

## **Obama Doubles Down Against History**

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By nature, most politicians are risk-takers. One cannot enter the political arena without being willing to risk his name, family privacy, and, sometimes, fortune on the winds of political lady luck. As with most gamblers, however, most politicians fail to recognize the warning signs and either hold 'em or fold 'em. Senator Barack Obama's selection of Senator Joe Biden as his vice presidential candidate is the latest example.

Because Vice President Dick Cheney decided not to run for the presidency, the 2008 race is the first "open" election since the 1952 election when General Dwight D. Eisenhower defeated Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson. Both candidates came from outside the Beltway. In 1956, they faced each other again and the outcome remained the same.

Since the 1956 election, only five presidential races have involved at least one candidate who came from a career outside the Beltway. All five races involved sitting or former governors. Those races were: 1976 President Gerald Ford v. Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter; 1980 President Jimmy Carter v. former California Governor Ronald Reagan; 1988 Vice President George H.W. Bush v. Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis; 1996 President Bush v. Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton; and 2000 Vice President Al Gore v. Texas Governor George W. Bush. Of the five races, the Washington outsider won four out of five races, or 80%. Many attribute the lone loss (Dukakis to Bush) to the popularity of President Reagan (as in Bush won (re)election to Reagan's third term).

The first history lesson, therefore, is that voters for the presidency prefer candidates from outside the Beltway. In the 2008 race, neither presidential candidate comes from outside the Beltway.

In the fourteen presidential elections from 1952 to 2004, only five elections included at least one candidate that was a sitting U.S. senator. Those races were: 1960 Vice President Richard M. Nixon v. Senator John F. Kennedy; 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson v. Senator Barry Goldwater; 1972 President Nixon v. Senator George McGovern; 1996 President Clinton v. Senator Bob Dole; and 2004 President Bush v. Senator John Kerry. Of those five races, the sitting senator lost four out of five races, or 20%. Many attribute the lone win (Kennedy over Nixon) to the involvement of fraud (as in 9,000 votes to Mayor Richard Daley's Chicago Machine and 46,000 votes to Johnson's Texas Machine).

The second history lesson, therefore, is that American voters for the presidency do not prefer sitting U.S. senators. In the 2008 race, both presidential candidates are sitting U.S. senators.

So, the 2008 race gives American voters their least preferred candidates: two inside the Beltway candidates who are sitting U.S. senators. As a result of this rarity, the selection of vice presidential candidates, while typically negligible on the outcome of the election, becomes potentially game changing. Each candidate has the chance to address history's lessons by selecting an outside the Beltway vice presidential candidate.

With the selection of Senator Biden, Senator Obama decided to totally ignore history's lessons. Given that his campaign is based entirely on change, his selection of Senator Biden creates even more dissonance with voters, as the U.S. Senate isn't known as a place where change occurs.

Even more problematic, Senators Obama and Biden are both lawyers. Among voters, lawyers rank among the least respected and liked professions. Typically, lawyers are slightly more popular than politicians. Senators Obama and Biden have a total of seven years of private sector experience. Of the seven years, six years involve practicing law. In contrast, between them, they have spent 49 years as elected politicians. According to the National Journal, Senators Obama and Biden possess the first and third most liberal voting records in the U.S. Senate.

John McCain has spent 26 years as a politician. Before politics, he spent 27 years as a member of the military, which included five and a half years spent as a Prisoner of War in Vietnam. While the democrats will try to portray McCain as a Washington insider, most voters across the United States see McCain as a maverick who has fought the ways of Washington. Given the nastiness of the 2000 primary with President Bush, it will be hard for democrats to stick McCain with the "Friend of Bush" tag. According to the National Journal, McCain has a middle of the road voting record.

In a battle of biographies, the democrats' biographies don't sound like winning ones. With them, the democrats have a problem.

The problem is the Electoral College and a little more history.

It is a safe assumption that both candidates will hold the states that their party won by 5% or more in 2000 and 2004, except possibly Colorado, Virginia, and Missouri (more on those three states later). With those status quo holds, McCain would lead Obama with 216 to 183 electoral votes. There is little evidence that any of those states will break with recent history.

Next, despite Republican talk that it can win the big five, history indicates that Obama will maintain the democrat's winning streaks in Michigan (Bush 1988), Minnesota (Nixon 1972), Oregon (Reagan 1984), Pennsylvania (Bush 1988), and Wisconsin (Reagan 1984). If President Bush (41) couldn't win Oregon in 1988 following two successful Reagan terms and President Bush (43) couldn't win Michigan (John Engler), Pennsylvania (Tom Ridge), and Wisconsin (Tommy Thompson) in 2000 with republican governors, no republican is going to win those states in 2008 with democrat governors (Jennifer Granholm; Ted Kulongoski; Ed Rendell; Jim Doyle) and a tough Bush economy.

As for Minnesota, non-Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party candidates don't win major statewide office unless a strong third party challenger is in the race (Jesse Ventura won with 37% in 1998; Tim Pawlenty won with 44% in 2002; Pawlenty barely won reelection with 47% (by less than 1%) in 2006) or democrats politicize a funeral (the Paul Wellstone election where Norm Coleman won by 2% over last minute replacement former Vice President Mondale), which isn't the case in the 2008 election. With those states, Obama would lead McCain with 248 to 216 electoral votes.

That leaves the five toss-up states of Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Ohio, as well as the three exception states from above. Those eight states are worth 74 electoral votes. Of those states, given the sheer enthusiasm for and primary turnout differential between the parties, it seems like a safe bet that Obama will win Iowa and New Hampshire, which would give him 259 electoral votes – only 11 shy of the presidency.

This is where the Biden selection negatively impacts Senator Obama's chances to get those remaining 11 electoral votes.

In 2004, President Bush comfortably won Virginia (8% win). While the state seems to be trending democrat given recent statewide races, a democrat presidential candidate hasn't won Virginia since President Johnson's landslide in 1964. Two sitting U.S. senators from Illinois and Delaware with extremely liberal records aren't going to convince the voters outside of Northern Virginia to vote for them. Given McCain's military credentials and Virginia's strong presence of military men and women, McCain should carry Virginia, which would give him 229 electoral votes.

In Missouri, President Bush won it in 2004 by over 7% of the vote. Even giving credit for the enormous turnout difference in the primary (820,453 democrat voters to 584,618 republican voters), overcoming a 7% defeat just four years earlier seems to be an unlikely event. With the liberal voting records of Senators Obama and Biden, their total lack of private sector experience, and their inside the Beltway ticket, McCain and his moderate voting record should have the edge, thereby giving him 240 electoral votes.

In Colorado, President Bush saw his roughly 9% margin of victory in 2000 get cut in half in 2004. With the substantial statewide and state house and senate wins over the last four cycles for democrats and the continued influx of liberals from California, Obama is likely to make Colorado an even closer election in 2008. The problem is that Obama's strong draw in urban centers and college towns gain him little in Colorado as Denver and Boulder traditionally heavily favor democrats already.

As was shown in the 2002 United States Senate race and 2004 presidential election, so long as the margins of victory in Douglas County and Colorado Springs negate the margins of defeat in Denver and Boulder, it is mathematically hard for a democrat to win the rest of the state given the rural communities in the rest of Colorado. Biden didn't add any element to the ticket to put these communities in play. With the large military presence in Colorado, McCain will keep its 9 electoral votes, leaving him with 249 electoral votes.

President Bush won both Nevada and New Mexico in 2004. Without Governor Bill Richardson on the Obama ticket, McCain, as the popular senator from the neighboring state, would seem to carry the advantage. Add in McCain's appeal to Hispanic voters due to his attempts to provide illegal immigrants a pathway to citizenship and his chances of winning those states is even stronger. As with Colorado, east coast Biden fails to change the dynamics in these states, too. Assuming McCain holds those states for the republicans, he would have 259 electoral votes.

That leaves just Ohio with both candidates needing it to win the presidency.

Hillary Clinton destroyed Obama in the Ohio primary. He won four urban counties (Cuyahoga; Franklin; Hamilton; and Montgomery) and one college town county (Athens). Obama received less than 40% of the primary vote in 62 out of 88 counties starting in the northeastern corner of Ohio, swinging down through the Appalachian counties, and then driving north into the traditional republican counties. It is an understatement to say that a ticket with two liberal U.S. senators from Illinois and Delaware with over 49 years spent as politicians mostly inside the Beltway will be able to reverse the views of those Ohioans who didn't buy what Obama was selling just eight months earlier.

Unless McCain also fails to heed history's lessons, he will hold Ohio and the presidency for Republicans with a 279 to 259 electoral vote victory. Specifically, McCain must select an outsider as his running mate. It frankly doesn't matter who that outsider is as much as it matters that he or she is not a Washington insider. McCain's choice won't win any more states for him, but he could neutralize the advantage he has over the Obama-Biden ticket if he selects a Washington insider. Such a slip likely would put Colorado, Missouri, Nevada, and New Mexico and their 30 electoral votes in play, which are enough electoral votes to lose the presidency.

Most Americans view Washington insiders with a healthy dose of skepticism. In presidential elections, outsiders almost always beat insiders and ultimate insiders (the U.S. Senate is considered the most exclusive club in America) almost always lose to anyone else. In the 2008 presidential election, Americans will choose between two tickets. The democrat ticket consists of two liberal U.S. Senators from two liberal states. The republican ticket so far consists of one moderate U.S. Senator from a moderate state and one unknown.

Senator Obama doubled down against history by selecting Senator Biden as his running mate. My bet is that McCain will ask lady luck to blow on his dice and put his wager on an outsider for his running mate. With the Electoral College advantage he currently possesses, as a student of history and military strategy, McCain knows when to hold 'em. Why gamble with history?

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