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## McCain: The John Kerry of '08

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By Terry Michael - The deal wasn't completely sealed on Super Tuesday, but the Republican Party seems suicidally set on nominating its own John Kerry in 2008, further depressing a despondent base, while offering little to the center on the defining issues of this election, ending the war and reviving the economy.

In early January 2004, I ran into a reporter friend and lamented, as a partisan Democrat, that we were about to nominate the worst possible candidate for president, a have-it-every-way legislator who supported the war in Iraq.

"Oh no," my journalist friend protested. "He's got Vietnam War hero credentials, and foreign policy experience." It was a perfect reflection of received wisdom shared by the Democratic political establishment, which looked in the mirror and saw Mr. Kerry, and a capital-based press corps, living near and quoting the usual suspects.

It was not the ideological base of the party coming to the aid of John Kerry. The party's anti-war core had boosted Howard Dean to front-runner status. It was the Democrats' K Street wing, which, like Mr. Kerry, had supported the neo-cons' elective venture into Mesopotamia, and which was deluding itself into believing the center of American politics could be reached with a candidate simultaneously for and against the war.

A similar scenario is now playing itself out among the pragmatic, interest-group dominated, Beltway-based Republican Party establishment (not to be confused with the party's ideological base), desperately trying to hold onto power which has corrupted them. Gasping for four more years, their desperation came through clearly in this recent assault from the GOP establishment. "He doesn't play by the same rules the rest of us do," said Charlie Black, a senior McCain strategist, to The New York Times Jan. 24.

Indeed, Mitt Romney doesn't play by the rules of the GOP power brokers, which Mr. Black, a quintessential Washington lobbyist, so perfectly embodies. Mr. Romney is a governor, the breed of politician, along with generals and some vice presidents and cabinet members, who Americans have almost always elected president.

Only three times in history have we selected someone directly out of Congress: James Garfield in 1880; Warren Harding in 1920; and, the only time in the candidate-centered, media-driven political era, Kennedy in 1960.

That last time is instructive to the 2008 race, because Democrats now have a better than even chance of nominating JFK-like Barack Obama, who can transcend the baggage that comes with being a split-every-difference legislator without executive experience.

Republicans understood clearly in 1996 how much burden comes with sitting-senator credentials when they talked the ultimate creature of Congress, Bob Dole, into resigning his seat before the party convention.

The collective groan of the Republican status quo, a noise inflated by a McCain-loving media, is now rushing to the aid of one of their own, his press-driven "independent" image not withstanding.

Of course, Mr. Romney has to live with the media narrative (left over from 2004) into which his "flip flops" played. He hired some of the same Rove-ing band of GOP operatives whose minds were stuck in the 1980s, when the religious right was more appealing to a Depression Era center and was entering its love-hate relationship with the libertarian and Main Street-Wall Street wings of the GOP.

Had Mr. Romney used his status as the monogamist in the race, with five vibrant sons, to reflect "family values," he could have focused from the beginning on his strengths, executive leadership and free-market prowess.

But he committed the ultimate press sin of apparent hypocrisy, changing his mind on gay rights, abortion and the 2nd Amendment, issues that matter most to cable-babbling talking heads. Never mind that the press favorite, the senator from The Daily Show, had blasted Jerry Falwell and then went to Liberty University to grovel before him.

No, the media's favorite "maverick" was the co-author of their beloved McCain-Feingold, an assault on free political speech that should be an embarrassment to anyone in the press corps who takes the First Amendment seriously.

The psycho-graphic landscape of the 2008 campaign is increasingly being defined by the Barack Obama Movement, not Clinton, Inc., energizing the Democratic base and appealing to the center with demands to end the war and revive the economy, move into a hopeful future and change politics as usual. In that environment, the other party seems to be preparing to nominate a standard bearer who: (1) appears to be satisfied with 100 more years of war, (2) lacks any significant free-market economic plans, and (3) at 71 is all about the past. And he is someone whose libertarian and socially and culturally conservative party base literally can't stand him. Go figure.

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