



BRODER'S CAUTION

Sunday, February 10, 2008

Every Sunday CUIP's president Jacqueline Salit and strategist and philosopher Fred Newman watch the political talk shows and discuss them. Here are excerpts from their dialogue on Sunday, February 10, 2008 after watching "The Chris Matthews Show" and "Meet the Press."

Salit: I was struck by David Broder's remark when Tim Russert said to him 'What do you see, what's the scenario?' in their discussion about how the super delegates are going to decide things on the Democratic side. Broder says 'The thing about this season is that all the scenarios have been wrong, so if we're sitting here today and we're saying the scenario is going to be that the super delegates will decide, that's going to turn out to be wrong, too.' Leaving aside any kind of prediction or calculation about how it's going to turn out, we are looking at a situation on the Democratic side where Obama is ahead in the popular vote, he's ahead in the number of states won, he's behind by a handful of delegates in the delegate count when you calculate in the super delegates, but the situation is very much in flux. Obama has demonstrated that he can be directly competitive with the Clintons and with the party machine.

Newman: I think what Obama has established, in many different ways, is that he can be elected president. I don't think Clinton has. Another way of putting that is that I think it's completely clear that all the Clinton supporters will go with Obama, though it's not completely clear that all the Obama supporters will go with Clinton. That's the big differentiation right now, I think. And that's a real factor because, first and foremost, the powers that be in the Democratic Party don't want to lose.

Salit: They don't want to lose the election.

Newman: They don't want to turn a clear victory into a defeat. They're concerned with that. So, we'll see how that plays. If you ask 'Who will make this decision?' I have no idea. But is it on the minds of lots of people, including those who have the capacity to determine what's going to happen? Very much so.

Salit: Yes. And on that very point, there has been detailed discussion about the super delegates and about the question that the party faces, namely, what if you end up in the situation where the super delegates overturn the popular will of the voters?

Newman: If that does occur, it won't be projected that way. We have to bear in mind the distinction between what's going to happen and how what's going to happen is projected. That's never going to be projected. Might it happen? This is the age of party autonomy, so they can decide all kinds of things. The Supreme Court claims they can...

Salit: The parties can set up whatever they like.

Newman: They can set up whatever rules they like. So, ultimately they'll make the decision. It's the Democratic primary, it's not the general election. And, ultimately the Democratic Party will make the decision as to who they nominate.

Salit: The independents are playing a very, very vital role, though this was less highlighted in the discussions today.

Newman: Less highlighted?

Salit: It was less highlighted, I thought, in terms of analyzing the results of Super Tuesday. We highlighted it in our analysis.

Newman: I don't think it's less highlighted. I didn't experience that.

Salit: Okay.

Newman: I think you are much more astute and informed about exactly the way that the independents do influence the process. You've gotten "more." They haven't gotten "less." That's my read of it.

Salit: Fair enough. Russert showed two match-up polls today, one of which has the Democrat beating McCain, no matter whether it's Obama or Hillary and another showing that Obama beats McCain while Hillary doesn't. The point is that whatever way the Democrats go, the race is going to be close with McCain as the Republican nominee. That's one snapshot that's out there. There's another picture that's out there, per MSNBC show host Joe Scarborough, a former Republican officeholder himself, who says that if you look at the relative turnout, in terms of the huge numbers of people who participated on the Democratic side versus the smaller number who have participated on the Republican side, and you look at all of the angst over McCain, the anger at him from conservative elements, that you could be looking at a rout in November...along the lines of the Goldwater 1964 campaign, where you got a completely lopsided sweep for the Democrats. And that would be on John McCain's head. He also suggested that no small part of why Mitt Romney got out of the race was that he wanted to get away from a train wreck, of sorts. Do you see elements of that in this?

Newman: I don't know. It's always hard to predict a rout in presidential politics in a country that you still think of as 50/50, although the country is now actually 33/33/33, at least if you include how people identify themselves, and thereby count the independents. That's the reality. So I don't know how to even think about that. This might be a biased read, but my sense is that if Obama is the

candidate, it could be a rout. I can't imagine Hillary Clinton routing anybody, no less John McCain.

Salit: We saw Huckabee on "Meet the Press" today. What's Huckabee doing? He's continuing on. He's making the statement that the voters need to make their statement, raising his conservative agenda and so forth. How's he doing? He's doing well enough to be in the race.

Newman: He's winning states.

Salit: He's winning states, yes. He had some surprise wins over the weekend.

Newman: I think some of the people who are advising him, and probably he himself too, are thinking things like McCain is a hot potato, sometimes even a loose cannon. There's no telling what he might do. So, why not stay in? What else has Huckabee got to do?

Salit: Do you think McCain/Huckabee is a strong ticket for the Republicans?

Newman: It's funny. In some obvious ways, yes. But, psychologically speaking, if Huckabee is the vice presidential candidate, all it does is emphasize the extent to which McCain is not a conservative. And the vote that counts is the one for president. You don't vote for the vice president, you vote for the president, who happens to come complete with a vice president. I think the Republicans have a lot more difficulties this year than the Democrats do. If all holds together – and this is a year when everything is not all holding together, as David Broder says – the Democrats should do quite well. But it's only February. The election is not until November.

Salit: Exactly. One reporter related a conversation they'd had with Frank Fahrenkopf, the former head of the RNC. Fahrenkopf reflected on how a lot of these "dissident" elements, like C-PAC, and the outspoken conservative wing of the party, were in play with Ronald Reagan, "in play" meaning attacking of Reagan, unsettled about his presidency, not unlike what's being said by them about McCain. The impression he tried to give is that McCain's troubles are standard fare in the Republican Party.

Newman: That's not the impression I get from it. Reagan, after all, was a former Democrat, he had been on the left, then he swung to the right. There is a myth that Ronald Reagan was born waving an American flag. I don't think that's the case at all. There was reason for the conservatives to be somewhat suspicious of Ronald Reagan...and for them to be suspicious of John McCain. That's why it looks alike.

Salit: Thanks, Fred.