

Hello Everyone,

February 19 redux

Some of you may recall that it was apparent in late February that Barack was going to win the nomination -- barring some unforeseen disaster. But, it was in the media's self-interest at that time to continue to call it a "tight horse race", and it was in Hillary Clinton's self-interest at that time to pledge to stay in it until June. But, the real story was that Barack had a virtually insurmountable lead in Pledged Delegates in February, which was what mattered most under the Democrat's unusual and highly-articulated rules.

I think we are now at that point in the general election. Here's why.

Two high risk decisions

As I have written before, I have little confidence in polls -- national polls, Electoral College polls, or exit polls. Sen. McCain's decisions are a much better indicator of the state of the race than any poll. In fact, he is our best pollster.

Sen. McCain has now made 2 highly risky decisions that clearly signaled that he knew he was going to lose unless he took some drastic steps: 1) his pick of Sarah Palin, and 2) last week's supposed "suspension" of his campaign. A single data point may be an aberration, but 2 data points indicate a clear trend.

If Sen. McCain didn't believe he was falling irretrievably behind, he would not have taken such huge gambles. No quarterback throws a Hail Mary pass if his team is winning or the score is close. No QB attempts a trick play based on distraction or deception -- that is likely to produce a fumble or an interception -- unless he is in desperate straits. And, even if it works once, it's hard to repeat.

The Palin pick

This was an impulsive attempt to change the momentum of the game. While it gave Sen. McCain's campaign an instant boost, like a sugar high, it wears off quickly. And, like a quarterback hiding the ball, he can't hide her forever.

I expect that Sarah Palin will prove to be an increasingly heavy lodestone around Sen. McCain's neck in the next 36 days. He may have thought his downside was Dan Quayle, who didn't sink George H.W. Bush. Sadly for Sen. McCain, to paraphrase a line from an earlier debate, "Sarah Palin is no Dan Quayle." I predict that the vice presidential pick will matter this time. In highlighting his recklessness, and ironically, his unwillingness to put his country first, it will help to sink Sen. McCain.

Sen. McCain's people can try to pound facts into Sarah Palin's head, but they can't actually educate her, teaching her grammar and teaching her to think clearly and coherently in 2 short months. It is even more instructive to read her than it is to hear her. Here is how Bob Herbert of the *New York Times* excerpted a portion of her interview with Katie Couric:

Ms. Couric asked Ms. Palin to explain how Alaska's proximity to Russia "enhances your foreign policy credentials."

"Well, it certainly does," Ms. Palin replied, "because our, our next-door neighbors are foreign countries, there in the state that I am the executive of. And there—"

Gently interrupting, Ms. Couric asked, "Have you ever been involved in any negotiations, for example, with the Russians?"

"We have trade missions back and forth," said Ms. Plain, "We do. It's very important when you consider even national security issues with Russia. As Putin rears his head and comes into the airspace of the United States of America, where do they go? It's Alaska. It's just right over the border. It is from Alaska that we send those out to make sure that an eye is being kept on this very powerful nation, Russia, because they are right out there. They are right next to our state."

The Palin choice was designed in part to distract voters from the very fact Sen. McCain has been in Washington for 26 years and is a Republican with close ties to President Bush. Hurricane Gustav was temporarily used as an added distraction for that same purpose. It will be fascinating to see how the McCain campaign seeks to distract us from this Thursday's vice presidential debate. They are now boxed into creating distractions from their main distraction. Will there be another hurricane or its equivalent? I am loath to doubt their creativity or disingenuousness.

Suspending his campaign

Sen. McCain's second rash move was his out-of-the-blue decision to fake the suspension of his campaign last week. As Frank Rich of the *Times* points out (see attachment), Sen. McCain's on-again off-again campaign suspension and threatened debate avoidance had some short-term benefits -- distracting attention from the dissipation of the "Palin bump" and the unveiling of the real Sarah Palin in the Couric interview. Distractions from his main distraction. And in the process, he looks "impulsive, impetuous, and impatient" as another columnist had it.

No highly experienced politician would put himself through such potentially destructive contortions unless he was staring defeat squarely in the face. That's why I say forget the pundits pointing to the polls as they breathlessly strain to retain our attention. Just follow Sen. McCain's on-the-field decisions closely. They are far and away the best barometers available to us.

Redoubling our efforts

All of this is not intended to say “relax; we've got this game won”. It is meant to reassure the anxious among us. But, more importantly, it is to say that victory is clearly within reach. Our opponent obviously thinks so. We have to continue to play hard in the waning minutes of the fourth quarter. We have to redouble our efforts by canvassing, convincing, calling, and giving. If we do, we will prove Sen. McCain’s polling instincts right -- Barack Obama is going to win the presidency.

Passion

One last note for those nervous supporters who have urged Barack to show more passion and even flashes of anger in the face of all the Republican lies. That is not who Barack is and, in my opinion, it would be ill-advised.

Barack’s self-awareness is one of his great strengths. He wrote in Dreams From My Father “...another trick that I learned [as a teenage]: People were satisfied so long as you are courteous and smiled and made no sudden moves. They were more than satisfied; they were relieved — such a pleasant surprise to find a well-mannered young black man who didn't seem angry all the time.” Barack realized long ago that anger no longer works for black leaders. And, grouchiness probably doesn’t work any longer for white ones either.

Please pass it on.

Chuck