

PRESIDENTIAL RACE STARTS EARLIER AND EARLIER **READY FOR** **THE RACE**



BY MARK SERRANO

It's that season again – presidential politics. Wait a minute. Isn't it only 2007? Every day I see, read, and try hard to avoid broadcast, print and electronic news stories about the presidential race. So why oh why are we already being inundated with constant news stories about the 2008 presidential race? Well there are a few reasons for that:

First the states – the presidential primaries are starting earlier than ever. By the first week of February 2008, Americans will have voted in caucus or a primary in 29 states, including New Jersey, which has a primary on Feb. 5. Never before has there been such jockeying for position by the states to have an impact on the selection of the two major party nominees.

Second, it's unofficially an "open seat" race. Not since 1928 has there not been a president running for re-election or a sitting vice president seeking to replace his boss. (Quiz time, who won in 1928?)

Since Vice President Dick Cheney is not running for president next year, the competition to replace George W. Bush is all the more intense.

Speaking of competition, No. 3 on the list is money. In 1996, Bill Clinton and Bob Dole doubled the money that had been raised in the previous election – and the records have been shattered in both presidential election cycles since. Fundraising increased by 112 percent for the Republican nominee between 1996 and the 2000 election – the first in which a major party candidate declined matching funds from the federal government for the primary election, which would have placed restrictions on the candidates' spending. And in 2004, total fundraising for the major party nominees increased 500 percent from the 1995 level, up to a head spinning \$550 million combined.

Why all this money? Because when you are trying to get the attention of voters in your party, you have to impress them by raising a lot of money just to be deemed a "credible" candidate, and then you must keep raising it in order to afford a big campaign infrastructure and paid advertising to maintain momentum later. Which leads to the fourth main reason that we are barraged with news about presidential politics already: the 24-hour news cycle.

Competition in the news industry is more intense than ever – newspapers are struggling to survive, national cable TV channels turn more exploitative by the day to compete for viewers, and the Internet is stealing customers from both. So what is a high-sugar, low-nutrition diet for this 24-hour monster? Politics of course.

Now the horse race, of the marathon, is consuming the news hour – meaning every news hour. Debates, the latest opinion poll, Clinton, Obama, Edwards, Giuliani, McCain, Romney, even the height of candidates and the related probability of winning cable TV network show one recent morning.

Noting the nauseating early nature of this news coverage, here is my advice: pay no attention to it.

Our nation is at war. Our public school education system – the biggest government monopoly ever – is struggling to maintain standards because it lacks the proper incentives to improve. And the Yankees still have time to make up lost ground in the race for the pennant.

Besides, we as Americans have too many important issues that will be decided well before the next president takes office, and even before the next top politician is indicted. Let's focus on important issues today and communicate to our elected representatives at all levels of government our view on key issues to impact our future now.

Some will argue that picking the next president must be covered exhaustively in the news today because of the importance it will have on our long-term future, but they who make this case probably have a stake in selling the news today. There is plenty of time for nonsense politicking and ridiculous news coverage.

If you do get lured into the media frenzy about the 2008 presidential race, mark my words: Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City will turn every presidential wannabe on his or her head in January 2008 when he joins the race as a third-party candidate and commits to spend as much as \$1 billion of his vast fortune to win – and beholden to no one.

That's when I'll tune in.
(Quiz answer: Herbert Hoover won the presidency in 1928.)

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