THE BLOG

Gore-Feingold vs McCain-Condi

By Marty Kaplan
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There are, I know, many fine reasons not to indulge in the '08 game. It's a distraction from '06; it's a political lifetime between now and then, and anything can happen to change the calculus; it focuses on personalities rather than message; it plays to the press's prurient jones for horserace over substance; etc.

But maybe there's also a productive purpose for these fantasy matchups. Maybe they can be tools to figure out — right now, today — what we believe about the leadership pool in American politics, and how winning campaigns are actually conducted, and the direction we want the country to take.

In the unscientific poll now going on over at dailykos.com, it looks like Gore is way out ahead among kossacks who think he can be talked into running (or talked into admitting he's running); without Gore in the field, Feingold is the runaway favorite. Now this of course can be attributed to the political demographics of the self-selected netroots who read that blog, but I'd like to imagine, just for a moment, that Gore truly is the best candidate that the Democrats could nominate, based on his issue positions, his experience, and his (Lordy, it's a miracle) spectacular public voice.

If Feingold were willing to take the second spot, it'd make a ticket that could not only inspire the base to turn out in record numbers, but also to win. (I'm persuadable that Obama might be ready to run as VP in '08).

On the Republican side, I'm trying to figure out what their strongest ticket might be. I'm not paying attention to their right-dominated nominating process and its possibly self-destructive outcome; I'm trying to stack the deck against Democrats as effectively as I can.

If you think there's a stronger Republican ticket than McCain-Condi, then name it.

If you think there's a stronger Democratic ticket than Gore-Feingold, then name it.

And whoever you think would be the Democratic presidential candidate best for the country AND best able to win, then list his or her more troubling negatives, and see if there's a way to surmount them.

Here's my list of Gore's biggest potential negatives:

The Hamlet thing. (Cuomo had this, too.) Gore says he doesn't want to run, but at a certain point, the rules of the nominating system can't create a draft. Saying no also creates a walking-back-the-cat problem. If we shouldn't have believed you then, why should we believe you now?

The speech in Saudi Arabia criticizing US anti-Arab abuse (lousy location choice for message)

The 2000 problem. He didn't campaign hard or well enough. He ran away from Clinton. He threw in the towel too soon.

The residue of 2000's negatives: "Buddist Temple." "He says he invented the Internet." The convention kiss. Tipper's rock lyrics campaign.

Backstage mischief by "prominent Democrats" with unparalleled access to the press and to political money.

The inevitable liberal/left/commie/pinko/ozone attack.

Have I left anything out? Are all of these surmountable?

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