the House of Representatives, which brought federal spending under control and produced what the media chose to call "the Clinton surplus."

Among the other announced Republican presidential candidates, former governor Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota talks the most sense and shows the most courage. When you tell people in a corn-producing



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state like Iowa that you want to cut back on Ethanol subsidies, that takes guts, because Iowa will also produce the first results in next year's primary campaign season. And first results, like other first impressions, carry a lot of weight.

But somebody has got to talk sense about our dire economic problems — and it is painfully clear that Barack Obama will not be that somebody. The fact that Pawlenty has put his neck on the line to do so is a big plus.

Tim Pawlenty cites his track record to back up his statements. That includes reducing Ethanol subsidies when he was governor of Minnesota and cutting the growth of state government spending from just over 20 percent a year to under 2 percent a year.

Governor Pawlenty fought Minnesota's transit unions over runaway pensions and hung tough during a long strike. "Today," he says, "we have a transit system that gives commuters a ride, without taking the taxpayers for a ride."

Some fear that Governor Pawlenty doesn't have the charisma and fireworks rhetoric that they would like to see in a candidate. Charisma and rhetoric are what gave us the current disastrous administration in Washington. Charisma and rhetoric gave people in other countries even bigger disasters, up to and including Hitler.

Politicians and the media may want a candidate with verbal fireworks but the people want jobs. As Tim Pawlenty put it: "Fluffy promises of hope and change don't buy our groceries, make our mortgage payments, put gas in our cars, or pay for our children's clothes."

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