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Obama-Romney for President



By Marty Kaplan

Forget the fantasy of Hillary Clinton taking Joe Biden's place on the 2012 ballot. Not only because it is not going to happen. The theory that having Hillary on the ticket would galvanize the base and that coveted independent voters, especially women, would break toward Democrats, has no deeper roots in empirical reality than creationism or climate change denial. It's just not the game-changer that Obama needs to hang on to the presidency, let alone give him a Congress that would be any less obstructionist than the one we have now.

Some Obama supporters don't think he'll need a Hail Mary pass. This view, which a developmental psychologist might call magical thinking, depends on widespread revulsion at the prospect of total GOP control of the government, an unappetizing nominee at the top of the Republican ticket and leveraging Occupy Wall Street-type discontent to benefit the Administration that enabled Tim Geithner and Larry Summers and shafted Elizabeth Warren.

I suppose there's also the possibility that unemployment and the economy will be moving in the right direction by November of next year, but if that's what it'll take for Obama to win the swing states, it's basically "Say goodnight, Gracie."

Obama's best hope is to change the dynamic of the race - to shake things up so that it's not a referendum on him (that is, on the lousy economy). To accomplish that, I have an admittedly bizarre but weirdly conceivable proposal: Obama could try to persuade Mitt Romney to be his running mate.

Start with the polling data saying that Americans want an end to the bickering and bitterness in Washington. Never mind the cockeyed injustice of holding Democrats and Republicans equally responsible for the nation's toxic gridlock; voters have no legal obligation to be informed about what's actually been going on. You want can't-we-all-get-along? Here ya go. An Obama-Romney ticket would have irresistible appeal to the kumbaya constituency.

It also would appeal to the president's inner conciliator. His recent spate of truth-telling about Republicans, while faintly encouraging to his disheartened base, runs counter to his nature. He really does believe that there's common ground to be found with the people who pledged to destroy him the moment he was elected, so why not make the

most of it? Let Obama be Obama. With Mitt on the ticket, and eventually just down the West Wing hall, every day could be bipartisan day.

Romney, of course, would need to be convinced to join Team Obama. It actually might be a good career move for him. After all, Republicans already think his professions of right-wing orthodoxy are inauthentic, and surely he'd be more comfortable in his skin if he could revert to the more moderate views he once held, before the Tea Party primary required him to go all un-mavericky. There's also the possibility that Romney, rather than being a closet socialist, is just a garden-variety opportunist, which would make it ideologically effortless for him to join a fusion ticket.

Obama-Romney could even sell itself as the third party that the punditocracy is pining for. If you liked Simpson-Bowles, you'll love Obama-Romney. Third parties have inadvertent consequences; they divide the opposition. With Obama-Romney, though, you get the bragging rights of upending the political chessboard, but without running the risk of throwing the race to a side you can't stand.

Why would Romney do it? My guess is that in Mitt Land, the current calculation is that he can withstand the \$20 million or more of negative media that Rick Perry is about to unleash on him. But by the time he gets the Republican nomination, he'll be damaged goods, and the base will like him even less than they do now. Better to be part of an exciting new experiment in American democracy than to drag his butt across the finish line with no mandate.

For Obama, convincing Romney to transcend petty partisanship would demonstrate strength. It might also increase his chances to get a Democratic Congress, though it's true that those odds could hardly get any worse. And for people who think there's not a dime's worth of difference between the parties, well, it would suggest that they might be right after all.

No, I don't think Obama-Romney will happen. It's a goofy solution to a dead serious problem that afflicts Democrats and Republicans alike. Our political system is not about to change. The plutocrats are more powerful than ever, and nothing on the horizon looks likely to change that. The 2012 election will be awash with special interest money, much of it secret and corporate. The ads that money will pay for will be as devious as ever. The Romney campaign, even with a break-the-mold running mate, will be passionless, except for the passion to defeat Obama. Whatever passion the Obama campaign manages to inspire this time around will be ignited not by dreams of change, but by nightmares of a Republican wrecking crew. It does make a difference which party wins. But it would make an even bigger difference if both parties lost.

This is my column from The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles. You can read more of my columns here, and e-mail me there if you'd like.

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