

## George Pataki for President: “Right Wing Republicans with a Human Face”

*While for many commentators, the Democratic nomination for the 2016 presidential election has already been sewn up by Hillary Clinton, the Republican field remains wide open. **Richard Brodsky** argues that the field is crying out for a shakeup, one that may be on the way in the form of a presidential bid from the former Governor of New York, George Pataki. As a skilled strategic thinker, Pataki may be able to blur the lines between the GOP’s establishment wing and the Tea Party, thus pulling it back from its current reactionary turn.*



If he’s serious, the Republicans of New Hampshire and elsewhere are in for an interesting time. George Pataki is heading north from New York, where he retired as an undefeated three-term Republican Governor in 2006.

Do not underestimate him. There’s a sort of aw-shucks persona he puts out there. He’s smart. He’s not encumbered by previous entanglements with the nutty Republican infrastructure. He beat a Democratic liberal icon, Mario Cuomo. He is/is not conservative enough. The big money boys like him.

I worked with him and against him for 12 years. He’s got genuine human qualities that are admirable. He’s a stone-cold political killer (His big move was defeating the Republican Senator who gave him his start, and he was Al D’Amato’s protégé). Unlike a lot of Republicans he surrounded himself with competent people who could think strategically as well as manage day-to-day stuff.

But is he conservative enough? Depends. Conventional wisdom is that the Republican primary electorate is interested only in red-meat, take-no-prisoners, Tea Party reaction. Even though he knows better, Pataki is capable of providing aid and comfort to the hard right, without the baggage of crazy (like a fox) Ted Cruz or Rand Paul. But when push comes to shove Pataki will have to make a few existential choices. He’s not rabidly anti-choice. His environmental record on land preservation is pretty good. He dealt well with the Latino community. He negotiated agreements with Democrats when he had to. What he will want to do is blur the lines enough to keep everybody happy. He could become America’s version of Czechoslovakia’s Alexander Dubcek, who proclaimed “Socialism With A Human Face” except substitute “Reactionary Republicans” for “Socialism.”

That may not fly in today’s Republican Party.



George Pataki Credit: [Christopher Leonard](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0](#))

There's a legitimate question as to how politically suicidal the GOP electorate has become. There are elements of the Republican coalition that will not accept any deviation from an anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, anti-immigration reform, anti-EPA, anti-drone, anti-Food Stamps catechism. That's a lot of anti's and they seem to mean what they say. Former Governor and current Fox Newsie Mike Huckabee is positioning himself to lead a right-wing third party effort if Republicans don't hew the line on social issues. He's ready to "become an independent," adding, "I'm gone.... I'm tired of this."

The corporate wing of the GOP is willing to see him go. The Karl Rove-led faction is willing to walk away from some or all of the social issues as long as the pro-corporation, pro-tax cut economic core of the Party's Wall Street base is preserved. They've managed to dispose of the kind of bizarre right-wing Senate candidates that cost the Republicans so dearly two years ago. They are now looking for a candidate for President who will show some flexibility, so to speak. Pataki would land comfortably in the Rove camp, with all the fundraising and organization benefits that come with it. A Pataki candidacy could become a proxy for an ideological Armageddon that will shape the GOP for decades.

The current Republican field cries out for a shakeup. Each of the early contenders have managed to step in it on one issue or another. Marco Rubio has never recovered from hinting at a pathway to citizenship on immigration. Rand Paul has never come clean about repeal of drug laws. Jeb Bush is, well, Jeb Bush. Ted Cruz is, well, Ted Cruz. None of them match up against Hillary.

All of them face a fundamental conundrum. The American electorate is just not as far to the right as the Republican electorate. Are Republicans going to again put ideological straightjackets around their candidate, just like they did to Mitt Romney in 2012? Can anyone thread the needle, and become the nominee without offending non-Republicans? Keep your eye on Just-Plain-George. Stranger candidacies have emerged. Remember Obama?

*This article is a longer version of a piece that [first appeared the Huffington Post](#).*

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