

## **Right should hope Jeb Bush rethinks 2012 race**

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Forget President Obama's low approval ratings and the economic doldrums. The path to the White House still goes through the Electoral College. That means basic math will drive the 2012 presidential race to get to the magic 270 Electoral College votes required to win.

Regardless of whom Republicans nominate, 46 states and the District of Columbia can be assigned already. Obama will win states worth 247 electoral votes: California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.

Despite their best efforts, Republicans haven't won Illinois, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania or Washington since Ronald Reagan's 1984 landslide win. Reagan's 1980 win was the last one for Republicans in Wisconsin, and Republicans haven't won Minnesota since Richard Nixon in 1972. New Mexico is the toughest call, but Obama's sizable win in 2008 portends a repeat in 2012.

In 2008, Obama won Colorado and Nevada by 9 and 12.5 percentage points, respectively. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada and Sen. Michael Bennett of Colorado both survived the Republican wave in 2010.

Coloradans also elected Democrat John Hickenlooper as governor, and the Colorado Republican Party just lost its best strategist with the retirement of guru Dick Wadhams. The likelihood that Obama will lose either state in 2012 is thus low, leaving him with 262 electoral votes, eight short of 270.

The Republican nominee will win states worth 180 electoral votes: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming. All but West Virginia are reliably red, and the Obama administration's job-killing moves against coal render him done in West Virginia.

Given the financial crisis in September 2008 and Obama's "blank slate" with voters, his wins in Indiana, North Carolina and Virginia likely won't be repeated. Voters know him now and he won't have better conditions than he did in 2008. Those three red states will return to form, giving Republicans 219 electoral votes.

With those allocations, Obama is a mere eight electoral votes shy of reelection with the remaining 57 electoral votes in Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Ohio. A win in Florida seals his re-election.

That is where former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush plays a critical role. Unlike the other Republicans seeking the White House who aren't generating much enthusiasm, Jeb Bush's name on the ticket virtually guarantees Florida's 29 electoral votes for the Republican ticket, which would raise their total to 248 electoral votes. Of course, the Bush name brings with it the baggage of his older brother, but the Bush name doesn't flip a single red state noted above into the blue column.

The key question is: do the negatives associated with the Bush name outweigh the positives of Jeb in the three remaining tossup states? Unlike his brother, Jeb is a top policy mind in his own right and a gifted orator. One can easily imagine him going toe to toe with Obama on any issue and winning.

Although Iowa gave Obama a 9.5 percent win in 2008, it tossed out the Democrat incumbent and put Terry Branstad back in the governor's chair last November.

New Hampshire strongly supported Obama in 2008, but sent a full Republican slate to Washington and cut Democrat Governor John Lynch's win from 41.3 percent to just 7.6 percent in 2010.

Ohio also went with Obama in 2008 by 4.5 percentage points, but swung back heavily Republican in 2010, with Republicans winning all statewide elections, taking back the Ohio House, and increasing its majority in the Ohio Senate.

So Obama needs Ohio or Iowa and New Hampshire to win; Republicans need Ohio and Iowa or New Hampshire to win.

One way to substantially enhance his chance of winning would be for Jeb Bush to add popular Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels as his vice presidential running mate. Daniels' appeal as a no-nonsense, Harley-riding regular guy would play well in both Ohio and Iowa.

Plus, the contrast on the presidential ballot line between two successful two-term Republican governors and two former Democratic senators (Obama and Vice President Biden of Delaware) would provide voters the stark choice they lacked in 2008.

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